

NEWTON-LE-WILLOWS GARDENERS' ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER: SUMMER 2016

EDITORIAL 2016 has, thus far, been a strange year when it comes to the weather that influences our gardening. The winter of 2015-16 was one of the mildest on record, with accompanying high rainfall. This allowed the slug and snail populations to prosper and, as I write, these pesky molluscs are playing havoc with our strawberries, lettuces and other 'soft' crops. Then came one of the coldest springs on record, with winds blowing from a northerly or north-easterly (i.e. arctic) direction; this hindered seed germination and seedling growth. Next, all of a sudden, we were in the midst of a heat wave with high humidity that encouraged a variety of fungal diseases to strike (my garlic was very badly hit). This was followed by torrential thunderstorms. That of the afternoon of 16 June put down over an inch at Lowton in 40 minutes, leading to one Association member calling in the Hut the following Sunday to buy some top soil to replace that washed away from one of his beds. As an old acquaintance put it, "It is all part of life's rich tapestry!"

Those members who partook of our trip to Biddulph Grange and Little Moreton Hall on 11 June were lucky. It rained going down, but stayed warm and dry as we enjoyed Biddulph Grange (a fabulous garden...well worth visiting). It poured down during our guided tour of the inside of Little Moreton (a great Tudor dwelling); and it poured down on our journey home.

Considering the weather, our Sales and Advice Hut has had brisk trade. Don't forget, that our prices are so low that a £4 membership subscription is peanuts! And advice from many members is free. We also had a stand at Willow Park Rural Craft Display, where we sold nearly every plant we took there, enhanced by the High Street stands organised by Newton Hub. . Malcolm Greenhalgh

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT I was listening to the radio at the time of the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. The Director of the RHS was bemoaning the "lost generation of gardeners", those folk in their twenties, thirties and forties whose parents "didn't teach them how to garden". Younger people, she said, had lost gardening skills.

Being of a somewhat older generation, I really cannot remember anyone teaching me *how* to garden. It is just something that I have always done. Some years the results have been great; in some years there have been failures. But we should learn from failures. What I do know is that, since I became a member of a Gardeners' Association, I have learned lots more, just by talking to older gardeners with far more experience than I had at the time.

I would therefore encourage any of you who are not confident in any facet of gardening, whether at home or on an allotment, to get more closely involved with our Association. Come along to chatter about problems you are having. Pick the brains of the older and more experienced. Besides selling seeds, plants, fertilizers and so on to you at rock-bottom prices, that is what our Hut is all about. And remembers, the difference between a gardener's plant and a weed is often a matter of personal judgement!

Dave Hemingway

In December "three days of peril there be, the fifteenth, the sixteenth and the seventeenth. Forbear then on these days to eat no worts [i.e. vegetables], for they be venomous and melancholic. A 15th century manuscript on the uses of Leeches and the importance of diet.

FLOWER AND VEGETABLE SHOW 2016 This year's Show promises to be a great one! We've had the Show schedules printed and they have been available in the Hut since early June. Many have taken one and shown much interest. As ever, vegetable classes, like tomatoes, runner beans, cucumbers and onions, will be very popular amongst exhibitors, as will also be cut flowers (come and see the super dahlias and chrysanthemums) and pot plants. It is always good to see lots of entries in the jams, chutneys and baking, as well as in the photography classes.

For this year's Show we have *had* to sample lots of cakes baked by talented committee members, before deciding on 'Chocolate and Apricot Cake' and 'Frisolous Fancies' for the baking categories. Photography classes will be 'Agriculture', 'Reflections' and 'Architecture', with the art theme being 'Gardens and Gardening'. The children's (under 12 years) classes will be 'Gingerbread Men' in the cookery section, and 'My favourite cartoon character' in the art class. If you have children or are involved in schools or other children's organisations, please encourage as many as possible to enter. Great fun!

We couldn't put on such a Show without sponsorship and we are delighted that our regular local sponsors are supporting us again, including the Rotary Club of Newton-le-Willows, Winwick Parish Council, Penkford School, Jewellery by Silvana, Lapwing Gardening, Loach (Horticultural) and Hatton's Travel. We are also being supported this year by another of our suppliers, Kings Seeds. Individual donations are very welcome, and are vitally needed to ensure the Show's viability. One donation this year was received from a member in gratitude to Think Ahead Community Stroke Group following support they had received from them.

I visited RHS Chelsea this year. It was a fabulous experience and incredibly well attended. The exhibits were impressive and watching Carol Kline filming for BBC very interesting. The Show gardens provided so much inspiration that when I returned home all I wanted to do it get gardening again! Chelsea is worth visiting....but £70 for a ticket....it's far more expensive than our Show and further to travel! But there are similarities, for at both Shows you meet people who genuinely love gardening, who will talk about their interests and who will share with you their enthusiasm and knowledge.

See you at our Show on 10 September.

Chantelle Seaborn (Show Secretary)

In 1354 King Edward III spent: 5s 10d (29p) on 14lbs of parsley seed, 1s (5p) on 12lbs of onion seed, 3s (15p) on leek seed, 2s 6d (12½p) on 72lbs of hyssop seed and 7s (35p) on 24lbs of other vegetable seeds, including turnip, cabbage, peas and beans. But don't think that those prices suggest our Hut prices are very high! In those days a 'field worker' might earn 2d for a long day's work, a shepherd 6d per week, and a thatcher 2 shillings for five days work. Hyssop? It relieved coughs.

THE LAST OUTING FOR 2016 is to the Harrogate Autumn Show on 17 September. We need to book tickets well before that in order to get a discount, so please book at the Hut by 25 August at the latest, cost £27. Departure 9am from Stocks Tavern in Newton or at Lime House (Lane Head).

