

THE POTTING SHED GAZETTE

NEWSLETTER FOR SCC ALLOTMENT TENANTS

2013: FROM FLOODS TO HEAT WAVE

It feels like a long time ago but the disappointment of the Spring that never happened still feels fresh. For a while it seemed that another year of struggle and limited success was the best we could expect. Fortunately nature came to its own rescue and although it has been a year of mixed success in the final analysis we came out of it pretty well.

Fruit crops lead the way; although this Editor's experience is limited to seven or so years this year's harvest set standards in both quality and quantity that aren't likely to be repeated very soon. The excessive dry weather following on from the biblical rain and bone chilling cold didn't do the legumes any favours and despite overcoming their troubled start the harvest period was short and the fruit not as good as we have come to expect.

Older, wiser heads will now be nodding sagely, knowing only too well the lessons that so many of us are still learning. No matter how truncated the season might be, the vegetables we grow are all just plants destined to complete a

life cycle which must, wherever physically possible, result in propagating another generation. In this the interests of both plants and gardener converge and a total crop failure remains a very rare event, although the Editor's sweet-corn did a pretty good impression of one.

The summer when it did finally arrive brought new challenges and the rain of the winter and spring was forgotten as the ground baked hard beneath the glare of the sun. For a couple of weeks even the weeds gave up trying. There were other benefits as well; potato blight arrived far too late to add to our troubles and by the time it was seen on Borrowdale Rd it was early October and it affected only a few tomato plants that were even then still fruiting.

At this time of writing the warmth of early October has given way to the wet, blustery days of true autumn. Leaves have begun gathering in drifts awaiting collection by those with a fancy for home-produced leaf mould and the autumn dig awaits us. Freezers are full, pickles, jams and wine laid up

GUARANTEED KISSES FOR CHRISTMAS?

Bill Davies, Witts Hill Allotments writes:

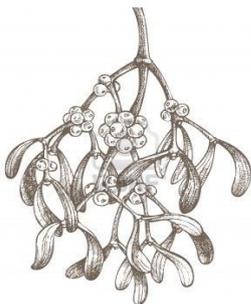
GROW YOUR OWN MISTLETOE: I have tried various ways to try and grow my own mistletoe and have succeeded at last. I first tried to grow the mistletoe from berries taken from imported French mistletoe at Christmas time. I also tried cutting the bark of the tree to hold the seed in place when applied to the tree in January February. I have since found out that marking the tree

for later consumption and with luck we can all enjoy some of the benefits of our labours.

Each year brings different challenges and the weather of this beautiful country is so rich and varied there cannot ever be a human lifespan long enough to have seen it all. This variety is what keeps so many of us returning to our toils year after year. Keeping an allotment is challenging, fulfilling, frustrating and even occasionally back-breaking but it's never boring.

So this winter if we find we have more pickles than we planned on and fewer frozen peas than we'd like let's not curse the weather but congratulate ourselves instead. By planting as wide a range of crops as possible we have helped ensure that there is something we can take pride in and enjoy. It is impossible to plan for every eventuality but the risk can always be spread.

The risk can further be reduced by taking the experiences we gain into successive seasons. The time to do that is now because as we know all the end of a season is nothing except the start of a new one.



Guaranteed Kisses for Christmas? cont.

like this is not necessary and will only damage the tree. My success this year was down to using local to the area ripe mistletoe berry's (pearly white). It is better that the tree you take the mistletoe berries from is the same as the host tree you intend to grow it on. When you squeeze the mistletoe berry on to the tree the seed will be seen to be covered with a sticky material called Viscin. This is an amazing material that is not only very sticky but also very strong. It allows the mistletoe seed to find its own place on the tree. It does this by allowing the seed to fall from a point on the branch where you put it and with the seed still attached to the sticky substance it becomes like a pendulum on the end of length of spiders web that blows about in the wind. When the seed touches another part of the tree it will stick to the bark and begin its transformation into Mistletoe. So when you look to see if it has grown, look in other areas on the tree.

