

System Allotment Society Newsletter

Summer 2014

Welcome to the summer 2014 issue of the newsletter. The Knoll Orchard is already bearing fruit, and the amazing summer weather has left many of us with gluts of produce – hopefully this will still be the case when the summer produce sale comes round on August 16th. In this issue we suggest a spicy way of using up some courgettes, explain how you can reduce the effect of white rot on your alliums next year, consider a few unusual winter vegetables, and make a suggestion for a day out at some unique gardens.

The Knoll Orchard bears fruit

All the fruit trees in the Knoll Orchard blossomed in the spring and they are now in full leaf. The Epicure and Discovery apple trees have fruit on them, which is ripening in the sunny weather we've been enjoying. Unfortunately the fruits will need thinning this year so the trees can put their energy into growth but we will be rewarded in years to come with better crops.



Discovery (top) and Epicure apples

Spring plant sale



Chair Richard Thorpe and Treasurer Terry Bailey serving on the produce stall

The spring plant sale was held on 17th May 2014. Contributions from plot holders ensured there was a wide range of plants and produce including rhubarb, seed potatoes, eggs, honey, bay leaves, geraniums and bean, melon, cucumber, tomato and courgette plants. The sale raised nearly £180 for allotment society funds, just pipping the amount taken at the summer produce sale last year. Committee members Richard Thorpe, Paul Windridge, Terry Bailey and Jackie Stanley served on the stall.

Beat white rot

As those of us who grow alliums know all too well, white rot is endemic on the allotment site and can severely reduce yields. Here, Paul Windridge explains how to minimise white rot

and increase your 2015 yield of onions, shallots and garlic by using the leaves and peelings from this year's onions:

As we have a soil type that is very light and sandy, it is ideal for all alliums - onions, shallots, garlic and leeks - which means alliums have been grown in this ground for over 100 years. Inevitably most of the site has a fungal infection called onion white rot which will cause failure of a significant yield of your alliums, especially garlic but also onions. Fortunately leeks seem to be less affected.



This fungus will lie for many years in the ground and is highly infectious. One way to improve your onion yields is to follow this procedure:

Firstly you will need to be organised and patient. During the late summer you will need to make onion tea. This is a simple but rather smelly operation. Take a large container, about 5 gallons, fill $\frac{3}{4}$ full of water and throw in all your onion waste, leaves etc., but ensure you don't use rotten onions. A lid for your container is a good idea because of the smell.

Now you need to prepare the ground for your next year's onion bed by clearing weeds. It's a good idea to mark out your bed with pegs and string. By the end of September your onion tea will be ready.

Now you will need to sow your marked out bed with a generous broadcast of mustard seed. As soon as your seed is sown you need to water it all with your onion tea. This is rather smelly but will soon diminish. Two weeks later your seed will have germinated. Let this grow until it's about 10 inches high. The time will vary depending on weather, but usually by the end of

October the mustard will need lightly digging in. This must be done before the mustard goes to seed. Now cover your bed completely – Mypex woven plastic is ideal - and leave covered until you are ready to plant out your onions.

Take off the cover in spring and plant out your onions. This process will not completely get rid of the white rot but it will markedly increase your yield and it is completely safe.

For anyone wondering how it works: the fungus needs something to be growing near it to become activated, and by watering the growing mustard with onion tea you will make the fungus think the growing mustard is in fact an onion. The fungus will infect the mustard, and because mustard is a brassica the fungus can't complete its life cycle. When you dig the mustard in you will also kill the fungus and the mustard leaf will markedly improve the structure of the soil.

Growing your onions from seed is also a good idea as you can't carry white rot from seed, unlike sets. I grow a variety called 'Golden Bear' which is slightly white rot resistant and it's also a good keeper. You can grow onions in the same ground year after year if you keep your ground clean. Add plenty of potash to the bed, using freshly burnt wood ash, especially from little twigs. The ash from these is especially high in potash. Covering the ground after growing in your bed will preserve the potash.

All year growing

Lots of us grow leeks, cabbage, purple sprouting broccoli and kale over winter, and maybe winter lettuces such as Winter Density and Parella Red, but have you considered some of the more unusual plants?

Claytonia, mooli, corn salad, rocket, chicories and land cress will last all winter as long as they get some protection during bad weather.

