Trading Centre Refurbishment

After more than two years of hard work, the Trading Centre refurbishment is almost done!

Back in July 2013, we started working on the improvement of the Trading Centre and since then, have carried out loads of jobs - both large and small - which have contributed to a smarter and more welcoming environment.

The first job was re-staining the outside woodwork: we chose to change the building from a Chestnut Brown to Woodland Green and this was achieved in just a few hours on a beautiful sunny day with many hands making light work. Homebase heavily discounted the wood stain and we still have a lot in stock so can give the Centre another coat when needed. The addition of four hanging baskets has made the Centre a lot less austere.

In September 2013, a member told us about South East Water’s Community Chest Fund which was offering grants for community projects, with a maximum amount of £2,500 available. In the end, SE Water had applications totalling almost £160,000 for the £30,000 fund. Our application was for money towards new guttering and down-pipes plus a water tank and barrels for rainwater harvesting.

I was delighted that they liked our idea and we received £200 towards new guttering and also 14 white barrels which used to hold a harmless water purifying chemical which they thought we could string together to save rain water. More of this later...

In early January 2014, we applied to a fund offered by our insurers called The Shield Total Insurance Allotment Fund as they were holding a monthly competition to win £250 for projects designed to improve the on-site facilities for allotment holders. We were successful and duly received a cheque which we

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spent on paint and brushes for the interior of the smaller room which is now a sunny yellow with a white ceiling.

An appeal to our members in early 2014 resulted in us getting hold of some second-hand kitchen units which have been installed in the corner of the yellow room and which we now use as a base for serving refreshments at the Open Day and for the monthly Brew & Bacon Butty socials.

Between starting the installation of the shiny new fast-flow gutters and down-pipes and finishing the job 18 months later (don’t let anyone ever tell you that installing gutters is easy - it’s not!), I put out an appeal on Streetlife for some shelving and storage units and a member told me that Sevenoaks District Council were having a clear-out. We got hold of three huge cabinets and the impact that they had was immediate and dramatic: all the pots of paint and smaller bits and pieces were removed from the floor and hidden behind cupboard doors. I was also given a couple of Ikea Billy bookcases from someone on Freegle which are used in the shop and to store stationery and other dull adminny-type stuff.

In early 2015, we finally managed to get the water barrels linked up behind the Centre and they now collect copious quantities of rain water, exactly as they are supposed to. Installation was really tricky as the lids were all sealed so we had to start up the generator and use a circular saw to chop the tops off so that we could link up the barrels at the bottom. By linking them in this way, the levels are all the same and you only need one tap. By linking them at the top, you would need a tap on every barrel as the level of each barrel would be different. We’re having a few teething problems with a few drips and a leaky tap but hope to resolve these with some waterproof mastic which can be applied to wet surfaces. (Did you know that 1mm of water on 1m² of roof = 1 litre?)

At about the same time, we made some changes to the larger room in the TC where the shop is, with more stock available, improved lay-outs and better merchandising.

I managed to acquire some HUGE curtains from charity shops and these now split the smaller room, keeping the front of the room with its formal neatness separate from the storage area at the back.

The final work that we had done was converting one of the windows into a serving hatch. Despite many appeals for help from our skilled members, no one stepped up, so we had to employ a carpenter who - I hope you agree - has done a fantastic job. This new hatch means that we no longer have to hold our Brew & Bacon Butty events outside under a gazebo and our Open Day refreshments have a more professional air about them.

We have recently been given long-term loan of a larger generator and have had a couple of power points installed so we can now - in theory - boil a kettle, although I’ve yet to test this one out!

There’s just one more job that needs doing and that is to strip back and re-paint the white window frames. We’ll probably take the opportunity to give the Centre another coat of stain as well. Watch this space for details of a painting working party in the Spring…

So, it’s a HUGE thank you to all the amazing painters, cleaners, carpenters, gutter-fixers, barrel-joiners, furniture movers, shop keepers, electricians and everyone else who has been involved in any small or large way in this project which has turned out to be a long-term slog, but I think you’ll agree, it’s been worth it!

Ruth King
Jobs to do be doing NOW on your allotment

Starting in this edition and for the next 10 months, we are going to cover what should be happening on your allotment on a month-by-month basis.

February

Overview

We get a glimpse of the early signs of the arrival of Spring this month. The soil begins to warm up around the middle of February and we can see for the first time this year the buds beginning to swell on fruit trees and bushes. Overwintering vegetables begin to look less sorry for themselves and they start to produce new growth. These are the signals that it is now safe to think about sowing a row of early peas and broad beans using a hardy cultivar. It’s too late to sow the broad bean ‘Aquadulce’ as it is only really suitable for growing over-winter.