The Editor shares Bill's interest in mistletoe but unlike Bill has yet to try growing it. All of what Bill describes above is supported by web sites and enthusiasts clubs but Bill also offers an insight this Editor's research hasn't yet uncovered and that is the benefit of placing the mistletoe on a host of identical variety to that the parent plant occupies. There is certainly some logic to this, as a parasitic plant the Mistletoe may well develop increased genetic tolerance to its host plant thereby increasing the likelihood of successful germination. For those of you who share Bill's interest in the propagation of mistletoe there are any number of websites offering tips and guidance which will also include a list of trees in the mistletoe plants order of preference. From an allotment holders viewpoint the good news is that mistletoe favours apple trees above all else so maybe we can coax an interesting winter crop from otherwise barren trees. So Kisses at Christmas? Eventually but mistletoe doesn't hurry so we may be waiting for a while and Bill has a head start on the rest of us.

CELEBRATING WITH RALPH.



Just a few weeks ago this editor had the privilege of an interview with Ralph Puddle, site representative of Sydney House Allotments. My introduction was arranged through Sue Ashdown, the Allotments Officer for SCC who contacted both Ralph and his daughter.

My visit coincided with the Annual Sydney House Pumpkin competition which Ralph judges. (Pictured opposite)

The reason for the interview was to celebrate Ralph and his contribution to Sydney House allotments; that he is worthy of celebration is obvious. In his 90th year Ralph is currently the oldest serving site representative and he has himself been a plot holder since 1969. That was the year man first walked on the moon and while the world has exploded with technological advancement since then Ralph still tills the soil with methods first developed millennium ago. Ralph told me that solid digging was pretty much beyond him now but his land hasn't suffered for it. Much loved and respected by both neighbours and family someone is always on hand to lend him one.

I think meeting Ralph the strongest impression I formed was that he was loved, respected and admired by all those around him. He had a calm, easy nature laced with gentle humour and he found time for everyone. The whole of the allotment site reflected his personality. Of course the pumpkin competition is a big day in the social calendar of Sydney House but over

and above that the whole site exuded a warm and welcoming atmosphere which I couldn't help but feel had its origins with Ralph and the regard in which he was held.

Ralph was great company and a wonderful story teller. In his gentle, easy tones he painted a snapshot of his interesting and varied life for me. Some of his tales recalled to me the life my grandfathers had told me about although I don't remember that they ever described the world quite so wonderfully as Ralph did. His story ranged from his first unsuccessful attempt to enlist; an effort frustrated by his mother letting slip to the recruiting Sergeant Ralph's true age, to the changes brought about by Vosper's purchase of Harland and Wolff's operation in Southampton. In between times Ralph was repatriated back to the UK as a wounded soldier a month before peace was declared in Europe, he brought up a wonderful and loving family and once he even won the celebrated pumpkin competition.

This last item of news Ralph gently dropped into the conversation as he did so much else, with no overwhelming pride but rather with a sense of simple satisfaction. Throughout our conversation I was struck by Ralph's untroubled acceptance of the world around him that had changed beyond all recognition from the world he was born into. Ralph even found time to look to the future, remarking on the surge of interest in allotments

TAKING TO THE HILL

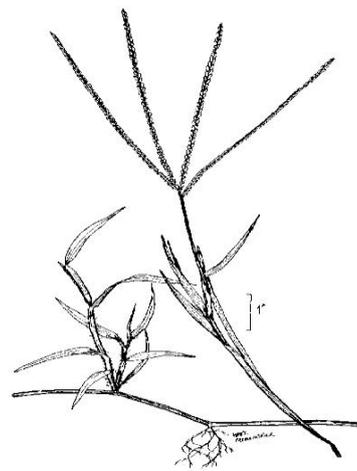
There has been an unwelcome arrival on Witts Hill Allotments. It was brought to the attention of the Gazette by Bill Davies who noticed it colonising an uncultivated plot and thought it may be of wider interest. It certainly is and The Gazette thanks him for his contribution. Ultimately the newcomer has been identified as *Digitaria* or Crab Grass. The Gazette has undertaken a little more research and has learned there are many varieties of crab grass, some have a place in the kitchen, even as the source of grain for brewing, while other varieties are considered pests or invasive plants; in the case of Witts Hill the crabgrass there falls into the latter category. This research also supported the evidence supplied by Bill that the risk posed by this plant is through its prolific seeding;

among Southampton residents. He noted the increase of in the interest of younger people and the participation of whole families in allotment keeping. Ralph gave allotment keeping credit for his vigour and longevity; I think we can all share the hope that we benefit in the same way.

