

Forge Farm Bugle Volume 2 Edition 2 Summer 2012

Hello Plotters and welcome to the second edition of the current year's Bugle. Announcements first: on May Day we raised over £200 so well done everybody. I trust you all enjoyed yourself despite the weather catching up on us. We shall hopefully be having more events like this throughout the year, the next is our Summer Show which will be on Saturday September 1st starting at 11am, the categories appear below. This year, as well as featuring many of the categories from last we shall be trialling a selection of quality fruit and vegetables, you can enter as many categories as you like but only once; last year some of us heaped a lot of work on our tast-tester Rita from Newhall Allotments by entering several jars of jams and pickles and she had to wittle down which was best and put that through. So remember - one entry per category only. And try and get them in before noon on the day.

We have restarted our shop this year and though we initially stocked only compost and fish blood and bone we have since extended our range. A full list of stock and prices will be featured in the Bugle regularly and on the noticeboards. Everything we sell will be very competitively priced as we believe growing your own should be made as inexpensive as possible in order to get you cultivating your plots as well as you can. We've found another, cheaper local supplier so buy all you can from us as it not only helps you but local business too.

The number of cultivated plots has risen again this year yet there are still plots that are not being worked to their full potential. If you are having difficulties please let us know. With the rise in rent this year it is clear that plotters will get more bang from their buck if their plots are producing fruit and vegetables for them. Early and repeated hoeing whilst weeds are small is the surest way to a tidy and productive plot. The Committee, in line with many other across Birmingham, are mulling over introducing a 75% cultivation rate per plot; meaning you need to be actively cultivating three quarters of your plot. Weedy plots become a nuisance to your neighbours, with overgrown plots providing an ideal home for pests such as rabbits and rats which we are having problems with this year. So please get the best out of your plot by putting your best in. The council's rules regarding cultivation are quite stringent and are being strictly enforced due to the amount of interest in acquiring an allotment so it is in your interest to read and follow the allotment rules.

The judging for Best Plot and Best Newcomer will be taking place during the latter half of August, so get your plots in shape if you want to be in with a chance to win.

We will also be having a scarecrow competition so start designing and constructing a scarecrow. Not only is a scarecrow fun but it may dissuade pigeons from terrorising

your produce and could even deter other intruders from entering the site.

Health and Safety is a concern at the site, no-one wants to be injured so we undertake risk assessments on a regular basis to see where we might improve our situation. The Council demands we do this for legal reasons too. Much of the measures we can take to safeguard our welfare are common sense practises, others involve a close reading of the allotment rules and regulations and a close adherence to them.

Shop Goods and Prices

Bonemeal	1kg	50p
Fish Blood and Bone	1kg	60p
	25kg sack	£15
Dried Blood	1kg	£1.20
Epsom Salts	1kg	70p
Compost Activator	1kg	50p
Garden Lime	big heavy bag	£4.00
Slug Pellets	1kg	£2.00
6X chicken pellet fertiliser	10 kg bag	£5.50
Seaweed Concentrate	1 litre	£4
Glyphosate Concentrate	500ml	£5
Bag of Horticultural Grit		£3.50
Small Bamboo Canes (pea sticks etc)		5p each

Show Categories 2012

Best Plot Trophy for the winner, certificates to runners-up.

Best Newcomer Trophy for the winner, certificates to runners-up.

Children's categories

Animal Monster - make a fruit and/or vegetable monster.

Best Posy in a jam jar - 'weeds' or flowers from your plot.

5 small cakes on a plate

Tallest Sunflower - we shall measure these on y our plot. Tallest wins a sunflower trophy.

Heaviest Vegetables

Cabbage Leek Marrow Potato Onion Beetroot

Pumpkin - if, like last year, they're too big to move on the day we'll measure the circumference and the biggest wins.

Longest Vegetables

Longest Carrot - measured from shoulder to 5mm tapered end.

Longest Runner Bean

Fruit

Small plate fruit - best looking to win

Flowers judged by an independent, outside party (unbriable)

Vase of Flower

Posy in jam jar

Home made categories Again judged by an independent connoisseur.

Home made Jam

Chutney or Pickle

Victoria Sponge

Ugly Vegetable Ghastliest or most humorous wins

Quality Categories Summer Show

Trimmed (except carrots and beetroot), clean on a paper plate (provided) plot number and name of entrant. One entry per category per plot. Judges decision final.