Sowing and Planting

After the middle of the month, it’s safe to think about sowing the seeds of early vegetables. Prepare a seed bed and sow Spring onions, early carrots, leeks and early types of lettuce - try a cut-and-come-again as it saves on time waiting for a heart to form. Try a sowing of parsnip seed if you really want large roots but use a canker-resistant cultivar.

February is the best month to plant out garlic and shallots. Prepare the ground as you would a seed bed and plant using a trowel - don’t push the bulbs into the soil. Plant the garlic cloves about 2”/5cm deep and leave the tips of the shallot bulbs just at the soil surface. The birds will pull one or two out leaving them lying on the ground. Replant them as soon as possible and the birds will quickly lose interest.

General

Top dress all fruit trees and soft fruit bushes with a general fertiliser at the recommended application rate. At the same time top dress the rest of the plot with a general fertiliser as land becomes available.

Check over any fruit trees and bushes for damage and disease problems and take appropriate action.

Prune late/autumn fruiting raspberries down as low as possible and mulch around them. Tip back summer fruiting to around 6ft/1.9m to encourage the development of fruiting side growths.

Complete any outstanding winter pruning of soft fruit bushes cutting down to soil level the older dark stemmed shoots of blackcurrants.

Cover the soil with cloches or sheets of plastic to warm it up in readiness for the next batch of sowing and planting. Don’t overdo it - little and often is the plan over the coming weeks. Start potatoes chitting and check them regularly. Rub off any eyes that are unwanted leaving three or four well-spaced shoots. Keep some fleece or newspapers nearby to cover them up on starry, frosty nights - you don’t want to run the risk of losing them at this late date.

Force rhubarb for an early crop and plant new crowns.

Mulch perennial veg such as artichokes and asparagus.

Keep checking frequently on the condition of any produce in store - it will begin to wake up after its winter dormancy and start to re-grow.

February is also a good time to build new raised beds and do some maintenance on existing beds.

All those catalogues that have thudded on to your doormat can be perused in the evenings in front of the fire (if you’ve not already got your seeds via SAHA from Kings, of course!). Make lists, place orders and prepare a planting plan, remembering to include successional sowings in order to extend the harvesting season.

March

Overview

Hopefully by now we are standing on the threshold of Spring and the new gardening season. The days are beginning to lengthen and although it may not feel like it at times, the temperatures are slowly increasing day by day. More importantly the longer days are the real trigger to new growth and you will find that with the help of a little protection you can really go for those early sowings. They might not all make it but it is still worth a try and you will still have plenty of time to re-sow any misses. Your best friend this month is the weather man; try to keep up-to-date with the local forecasts; better still, ask the advice of the gardeners around you who have years of experience to draw on.

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Easter falls on the 27th March this year and the clocks go forward over the same weekend. Don’t allow yourself to get caught up in a frenzy of Bank Holiday week-end gardening. Plan your work load for the month according to weather and the time you have available.

Sowing and Planting

Plant out early cultivars of potatoes as soon as possible and follow on planting out at regular intervals with the second earlies and first maincrops until the end of the month. Don’t be tempted to plant out more potatoes than you can protect from any frosty weather further down the line.

Transplant any early peas, broad beans, cabbages or lettuce you may have started off earlier.

Sow the seed of Brussels sprouts, summer cabbage, broccoli, onions and leeks in short rows in a “nursery seed bed”. These will be grown on to be transplanted in April.

Sow in rows in the open ground seeds of round-seeded spinach, Swiss chard, early types of beetroot, carrots, parsnips, lettuce, Spring onions, peas, broad beans and turnips. Try sowing the seed of the white form of kohl rabi towards the end of the month.

Plant out onion sets, shallots and garlic before they start to produce shoots. Reject any that are already shooting as they will only bolt during the summer. Transplant any onions that were grown from seed sown last summer into rows.

If you can offer the protection of a greenhouse, sow the seed of celery, celeriac, French beans (they are hardy enough to be planted out before the runners) and cauliflowers to transplant into the open soil next month.

If you missed planting fruit trees and bushes in the Autumn, now is the time to get them in with some slow-release fertiliser such as hoof and horn [£1 / kg in the TC] or a good dose of farmyard manure [£3.20 / 60 litres].

General

Complete any unfinished digging and winter pruning. Clear the old leaves off strawberry plants and clean up the ground in between the plants before giving them a top dressing of a general fertiliser. Keep some fleece handy [25p per metre, 1.5m wide] to protect the developing strawberry flowers from frost. Any frost-damaged flowers are easily identified as they display a tell-tale “black eye” at the centre of the dead flower.