Regretfully time constraints prevented me staying on to witness the pumpkin weighing but I was fairly satisfied I had been introduced to the likely winner. I had also been introduced to an absolute winner in Ralph and I thank the good gentleman and his family and friends for the welcome they gave us on our visit. The Potting Shed Gazette on behalf of its readers would like to extend our congratulations to Ralph Puddle on his continued contribution to Sydney House site and wish him the joy of continuing it for a long, long time to come.

AND ALSO....

On the subject of long-serving site reps Peter Andow of Borrowdale Road has just entered his 80th year and is still going strong and serving our community. Like Ralph he is very generous with his time and he is still very actively involved in site improvement. Pete has a very can do approach to life that inspires many of the Borrowdale tenants to share his self-imposed labours and the Potting Shed Gazette would like to take this opportunity to salute him and express the hope he will be part of the fabric of Borrowdale for many years to come.



indeed some varieties can produce up to 150,000 seeds. This aspect of the plant coupled with the lengthy germination period they enjoy. can make them a labour intensive foe but they

Taking to the Hill (cont.)

can be defeated with regular treatment.

Where the plant came from in the first place must remain a matter for conjecture. It is just as likely that it spread into the allotment from a suburban garden as it was deliberately introduced by a plot holder. Despite our ignorance as to where the grass came from there is still a lesson in this for all plot holders. A lesson made all the more pertinent by the recent and welcome increase in flower beds being created on plots alongside the more traditional vegetables and fruit.

FRUIT TREE OFFER

Southampton's residents have the opportunity to buy bargain price fruit trees to help create a city-wide 'virtual orchard'. The offer includes a selection of apple varieties, cherry, pear and plum trees from between £7 and £10 per tree.

The TREEmendous Southampton Project will be re-launched for the fourth year on 21st October – National Apple Day. In the last three years, 280 fruit trees have been distributed by TREEmendous Southampton as part of the bulk buy scheme. The initiative is run by volunteers from Transition Southampton, a non-profit community-led organisation, who buy the fruit trees in bulk and pass on the savings to local people.

Having more fruit trees in Southampton will not only help lower food miles and benefit wildlife, but also provides fresh, tasty and organic fruit right on your doorstep!

Order details will be available online at: www.transitionsouthampton.org from 21st October and trees will be available for collection at Ropewalk Community Garden in Southampton in February 2014. For more information, email treemendous@transitionsouthampton.org

Deadline for orders is 31st December 2013, although there is a limit on order numbers, so order early to avoid disappointment.

Transition Southampton is committed to working with local communities, organisations and local government to help develop positive solutions that meet the imminent challenges of fossil fuel scarcity ('Peak Oil') & Climate Change.

The lesson is that all weeds are plants growing somewhere we don't want them and while Parrots Feather may be just the thing for your small pond it is a pest if disposed of in a natural watercourse. So if you find yourself setting aside a small strip of land for a seat in the shade surrounded by sweetly scented borders give some thought to what you plant there. As tenants we are custodians of the land we occupy and ultimately they will pass on to the next person on the waiting list. Therefore the onus is on us to ensure that the land we hand back is, if no better than we found it is at least no worse.

Above all, Transition Southampton has a positive vision of a resilient and sustainable future beyond the age of abundant fossil fuel energy.

WHAT'S COOKING?



This clay oven was built by a group of tenants on Borrowdale Rd Site as an environmentally sustainable project. This temporary structure is built entirely from material found on site has a life expectancy of 3-5 years and is the focus for much on-site socialising. Technology thousands of years old employed to provide food for those engaged in a pastime every bit as ancient. What a modern place the Borrowdale Road Site is.

AND FINALLY The editor would like to thank all those who wrote in with articles of suggestions. If you would like anything considered for the next edition please forward your suggestions to: sue.ashdown@southampton.gov.uk **FAO. Clay Potts, Editor.**