

fairfield allotments

newsletter 23, summer 2011

Summer Daze – stall and music

In previous years we have taken a stall at the Fairfield Family Fun Day and your surplus plants and produce an average of £250- £300. This amount obviously helps keep rents down for everyone. The Fun Day isn't happening this year, so we'll be doing a stall on July 17th to coincide with Fairfield's Summer Daze.

Summer Daze is a Fairfield Association event with live music from local bands (Country to Soul-Jazz). Bring a picnic along to Fairfield's mini festival! Kids' games and refreshments.

Please save those extra plants you sowed and start planting additional seeds for lettuce/ salad crops. Also, if you have any plants that need splitting, please pot them on.

As well as plants we sell produce (flowers are particularly popular, but so are bundles of rhubarb!) and any jams/chutneys you can spare. Please label anything you donate- otherwise the stall volunteers have to guess what we're selling.

Help is also needed on the day. We start collecting from 8.30am, set out the tables in the morning, then sell from noon to 4.30pm - then tidy everything up. If you can spare an hour you would be most welcome.

We'll also be running the children's competitions again- children can make a miniature garden in a tin or tray; and an ugly creature from a plant. We charge £1 per entry and the winner in each category receives a book token.

If you can't help on the day but wish to donate plants/ produce, please drop them off at the greenhouse on Plot 12B, or give me a ring on 01524 64997 and I will arrange collection.

Jean Laurie

Garden Competition & Plot Usage

On or around the Summer Daze event (weather dependent) we'll also be resurrecting the garden competition this year. So please make sure your plot is clearly numbered and looking it's best that weekend!

As many of you know the committee is really trying to make sure plots are well used this year and we will be inspecting the plots again at around this time. If you know your plot is too big, we may be able to offer smaller. If you know you're not really using your plot, please give it up if things aren't going to change in the foreseeable future, there are well over 100 families on the waiting list waiting for the opportunity.

Bee seeing you...

As many of you will know we have had to bring the bee experiment to an end. It seems that the bees did not like so many allotmenters in such close proximity. The bees were getting very agitated and preventing people from enjoying their plots, some even suffering severe reactions from stings.

Despite the best possible management of the hives and reducing the number we were unable to come to a happy compromise. The bees have all been happily relocated to more rural settings and the spare bee suits we had have been donated to Lancaster Bee keepers for educational work.

Aminopyralid-tested manure

Following on from pieces about aminopyralid in manure in recent newsletters... Aminopyralid is a herbicide which kills broad-leaved plants. Used on grassland it makes its way through horses and into their manure, or into their bedding. From the manure it can make its way onto your plot and badly affect the broad-leaved plants which make up your crop. Aminopyralid isn't broken down in the horse's digestive system and though it will break down in the soil in time, it isn't broken down rapidly when manure is stacked to rot (2-3 years "should" be ok). So, manure can be a problem for plotters.

You can test for aminopyralid yourself, by mixing suspect material with potting compost and growing some lettuce, tomatoes or beans in it. Yellow, curled and stunted leaves suggest a problem. However, this takes up valuable growing time, and you have to get hold of the suspect manure in the first place. Commercial testing is also available.

Thankfully we've got an alternative solution. At the risk of sounding like an infomercial, I was delighted to speak to Piccadilly Garden in Scotforth earlier this year and find out more about their manure. Piccadilly Garden's Compost & Recycling Team get their manure in from a local stable who test it in the first place; then they re-test it themselves. The manure is subsequently rotted for at least six months, and delivered to the site by friendly people with a tipper trailer.

<http://www.allotment.org.uk/garden-diary/321/testing-for-aminopyralid-in-manure/>
<http://www.piccadillygarden.org/index.php/departments>

Vandalism, theft & arson

Most of you will have received an email from John recently warning of some theft and arson at another Lancaster allotment site. Please be vigilant of suspicious activity on and around the plots and notify the police if you see trespassers on the plot at night.

It is sensible to take expensive tools away with you and not leave them on the plots to tempt thieves. Fuel for mowers and strimmers should also only be brought onto the site in small quantities as and when needed.