Over-wintered green manures can be chopped up and dug in now while their stems are still soft.

When the weather conditions allow it, complete the preparations of seed beds for direct seed sowing. Spread the job out over several days to allow the surface of the soil to dry out.

Source: rhs.org.uk, nsalg.org.uk, thompson-morgan.com

(Continued from page 3)

Ode to the Crown Prince Squash

Last September, I had one of the most enjoyable, but hardest, jobs I’ve ever done since we got our family allotment 8 years ago. I pushed home our allotment wheelbarrow – up the very steep Prospect Road! – fully laden with almost 50kg of Crown Prince F1 Hybrid Squashes.

Growing any pumpkin or squash is always good fun. They’re easy to germinate, grow like the clappers, normally crop well, and are versatile in the kitchen. But, to us, the Crown Prince is the undisputed King!

Currently sitting on our downstairs loo cistern are some of our pride and joys: two enormous Crown Princes each weighing 4kg+ (our shed holds 10 more, albeit smaller!). The loo is off our kitchen: where the deep orange flesh is made into soups, risottos, savoury cobblers and vegetable curries, or simply diced and roasted with thyme as an accompaniment to stews and roasts.

From two packets of Kings’ seeds (total cost £2.60!), I germinated eight plants on our attic windowsill and planted them out 3-ft apart in well-manured ground in mid-May. There is then the agonising wait whilst they sit there, waiting for the soil to really warm up. But by mid-July, they grow … and grow … and grow! As soon as they outgrow their patch, I train the rampant shoots into any available gaps (tip: grow them above your early potatoes!). There’s the August thrill of peering through the luxuriant foliage to see how many pumpkins have set; and the September joy as the leaves wither to fully reveal the bounteous crop.

Our Crown Princes cropped so well this year that we could give a few away to friends and family for Christmas lunch, and still have more than enough to get us through to the “hungry gap” of late winter; when fresh produce is scarce. So I’d suggest giving them a try this summer if you can get the seed. We once saw them on sale at foodie-heaven Borough Market for £4 / kg – that makes my laden wheelbarrow last September worth around £200!

The Kings’ catalogue describes Crown Princes as excellent for long-term storage and renowned for their eating qualities. As we cut into another one in late January, I couldn’t agree more!

Simon Aguss (plus Chris & Johnny), Plot 38A
Looking forward to … our Open Day, Sunday 17th July

I know it’s only just 2016, but I’m already planning this year’s Open Day which should be as big as last year’s… only with guaranteed good weather! (After two years of high winds and pouring rain, one can live in hope…)

As well as the usual Children’s Treasure Trail (still in my head), raffle, decorate-a-pot-and-sow-some-cress-seeds activity, refreshments, plant stall and visiting businesses, charities and local organisations, I would like to have a Jar Tombola and also encourage the children to help build a Bug Hotel. To this end, I would like to appeal for some help.

In the next few months, I need to gather loads of empty jars of any size with the idea that we fill them with small stuff. I already have some long-dated Christmas choccies which I’ve stashed away, but it doesn’t have to be something edible… anything that’s small enough to fit in a jar is suitable. Full jars are also very welcome such as bought-in or home-made jams or chutneys etc. Then the idea is to trim the jars with a piece of material and ribbon. Easy!

As for the bug hotel: I’d like donations of materials that can be stuffed in between pallets; the photo shows an example at Coolings Green & Pleasant from a few years ago when it was brand new.

So, if you can help out with any of the following, please get in touch:

♦ Jars, empty with lids (any size or shape)
♦ Full jars (anything - home made or not!)
♦ Scraps of material of decent sizes
♦ Lengths of ribbon
♦ Small items for putting in jars (literally anything will do!)
♦ House bricks, roof tiles
♦ Logs (to drill holes in)
♦ Straw
♦ Wool
♦ Terracotta plant pots (not plastic)
♦ Hollow canes
♦ Bundles of sticks
♦ etc………………

If you have something you’d like to donate, please take it to the TC where it will be kept safe until I can collect it, or let me know and I’ll arrange to pick it up from your home.

Ultimately, I would love someone to step forward and volunteer to help organise and run these two activities. Of course, I’ll help out, too!

This is just the start… I’ll be appealing for more help in the next edition!

Ruth King, Open Day organiser

Know your By-Laws - 6. Water, Bonfires & Other Restrictions

In edition 20 (June/July) we covered Water (6.1) and Bonfires (6.2). Here follows the remainder of the By-Law, ‘Other Responsibilities’.