3 white potatoes	2 lettuce	6 pea pods	2 squash
2 sweetcorn	3 onions	5 shallots	3 beetroot
3 carrots	1 cabbage	1 cauliflower	3 courgettes
2 cucumber	6 french beans	3 leeks	5 tomatoes
3 cooking apples	3 eating apples	6 raspberries	home made wine

INFORMATION RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY

A risk assessment has been carried out for the site and the findings are contained in a file which is kept in the meeting hut and located in the cupboard above and to the left of the sink unit.

Risk assessments will also be carried out for all allotment events eg May Day Social Event and for any additional risks such as the visit by Environmental Services regarding the rat problem.

Please read through the information in the file.

Main points to take account of

- We are all responsible for Health and Safety. Please inform a member of the

committee if you think action should be taken about anything you consider a hazard and cannot deal with it yourself.

- Please check paving slab paths between allotments to make sure they are level to avoid tripping.
- Take care when removing plant waste to tip area as paths and ramp may be slippery.
- Please remove all non plant rubbish eg paintpots, plastic containers, metal off site to local tip.
- Please check your plot for broken glass, wood with exposed nails and remove to local tip.
- Please check sheds for insecure glass, timber and metal which could be blown off in high winds.
- Please cover ends of runner bean canes which are protruding at eye level as these could cause injuries to eyes.
- Plotholders with children are reminded that they must be prevented from running in the road or wandering on to other plots.
- Chemicals eg weedkiller, sprays paraffin. Plotholders are advised that no bulk amounts or out of date chemical should be kept in the sheds or green houses. Small amounts of allowed chemicals are acceptable.
- Cars – the speed limit is 5 MPH. Please park on one side of the road to allow safer movement of cars rather than a slalom effect.
- Visitors are asked to park near the meeting hut when the site is busy.
- Tools belonging to the Association. The user of any of the Association's power tools must be competent. Training will be given in their use and the hazards explained. There will be a book to sign in and out.
- Plotholders wishing to use the meeting room and electricity will be given instruction on how to use the generator before being allowed to do so.
- Bonfires – these are only allowed in November and March and must not be left unattended. Please make sure the fire is out before you leave your plot otherwise it could attract vandalism.

CULTIVATION OF PLOTS

The committee would like to draw all plotholders attention to the Birmingham City Council's Allotment Rules. A copy of these was given out when subscriptions were paid. It is important that these are read and understood. In particular we would like to draw your attention to Nos 5 and 6 with special reference to the following:

5.1

“ Allotment Gardens must be kept clean, free from weeds, well manured and in a good state of cultivation and fertility.”

Plots that become overgrown are a problem for your neighbours.

If there is any reason why there is a temporary lack of cultivation then the committee

should be advised so that appropriate help can be given.

6.1

“Hoses or sprinklers are not allowed except where required to fill water containers. Hosepipes or siphoning devices are not to be used to remove water from any water trough. Tenants must take every precaution to prevent contamination of water supplies. Water may only be extracted from a water course with the approval of the Council and subject to the appropriate licence”

Green Container

This new shipping container was donated to us by Sutton Coldfield Municipal Charities, who have also enabled us to purchase a large marquee. It will be used for the shop items and some of the Association's equipment. If you wish to use the latter please contact a Committee member or drop a note into the postbox attached to the toilet block. Several times plot holders have claimed they have not had access to the Association's equipment; this was only partially true for a period when the brush cutter was broken and being repaired. Since the purchase of the rotovator in 2008 there have been arrangements in place whereby the machine could be hired through the Committee. Not many allotment sites in our neighbourhood have such equipment and facilities such as the tip for use by plot holders so we should be grateful we have them at all. Be advised though, you use the equipment at your own risk and after following the health and safety requirements.

2012 will be remembered for being very wet after a dry start. All the rain will wash nutrients out of your soil leading to starved crops but you can remedy this with applications of fertilisers such as Fish, Blood and Bone, Growmore etc some of which we sell in the shop. Fish, Blood and Bone can be sprinkled on your soil with the weather taking it into the ground, repeated applications - some use it every 3 - 4 weeks will keep your soil fertile and feed your crops.

Whereas Fish, Blood and Bone is organic Growmore is inorganic, but not 'artificial', and was introduced during World War Two as National Growmore to help fuel the Dig for Victory campaign.

Website address: <http://forgefarmallotments.weebly.com/>

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On May 7th there will be a social event at Forge Farm Allotments from 11am until 2pm.