The Gardener's Hymn

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.
But what we never mention, though gardeners know it's true,
Is when he made the goodies, he made the baddies too.
All things spray- and swatt-able, disaster great and small,
All things paraquat-able, the Lord God made them all.

The greenfly on the roses, the maggots in the peas,
Manure that fills our noses, he also gave us these.
The fungus on the roses, the club root on the greens,
The slugs that eat the lettuce and chew the aubergines.
The drought that kills the fuchsias, the frost that nips the buds,
The rain that drowns the seedlings, the blight that hits the spuds.

The midges and mosquitoes, the nettles and the weeds,
The pigeons in the green stuff, the sparrows on the seeds.
The fly that gets the carrots, the wasp that eats the plums,
How black the gardener's outlook, however green his thumbs.
But still we gardeners labour, midst vegetables and flowers,
And pray what hits our neighbours, will somehow by-pass ours.

With thanks to the Salvation Army at Carnforth, via Lancaster University library staff and John Weedy.

Committee

Your allotment committee is:

Chair: Manjeet Lamba

Secretary: John Lambert, 6 Carr House Lane,
Lancaster LA1 1SW 01524 849371
secretary@fairfield-allotments.co.uk

Treasurer: George Burnett, 94 Westbourne Road,
Lancaster LA1 5JX 01524 62585

Committee: Gillian Allen, Ian Fraser, John Weedy,
Mike Brandwood and Anne Stewardson.

New members or observers always wanted.

Website

Website and forum:

<http://www.fairfield-allotments.co.uk>

Safely does it!

'Tenants, even when not on site, have a duty of care to others on the allotment site or adjacent to it. This includes visitors, trespassers, other tenants, themselves and wildlife.'

This is a quote from some best practice rules for allotment sites and is generally in line with current Health & Safety legislation. **We are all responsible for making the places we work, live and garden safe for others and ourselves.** The bit about trespassers is also interesting, we have to make sure the site is safe not just for us and those that we invite but also those that aren't invited! That's one of the main reasons we ask that you **lock the gate behind you** as you enter and leave the allotments. Not only does a locked gate help stop people getting on site who shouldn't be, it would also help if we ever needed to make a claim against our insurance if a trespasser was injured having gained access through an unlocked gate. The gate being locked also prevents children coming onto the site when they shouldn't.

There are a lot of other obvious and less obvious hazards on the allotments that we all need to be aware of:

- Broken Glass
- Unstable structures – One member has had serious injuries this year falling through a green house window and another was hospitalized after falling through theirs at home.
- Tripping hazards – keep your plot tidy and paths trimmed.
- Well maintained tools and proper protective clothing when using strimmers
- Pesticides and weedkillers need to be stored properly (why not go organic!)
- Are you up to date with your anti-tetanus injections? (If you've got old rusting barbed wire, metal etc on your plot try and remove it.)
- Washing produce well – particularly your bean sprouts!
- Safe digging - mind your back.
- Sun screen, don't laugh we do get some sun!
- Caps on canes, how many times have you just missed your eye bending down to do some weeding?
- Pond safety – small ponds on allotments are good for wildlife but make sure they are securely covered with strong mesh
- Water butts, as they can be really dangerous to children leaning over to see interesting floating things. The committee is aware that all the large shared water butts need replacing and we are hoping to do that over the course of the next year. In the meantime we should remind you that all young children should be under supervision and be accompanied at all times on the site.



There are lots of other possible hazards no doubt but if we are all vigilant and looking after our plots we should be able to make the allotments safe for all to enjoy.

Adventures in companion planting

Companion planting means growing more than one kind of plant together, in the hope of benefiting at least one of them. It's a valuable organic gardening technique, and when we got our plot I wanted to give it a go. I've got to admit straight off that I'm a beginner, and I'm learning as I go along. In two years on the plot I've had some successes, and made a few mistakes...

