

ALLOTMENT NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2019

Hello everybody and welcome to the first in a regular series of Watlington Allotment Newsletters.

We hope to include, among other things:

- hints and tips for successful growing
- reminders for things to be done at this time of year
- specific things which may require your attention
- information from our Allotment Committee meetings

Remember, help and advice is never too far away, not just via anonymous persons via the internet, but from your neighbours and fellow plot holders. We're all here to make Watlington a fulfilling, enjoyable and sociable place to grow our fruit and veg.

Winter is Coming

OK so we've done our harvesting and we've maybe even a bit bored of courgettes and tomatoes for dinner every day, so now what? Here are a few things to keep us busy over the next few months, some obligatory, some not:

- Weeds
- Rubbish
- Bonfires
- Pathways

All the above need looking after all year round, not just Easter to Halloween!

Weeds:

Where there's weed there's seed. Not only do weeds get in the way of our crops, but if weeds are allowed to proliferate, they set seed which means they will spread to neighbouring plots. And so the cycle continues - unless they're dealt with at from the outset. So we encourage everyone to keep their plots free of weeds at all times throughout the year.

Rubbish:

Is not only unsightly but can be a nuisance to people and a danger to wildlife. All rubbish needs to be removed off site before winter winds blow it around the allotments or before it becomes decrepit and unmanageable. Please weigh down your bins, loose items and anything else unstable with bricks, pallets etc. There are a selection of pallets free to use on Plot 35. If you're able to supply your own, so much the better, in fact useful items like pallets

and bricks are always welcome should you be able to supply any that aren't wanted, just leave them (neatly) by the parking area next to Plot 35. [Click here to view the plot map.](#) It's at the bottom of the page under downloads.

Bonfires:

Please remember that if you must have a bonfire then *someone must be in attendance at all times*. Fires must only be lit when the wind blows the smoke away from the houses on Love Lane. Remember, the drier the material, the less smoke there will be. *Make sure the fire is out fully*, preferably by stamping and water, before leaving the area.

Pathways:

They need to be kept clear between plots at all times. Each plotholder is responsible for the maintenance of the pathway adjacent to their plot. A little chat with your neighbour is all it takes to decide who does what. Also, if you have a bucket of stones/flints and you're not sure what to do with them, they're ideal for filling in a pothole on the main track, and there are many of them!

Watlington Allotment Committee

Meetings are held every few months in the Parish Offices. These are your allotments, and we need your help! If you want to get involved, contact Watlington Parish Council on 01491 613867 or email wpc@watlington-oxon-pc.gov.uk

The minutes of the September meeting can be found on the Parish Council website. Please click [here](#) for details.

If you're short of time, here's a quick summary of what was agreed:

- two noticeboards will be erected which will be for common use by everybody
- we're looking into supplying FREE manure and woodchip for all plot holders - more details soon!
- the errant conifer near Plot 45 will be cut down and removed
- the bi-annual inspection will be held in the next few weeks. Plots that appear unattended or are in a bad state of repair may be served notice

Article in the Watlington Times, October issue:

But for a few late developers like squash and beans, most of our crops have now been harvested. We've enjoyed the fruits of our labour, we've learned a few things on how to improve for next year, and many of us are already looking forward to getting started again in Spring. So with a full larder but empty plot, the question arises, what to do with all the bare ground?

There are several answers of course, the best being sowing crops that will grow over the winter months such as broad beans, garlic and onions. However, even the keenest grower is unlikely to use every square foot of available space for just a few things, so it's inevitable that other plans will have to be made.

Probably the worst thing to do is to leave the plot barren and bare. The nutrients will leach out of the soil, the topsoil will blow away, and weeds will have plenty of time to become established, meaning they will be difficult to remove in the spring. A popular alternative is to use black plastic sheeting or similar, usually weighed down with bricks or pallets. This will stop the weeds and leaching, but the problem is that it doesn't actually improve the soil; in fact it can be detrimental because the healthiest soil is that which has plants growing in it. Plastic sheeting may well prevent light, air and water from allowing weeds to grow, but as such it also damages the mini-ecosystem of beneficial bacteria and fungi that keeps the soil vibrant, healthy and alive.

So I'd like to state the case for green manure. I admit I'd never heard of it until a few years ago, but having used it for a couple of years now I have seen the benefits and I am now a keen advocate. Green manure is basically a non-food cover crop that's grown to protect and enhance soil. It's usually grown over winter and dug in during the spring before food crops are planted.

Benefits of green manure:

- Adds nitrogen
- Prevents nutrients leaching
- Conserves moisture in the soil
- Resists soil erosion
- Breaks up compressed and heavy soil
- Adds organic matter
- Prevents weeds from growing

Some popular examples are field beans, clover, winter rye and mustard. Most of these can be introduced now, and all will grow through the winter. Field beans and clover will add valuable nitrogen to the soil, while winter rye will outcompete weeds and will create a layer of lush grass which can be cut and turned over in the spring for it to rot down and provide organic matter. Mustard is used for removing soil borne pests and disease. Most are easy to grow; just broadcast the seed, rake it in - and let nature do the rest.

There are many cover crops to choose from, but whichever you choose, either individually or in combination, something is certainly better than nothing.

Useful links:

[Watlington Parish Council Allotment Page](#) (the downloads at the bottom of the page includes plot maps, tenancy agreements and application for consent form)

Watlington Allotment Facebook Group – click [here](#)