If you enjoy salads claytonia, also known as miners' lettuce, will stand mild frosts. The fleshy heart shaped leaves are juicy and mild and contrast well with peppery salad leaves. Sow claytonia by the end of August and keep it moist. Corn salad is another mild green that will last all

winter. Corn salad should be sown by the end of November.



Claytonia

Land cress is watercress's soil based cousin and has the same spiky flavour. Rocket, both wild and cultivated, is peppery and can grow in profusion even through winter. Both of these should be sown by the end of September and kept moist. Rocket is usually plagued by flea beetle, so does better under fleece or a fine mesh netting until it's established.



Corn salad

Some radishes, such as black radish, will overwinter, but they can get woody. An alternative is a radish called mooli or daikon. It's a long, white root that can grow to over a foot in length. The young roots are fiery but the heat dissipates as they grow. Mooli should be sown in late summer, as it can bolt if sown earlier. As a brassica it will be attacked by cabbage root fly, leaving a network of black markings inside the root, so keep it covered.

The real winter stars are chicories and radicchios. Sown now and brought on before it gets too cold, they will go through the winter and shrug off all but the hardest frosts. They have a slightly bitter flavour that works really well with lettuce and other mild leaves. Misticanza is a mix of chicory and radicchio seeds that is a great way to get a variety of winter hardy plants with the added excitement of not knowing what will come up.



Mooli radishes

Hill Close Gardens

Hill Close Gardens in Warwick are a very rare example of detached Victorian leisure gardens, which were originally created on the outskirts of towns to enable the local tradesmen to grow fruit and vegetables and keep a few animals. Restored by local people, the gardens are the only ones of their kind in the UK open to the public and are just an hour's drive from Syston. Historic varieties of fruit and vegetables are grown and are offered for sale.



There are special events for both children and adults at the gardens, including head gardener's tours and an apple walk. In summer the gardens are open every day and a cafe is open at weekends. Admission for adults is £3.50. For more information about the gardens, see their website at <http://www.hillclosegardens.com/> or telephone 01926 493339.

Courgette and potato curry

It's that time of year again, when many of us are trying to find ways of using all our courgettes. For a change, try using them in an Indian curry. Courgettes are surprisingly good in a curry, as they readily take up the flavour of the spices. The texture of courgettes is a natural pairing for new potatoes. Serve with a lentil dhal, basmati rice and a cucumber raita. All the recipes are for two people.

2 medium courgettes
4-5 small to medium potatoes
1 tsp black mustard seeds
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground coriander
Half tsp chilli powder
Quarter tsp turmeric
Pinch of salt
Tablespoon vegetable oil

Chop the courgettes into chunks and the potatoes into 1.5 cm cubes. Using a big frying pan or a wok, fry the mustard seeds and when they start popping add the potatoes and fry over a medium to high heat, stirring until the surfaces of the potatoes are crisp. Put in the courgettes and fry until they start to brown a little. Add the other spices and a pinch of salt, mix together so everything gets coated with spices and keep cooking for about five minutes until the potatoes are tender - add more oil if necessary. The potatoes and courgettes should be crisp but not oily. Turn down the heat if the vegetables look like they're burning before they're cooked.

Lentil dhal

100g red lentils
Half tsp turmeric

Half tsp chilli powder
375ml water
An inch of fresh ginger, peeled, and finely chopped or grated

Wash the lentils and cover with the water. Add the remaining ingredients, bring to the boil and cook gently for about 30 minutes, until the lentils are tender.

Cucumber raita

250 ml plain yoghurt
Pinch of salt
One small cucumber, finely chopped
Small handful of mint leaves, finely chopped
Half tsp black mustard seeds
Tsp vegetable oil

Beat the yoghurt and salt together. Put a tablespoon of oil in a pan and heat, add the mustard seeds and heat until they start popping. Turn off the heat and allow the seeds to cool. Add the cucumber, mustard seeds and mint to the yoghurt and mix gently.

Bonfires

Bonfires are allowed again after the end of British Summer Time on 26th October, during the two hours before dusk. As a guide, here are some sunset times for October to the end of the year:

October 26 th 4.45 pm	November 15 th 4.10 pm
November 30 th 3.54 pm	December 15 th 3.49 pm
December 31 st 3.59 pm	

2014 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 16th August. We welcome any contributions of produce you can spare from your plot.