

Syston Allotment Society Newsletter

Summer 2013

Welcome to the Summer 2013 issue of the newsletter. Yet again we have experienced difficult growing conditions, with the coldest spring in many years moving into a July heatwave, and hardly any rain to help the dried out soil. The spring plant sale was cancelled as everything was behind due to the cold weather, but an August produce sale is planned now we have at last had some rain and the allotments are full of fruit and vegetables.

Community orchard

As many of you will no doubt have noticed, the community plot (Plot 1) has been looking very overgrown and uncared for. The plot has proved unsuitable for growing vegetables, so it will become a community orchard instead.

The committee applied for a grant of £700 from the South Charnwood Area Forum budget, which would pay for the trees, ground covering Mypex and bark chippings, edging and fixings. We were competing with seventeen other projects for a share of £15,000. At the decision night on 11th June, we presented our case for the money. The idea was to plant heritage varieties of different fruit trees, including apple, pear, mulberry and plum, and to offer the fruit free to local people. The ground cover would keep the weeds down, and volunteers would maintain the plot and prune the trees.

After all the presentations, the voting took place. We were competing against such worthy projects as Syston respite care, refurbishment of the volunteer centre mobility aids shed and a defibrillator for Barkby, and we unfortunately didn't get chosen to receive funds. However, a local resident was so impressed by the orchard plan that he offered the funds in full, on condition he could remain anonymous. So we thank him for his generosity, and we also thank Gamble and Hollis butchers for donating £30 towards a tree.

The trees will be planted in November and December, and site preparation has already begun. The weeds have been sprayed, and will

be cut back and sprayed again, after which the edging boards and Mypex will be laid.



The overgrown community plot before the weeds were sprayed in July

Bonfires

Under the new Syston Town Council rules, bonfires are only allowed outside of British Summer Time, so please wait until the clocks change on 27th October to have a bonfire. Bonfires are only allowed during the two hours before dusk. As a guide, here are some sunset times for autumn 2013:

October 27 th 4.44 pm	
November 1 st 4.34 pm	November 15 th 4.11pm
December 1 st 3.54 pm	December 15 th 3.50 pm

Water troughs

Many of you will now have IBC cubes and other containers to collect water when it rains. During dry spells these empty all too quickly, and we are reliant on the taps along the central track. All plot holders are encouraged to use water as carefully as possible, as the water supply to the site is on a water meter, with the bill paid by Syston Town Council. The Council are not obliged to supply us with water, and continuing the supply has been discussed at Syston Town Council meetings, especially after leaks in the past have led to very high bills. Committee members keep a very close eye out for leaks and repair them right away, but there have also been problems with vandals entering the site at night and turning on taps, and the extensive water loss is only discovered the next morning.

To counter the vandalism, the taps will be replaced with troughs, the kind that are used by farmers for watering their livestock. They fill by using an enclosed ball valve system and are practically vandal proof. They have two large tanks each side of the central valve so two people could fill their watering cans at the same time. One tap, about half way down the track, will be replaced with a push tap so there is clean water available for first aid and making drinks.

By investing in the troughs, we are making a clear statement to the Council that we are serious about water conservation, and we see this as making a significant contribution to addressing their concerns about continuing our water supply.

Preserving hedgerow fruits

The hedgerows around Syston are now covered with ripening fruits, and once ripe they can be turned into a delicious hedgerow jelly. Using just red fruits makes a fragrant light red jelly, and including the darker fruits makes a purple-black, richer jelly.

Pick rosehips, haws, blackberries, crab apples, sloes, rowan berries, sloes and elderberries, ensuring about half the weight is apples. 1kg of apples and 1kg of other fruit makes between four and eight jam jars of preserve.

Put the apples and berries in a large pan. If you decide to use rosehips, chop them roughly first, though take care because the fibres inside them are an irritant, so you could do this in a processor. Add enough water to almost cover the fruit, bring to a simmer, and leave to cook gently until the fruit is soft and pulpy. Tip into a jelly bag and leave to drip for several hours or overnight.

Prepare your jam jars by washing them in hot soapy water, then put them in a low oven to dry out and heat up. Put a saucer in the fridge or freezer.

Measure the juice and transfer to the clean pan. For every 600ml juice, add 450g sugar. Bring slowly to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar, then bring up to a rolling boil and boil hard for eight minutes. Now start testing for setting point. Turn off the heat, use a teaspoon to drip a little jelly on to the cold saucer and return to the fridge or freezer for a couple of minutes. Push the jelly with your fingertip: if it has formed an obvious skin that wrinkles with the push, it's reached setting point; if not, turn the heat back on and boil for two to three minutes more, then test again. Don't take the set too far, as a lightly set jelly is far nicer than a tough, solid one.

Once setting point is reached, pour into the hot, sterilised jars and seal at once. Leave to cool, label and store in a cool, dark place. Use within a year, and refrigerate after opening.

Dates for your diary

Committee meetings are on the first Tuesday of the month at the Syston and District Social Club, starting at 7.45. Any non-committee members are welcome to attend.

The summer produce sale will take place on Saturday 24th August 2013. We welcome contributions of any produce you can spare from your plot.