6.3 Rubbish and Recycling

Rubbish from external sources may not be brought on to the site. Infringement may result in termination of a tenancy and/or prosecution.

Non-diseased vegetative matter should be composted or shredded and used on the tenant’s allotment. Diseased plants and perennial weeds can be burned at appropriate times.

6.4 Removal of Crops, Soil and Similar Materials

Tenants may not remove crops from vacant plots or any mineral, sand, gravel, earth, turf or clay from the site without written permission from SAHA.

6.5 Nuisance

No-one may threaten others on the site, or discriminate against, harass, bully or victimise them on any grounds whatsoever.
Spring outing to Kew Gardens

If you’re planning on coming to Kew Gardens with us on Saturday 16th April, please add your name to the list and pay in advance in the Trading Centre (or to me by arrangement) in order to guarantee a seat on the coach.

Taking a trip in this way is a win-win situation: not only is it cheaper to join our tour than to take the train, the journey is also faster (approximately one hour on the coach versus almost two hours (and three changes) on the train/tube). Then you have to get yourself to and from the stations at either end whereas all we ask you to do is turn up at Allotment Lane and you’ll be dropped off at Kew’s gate. What’s not to like?

At today’s prices [January], it costs £15.30 on the train and £16.50 (adult) to get into Kew (£15.50 concession) but this price may rise on 1st April. So our £25 is a bargain!

Spring is a wonderful time to visit Kew as they have so many lovely things to see including:

- Bluebells carpeting the Woodland area which are particularly striking in the grounds of Queen Charlotte’s Cottage.
- The Cherry Walk which runs from the Rose Garden behind the Palm House to King William’s Temple, and then on to the Temperate House.
- Over 250 types of magnificent magnolias across the Gardens, in particular near Elizabeth Gate entrance, Victoria Gate, and near the Kew Gardens Gallery.
- Several varieties of camellia bring intense colour to the Gardens from winter and all through spring. They can be found along the path from Victoria Gate to the Shirley Sherwood Gallery.
- Then there are the all-year-round attractions such as Royal Kew Palace (home to ‘mad’ King George III and his huge family), various glass houses, Tree-Top Walkway, Palm House and Rose Garden, Marianne North Gallery, Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanical Art, Pagoda, Japanese Gate and Landscape... there’s so much that one visit isn’t really enough!

There are loads of different catering outlets but you can always take a picnic, of course.

The coach will leave Allotment Lane at 9am and - M25-permitting - the journey should take about an hour. We will leave Kew at 4pm. The cost of the trip is £25 per adult, £16 for a child aged 4-16 and - if you happen to be a member of Kew - just £13.

Remember that this trip is open to everyone, not just members, so tell all your family and friends and have a great day out!

We are running this trip to Kew because quite a few members have asked for it, so we look forward to your support!

Ruth King

2016 dates for your diary

Members’ Outing to Kew Gardens on Saturday 16th April. Full details above.

Brew & Bacon Butty on the LAST Sunday in the months of April to September at the Trading Centre from 9.30-11am. Just £1.00 will get you a bacon butty and it’s 50p for tea or coffee. Come along, meet other plot holders and have a natter!

Plant & Seedling Swaps at the April and May Brew & Bacon Butty socials. Bring along all your spare plants and swap them for something you’ve not grown yourself. Why not sow some extras when you’re sowing your own seeds and then you’re guaranteed something to trade-in?

Open Day on Sunday 17th July. Activities include a Children’s Treasure Trail, Plant Stall, Refreshments and more! It’s FREE to get in (donations welcome) See page 5 for more details.

Autumn Show on Saturday 3rd September at St John’s Church Hall. Lots of fruit and veg classes plus photography, artwork and cooking. Staging of exhibits from 9-10.45am. Open to the public and prize-giving 2-4pm.

AGM on Thursday 1st December at St John’s Church Hall. Mince pies and hot drinks from 7.30pm. Meeting starts at 8pm.
News from the Trading Centre

As we see the start of Spring it's time for us to spring into action and get going with our allotment: deciding on what we want to grow, building a netting frame ready for the season or even, later in the month, start potting up some of our seeds.

This may mean you need some new items from the Trading Centre like

• 4m wide woven net at only £1.75 per linear metre
• new gloves which we have in either leather suede at £4.30 a pair or latex gloves for only £1.75

For potting new seeds don't forget the compost that we have available:

25 litre J. Arthur Bowers seed compost with John Innes for £5.20 a bag; or

75 litre Hortons multi-purpose compost for £5.70 per bag, or

50 litre New Horizon organic peat free multi-purpose compost for £6.90 a bag.