Companion plants can **feed beneficial insects** (both pollinators and predators). Plants rich in pollen or nectar feed bees, wasps and hoverflies; wasps prey on aphids and caterpillars, and many kinds of hoverfly larvae scoff aphids like sweeties. Calendula, feverfew and poached egg plant are good for this. Echium (viper's bugloss) is a superb bee plant, currently filling up gaps in the row where a few of my broad beans didn't germinate. These four are all small enough not to swamp the veg.

Umbellifers such as parsnips, carrots and coriander, when flowering, provide food for hoverflies and ladybirds (whose larvae eat aphids) and the tiny parasitoid wasps that do not harm humans, but that lay their eggs in caterpillars and aphids and other plant pests. Alliums - garlic, chives, onions and leeks - are attractive to bees if left to flower.

Calendula or pot marigold is good for pollinating insects and hoverflies, and makes a cheerful splash of colour around the plot. It self-seeds freely, but unwanted plants are easy to remove. Tagetes or French marigold repels nematodes through its root secretions and is said to deter whitefly through its smell. As a general rule, **single varieties are better for wildlife** than complex or double ones. Double flowers are likely to produce less nectar/pollen and are harder for insects to get into.



Calendula, by Leo Michels

Companion plants can **confuse flying pests** such as the cabbage root fly. The cabbage root fly finds food sources through their size and shape. It lands on the green things in an area to find out whether they're suitable food for its offspring, then makes short hops between leaves to confirm its choice. If the only green things in an area are your cabbages, then it is far more likely to find a suitable host than if the cabbage is in the middle of other green things, such as clover. A study at Warwick University showed that 36% of cabbage root flies laid eggs next to plants in bare ground (resulting in no crop), and only 7% laid eggs next to cabbages planted among clover (resulting in a good crop). Trefoil is another ground cover plant/green manure that can help to confuse the fly. Let's face it, from the fly's point of view, an area planted with only cabbages might as well be planted with only winning lottery tickets.

Some companion plants, such as nasturtiums, are "trap crops" which can **attract blackfly and cabbage whites away from other plants**. However, last year I made the mistake of sowing both nasturtiums and broccoli direct into rich but club-rooty soil. The nasturtiums were unaffected and vigorous (they flower better in poorer soil, so made vast amounts of vine and leaf in the brassica bed), and the broccoli never got started. In between the competition and the club root, it never had a chance. Another mistake was to leave too many feverfew seedlings: next year I'll pull them out ruthlessly when they still look small and harmless, except for on the north (shadier) sides of beds, where they should compete less with the vegetables.



Poached egg plant, by David Jackson

However, the shade and shelter provided by closer planting – when they're not swamping each other – will suppress weeds, hopefully provide some shelter from the wind, protect the ground, and give much-needed cover to the ground beetles which scurry around eating slugs. Some crops such as swiss chard, spinach, American land cress and lettuce will tolerate more shade, making it possible to **interplant them between larger crops** and in theory get a larger yield from the same space. I'm trying lettuce between the sweetcorn plants this year and it looks promising, but as yet it's too early to say how it's going.

So, to date I've tried growing insect-friendly flowers and using beans to fix nitrogen, through the symbiotic bacteria on their roots. The beans have grown happily but I haven't seen many root nodules compared to on clover plants; maybe the plot doesn't yet have populations of the right kind of bacteria. I'm trying Mr Fothergill's Pea & Bean Booster; watch this space. The insect-friendly flowers are a definite hit but must be kept from overpowering the vegetables. Interplanting with shade-tolerant vegetables... let's see how well it works this year; and I'm going to undersow the big brassicas with trefoil on my next trip to the plot. Whilst researching this article I've come across the intriguing idea that planting basil with the tomatoes may improve the tomatoes' flavour. Similar benefits are claimed for other herbs; maybe next year?

Have you had successes – or otherwise – with companion plants? Let us know your experiences, and they can be included in the next newsletter.

Some more plants to try:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_companion_plants
<http://www.dgsgardening.btinternet.co.uk/companion.htm>
<http://organicgarden.org.uk/gardening/companion-planting>
Mark Diacono, *Veg Patch* (2009) p. 213

References for this article are on the website.