There will be drinks and cakes on sale and any spare seedlings you might have you can donate to the Association and we can sell them to other plot holders for a small amount - all proceeds to the Association. Amongst plants already donated are

strawberry plants, cabbage, tomatoes, celeriacs, chard, spinach and marigolds. We still have some Erin multipurpose compost for sale at £3.50 a bag or 3 for £10. We have sold out of fish blood and bone organic fertiliser but will be getting more soon.

The categories for the Summer Show will be up soon, many are the same as last year so make sure you have your giant veg ready for late August/early September, actual date to be confirmed.

Please can you remember to pay for the site's rotovator if you use it. Also, supply your own unleaded petrol. We have had to buy a new belt recently and this costs money so please pay a committee member your £5 for 2 hours hire.

Also, the manure near the tip is donated to us by a local farmer on the understanding we make a donation to St Giles Cancer Hospice. It's only £1 for three barrow loads so it's inexpensive as well as for a good cause. Alternatively you can have a large load delivered to your plot for just £10. Plan ahead as it takes about 6 months to rot down to lovely stuff.

If you have had any recently please let us have your donation soon as we're giving it to St Giles at the end of April.

This and last year have been expensive ones for the Association. We have spent £250 on getting the road's potholes fixed and £220 on the repair of the Generator. Another £40 has gone to a new drive belt for the Rotovator. We have spent £40 on native rambling roses for the hedge to help keep intruders out and wildlife happy. There are always taps to be fixed and this winter was no exception despite the water being turned off, at least it wasn't as bad as the year before. We have spent money from your £5 Association fee on Insurance for us all. Other maintenance and security issues have amounted to several hundred pounds not including money spent on last year's Summer Show so every little we get from fundraising and hiring out equipment helps as the Council have devolved responsibility to us and have no money to help us now or for the foreseeable future.

Tips

Give the soil priority – getting the soil fertile is more than half the work done and will give satisfying results.

Start your compost heap. Make it as simple or complicated as you wish, but do get one going - it's good for maintaining fertile and healthy soil. Look at the plots around you - plots with compost heaps are usually the ones with good deep beds bulging over the path edges; plots without compost heaps are often those where the soil has sunk below path level.

Grow the easy stuff first – the best people to speak to this about are the old timers from your area. Squash, broad beans, leeks, garlic, shallots, kale, purple sprouting broccoli, spinach beet, Swiss chard, corn salad, are some of the easy ones recommended to start with because they will all grow in shady sites provided the right soil preparation is made and many allotments are shady.

So now the path has over wintered, and the mosses, lichens and of course the weeds have all taken over you might like to clean it. Salted Boiling water and a good stiff broom will do the trick. It may need to be repeated, but will not damage surrounding soil like commercial products can, and is the safest where pets are concerned.

When planting up your fresh spring hanging baskets why not use your old knitwear or newspapers for a no cost basket liner, this will save you plenty, and the money saved can go towards better quality compost and plants. Don't throw away the remnants of last summers baskets; either dig it into your garden or at the very least put it in your compost bin.

Use old bubble wrap to line your pots and containers, it will help warm the compost and prevent late frosts from damaging delicate new roots.

Washing up liquid makes a great insecticidal soap when you mix it with water. Take 1 to 3 tablespoons of washing up liquid and mix it into 4 litres of water, add a tablespoon of vinegar too, put it in a spray bottle and mist spray the entire plant. Small left over soap bars, you remember the ones that clutter the soap tray in the bathroom, and no one likes to use, can be utilized also and easily dissolved using warm or boiling water. Of course always remember to let it cool before applying to your plants. Soapy dish or bath water can also be collected and used effectively.

Hopefully you have all seen the free guttering Dionne has kindly given to us, if not it's by the Green Shed. Fixtures, fittings and downpipes are all there and will save you money and water if you put them on your sheds and greenhouses. We are negotiating a purchase of 205 litre blue barrels for June and trying to get a grant for them.

Harvesting rainwater is not only environmentally friendly but it's much better for your plants.

It has been noted that some plot have dandelions about to set seed, if your's is one of these plots could you dig these out and dispose of them before they do otherwise we will be inundated with their pernicious flying seeds. Depedning who you read there are between 100 and 180 seeds on each dandelion head which translates into a major problem.

If you need reminding Forge Farm has a website. You can't search for it on Google as that would mean we'd have to pay for it so here's the address:

<http://forgefarmallotments.weebly.com>