Also, still on offer while stocks last are various root trainers to plant your seeds in giving a good root growth to the new plant starting at £4 a tray.

When planting your seed potatoes, add some potato fertiliser, which I now have back in stock this season and is highly recommended by members for just 90p per kg or £16.60 for a 20kg bag.

Back by popular demand I will be opening the Trading Centre 9.30am-noon on the following Saturdays:

⇒ 27th February
⇒ 12th & 26th March
⇒ 9th & 23rd April
⇒ 7th & 21st May

Please remember that if there is anything you would like stocked in the TC please email me at dean@sevenoaksallotments.com and I will see what I can do.

Dean Brett

Dates for the Council’s collection of green waste

Starting from this edition, we are going to publish the up-coming dates when the green waste bags will be collected from the main gate. As a reminder, our collection day is Wednesday during GREEN WEEK which is a fortnightly rotation. A copy of the calendar is laminated and attached to the fence to the right of the main gates. All sacks should be placed outside the gate (to the right, on the pavement) by 7am, or the night before if possible, so that they can be easily seen by the crew on the scheduled collection day.

Please also note that the garden waste sacks are for the collection of garden waste; they are not storage sacks. If material is left in the sacks for more than 5 days, there is a risk that they will begin to fall apart. If crews find sacks that are so decomposed that they cannot lift them, those sacks will be left behind. Sacks with wrong materials in them, such as stones, turf, or rubbish of any kind will also be left behind with a sticker affixed explaining why.

We stock brown sacks in the TC which are 55p each or £13.50 for a pack of 25.

Please remember:

• only ever put garden waste out in the couple of days before the collection date (green week) and NEVER more than 5 days before, or risk having your sack left behind because it's deteriorated
• only ever dispose of garden waste that cannot be composted on your plot, such as pernicious or perennial weeks (couch grass, bind weed, mare's tail… you know what I mean!)
• never fill above the line marked on the sack
• the smaller you chop the contents, the more you’ll get in the sack and the less sacks you’ll use
• DON’T ABUSE IT OR WE’LL LOSE IT!

The next three months’ dates are as follows*:

February: 3rd, 17th
March: 2nd, 16th, 30th
April: 13th, 27th

* all dates are Wednesdays and will change when there is a Bank Holiday. See www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/collectiondays for exact details.
Some words from our Chairman...

Things are moving. Geoff and I attended the Complaint hearing about 10 days ago. Everyone - the Town Clerk, three Councillors and the two of us were all very polite and friendly. Not a word was spoken in anger. You would not have thought this possible after all the stuff that’s been in the Chronicle and by email during the last two months. Our complaint was not upheld, which means that the panel were of the opinion that the two weeks between receiving the draft lease and the Open Spaces meeting was enough time “to consider and respond to the draft lease”. For me it was not a win or lose situation. I believe that we made our point, that we can now move on in a more democratic manner.

Our response to the draft lease from STC, ‘loosely’ based on the NAS template (STC’s words), has a few amendments suggested for consideration by STC. Our legal advisor has been invaluable and we are very fortunate to have him amongst our plot holders. It is worth reminding ourselves that the lease is with SAHA and not the Allotment site. SAHA, a group of volunteers, manages the site on behalf of STC and at no cost to STC. We were assured last week that the Allotments will stay and that the Council wishes SAHA to continue managing them. So with a bit of goodwill and willingness to listen and discuss, the new lease should be done and dusted before the present one runs out in July.

Welcome new members!

“An allotment is like the army. The first month is the worst: after that you begin to enjoy it.”

As spoken by Mr Middleton, the ‘voice’ of the Dig for Victory campaign during the Second World War in one of his radio broadcasts ‘In Your Garden’.

Martin Archer - plot 127A
Anna Debrowska-Jaudi - plots 27B & 38B
Katie Sands - plot 145

Here is the most amazing pair of BEFORE and AFTER pictures I have ever seen! Congratulations must go to new member Anna (right), her mum (left) and Anna’s husband. Anna took over this half plot (and another half elsewhere) at the beginning of January and by the 11th had completely cleared it! This is what Anna says about her experience:

“I’m very very happy with my new project. I had a veg garden before and it gave me a lot of joy and fulfilment. I absolutely love plants. They are such an intelligent creatures.

“Gardening seasons in Poland are so different from the UK. In Poland the temperature is usually -20 degrees with a metre of snow in January while in the UK I can already plant potatoes. I have to admit that this confuses me sometimes.”

So next time we Brits whinge about the cold weather and difficult growing conditions, let’s be grateful that we don’t live in Poland!