Two Old Wives' Tales

1. We have all been brought up to think that by putting broken crocks in the bottom of plant pots drainage is improved. IT IS NOT SO! To improve drainage, mix grit or perlite with your compost and fill the whole pot with it.
2. We are warned not to water plants on bright, hot, sunny days, for if we do the sun's rays, refracted through the water drops, will brown or scorch the leaves. IT IS NOT SO! If it was, every plant that was drenched with a sudden thunderstorm would be burned or scorched when the sun came out.

HUT OPENING TIMES The Hut will not be open on Wednesday evenings again this year, but it will be open on Saturday and Sunday mornings, 10.30-12 noon, up to and including 29-30 October.

Two Tips for these who grow tomatoes, peppers, aubergines and courgettes...or some of these

1. Most people have just the one tomato crop so that, come September or early October, the crop dries up and it's back to the red ball bearings sold by supermarkets. Try this. Let one or two of the side shoots grow and, when six inches long, remove and plant as cuttings in a pot of compost. When rooted, pot up into a 10-12 inch pot with a 4ft cane, and grow on in a heated greenhouse or in a frost-free conservatory or sunny window sill. Stop the plants by nipping out the growing tip after three trusses have formed. Take the cuttings in July or early August and you will have fresh tomatoes to late autumn (8 December, last year).
2. What to do with all those surplus tomatoes, peppers, aubergines and courgettes? Why give them away to folk who don't grow their own? Chop them up into chunks, with some onion and garlic, add a splash of water and squeeze of tomato concentrate and any herbs you have to hand, and heat gently until everything is soft. Let it cool, bag up and put in the freezer. If you are out of, or don't grow, say, aubergines, buy them from a farm shop or market to add to the mix. You can use this as the basis for a whole range of meals, and it is great as it is, heated up, perhaps with some chopped chorizo sausage, with pasta.

WINTER ONIONS AND GARLIC: These will be for sale in the Hut next month. Notification by email or check at the Hut for information.

THE COMPOSTS WE SELL AT THE HUT

The Association stocks four types of 'compost' that can be used to grow plants in pots and containers.

John Innes (JI) Composts These were devised by the John Innes Institute and follow a strict formula based on loam (traditionally made from well rotted turf), coarse sand or grit, and peat, together with extra fertilizers.

John Innes Seed Compost has two parts loam to one part each of peat and sand, plus ground limestone and superphosphate. If JI Seed Compost is not available (frequently the case) see below (JI No 1).

John Innes No 1 has seven parts loam, to three parts peat to two parts sand, plus ground limestone, hoof-and-horn, superphosphate and sulphate of potash. To turn this into a good seed compost, add

extra coarse sand or perlite, to increase drainage and allow better root penetration. No 1 is ideal for young seedlings.

John Innes No 2 is as No 1 but with twice as much fertilizer, and JI No 3 is as No 1 but has three times as much fertilizer. JI No 2 is the ideal general compost, whereas JI No 3 is mostly used for plants that will remain in containers (shrubs and other perennials). Many gardeners like to increase the drainage of all JI composts by adding extra grit or perlite.

Peat based composts These are the most popular, though in the future the use of peat will be banned because of environmental concerns. Sinclair and Clover with (orange) or without (yellow) John Innes fertilizer are most popular. For sowing seeds, add extra grit or perlite to increase drainage and lighten it a little. The chief drawback of peat-based composts is that, when dried out, peat composts in plant pots and containers are very difficult to water thoroughly. You **MUST** keep them at least slightly moist all the time.

Ericaceous compost This is peat based compost with no added ground limestone, and is for growing plants that hate lime in the soil, such as blueberries and azaleas. Don't water with tap water, for tap water usually contains lime!

Local Authority 'Green Waste' compost We sell Richmoor, which is a coarse, tough compost, made from the contents of people's green bins, and ideal for mulching or digging in to beds lacking in humus. It can also be used to grow plants in containers or providing water-storing bulk at the bottom of big containers (perhaps growing courgettes or squashes), with either John Innes or peat-based on top. Always wear gloves when handling it.

SUMMER FRITTATA...A LOVELY RECIPE This is an easy recipe, especially for those who grow their own new potatoes, peppers and sweetcorn. It feeds four.

Ingredients: 1½ lbs waxy potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced (new potatoes are ideal); one very large or two not so large red or orange peppers, deseeded and chopped fairly coarsely; a small to medium onion peeled and chopped; the sweetcorn cut from one or two cobs (you could use canned); 6 large eggs; 4 tablespoons of parsley chopped finely; salt and pepper to taste; olive or rapeseed oil. Note that this recipe is not chemistry, like baking, so quantities need not be so precise. You could add courgette if you liked.

1. Put the potatoes in a pan, cover with boiling water and simmer.
2. After two minutes, add the chopped pepper and simmer for another 3 minutes.
3. In the meantime take the chopped onion and sauté it in oil until soft (about 3 minutes).
4. Drain the potatoes and pepper, and put them in the frying pan with the onion. Add the sweet corn and continue sautéing until the potatoes are soft (about 8 minutes). Remove the pan from the heat.
5. Break the eggs into a large bowl. Add the 4 tablespoons of chopped parsley, and salt and pepper to taste and whisk well.
6. Then, using a slotted spoon, put cooked vegetables into the eggs, stir and put the whole lot back into the frying pan with a little extra oil. Make sure the vegetables are well distributed and put back on the stove for 3-4 minutes, shaking the pan as the frittata cooks.
7. When the top seems setting and the edges are set, put under a preheated hot grill for 2 minutes until the top is browning.
8. It's done!

You can eat this, ideally with salad from the garden, hot or cold (it will keep in the fridge for 24 hours, but let it warm up to room temperature before you enjoy it, for it then tastes better) and it is a great picnic dish.