

System Allotment Society Newsletter

Winter 2014/2015

Welcome to the winter 2014/2015 issue of the newsletter. In this issue we focus on the National Allotment Society, look at keeping chickens, and help you to keep out the winter chills with an Italian recipe for a warming soup. The Annual General Meeting is coming up on 17th March, and you will find an invitation on the back of this newsletter.

Summer produce sale



Chairman Richard Thorpe and Treasurer Terry Bailey making an early start at the produce stall

The summer produce sale was held on 16th August 2014. Plot holders contributed a range of late summer produce, including marrows, beetroot, apples and beans. Eggs from plot holders' chickens also proved popular, as did chilli plants. Committee members took turns to serve on the stall, and after a busy morning had raised £138.80 for allotment society funds. The spring plant sale will take place on 16th May, and donations of plants and produce will be very welcome. See page 3 for more about what sells well and how you can help.

Best scarecrow competition

The children's competition in 2014 was for the best scarecrow. Judging took place in September, and prizes were awarded to some decidedly scary offerings from plot numbers 19A (two scarecrows), 2, 49A and 51B. Thank you to everybody who took part.



The National Allotment Society

The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG), now known as the National Allotment Society, is the only national organisation that fights for the rights and interests of allotment holders across the country. Both individuals and allotment societies can be members. For an allotment society to join, at least 25% of plot holders need to pay a small fee. So every year at the AGM, Treasurer Terry Bailey asks plot holders for a small fee (recently £2.00) so Syston Allotment Society can remain a member.



The National Allotment Society works to ensure statutory allotment sites are not disposed of unfairly, and that local authorities uphold their duty to provide allotment land. Allotment gardening is the only recreational activity enshrined in law, meaning that through the National Allotment Society's in-house lawyer, they fight for the rights of allotment holders and provide advice where disputes have arisen.

By paying the membership fee each year, Syston Allotment Society retains access to this free legal protection, and plot holders paying the fee get access to excellent quality Kings seeds at a 40% discount on retail prices. By buying even a few packets of seeds via the scheme, you will save the cost of the fee.

In 2015, the National Allotment Society has increased the fee to £2.50. Syston Allotment Society believes this still represents great value for the benefits we get.

About half the total number of plot holders in Syston pay the fee, and it would be great to increase this number so we can support the excellent work done by the National Allotment Society. So please pay Terry your £2.50 either at the AGM, or as soon as possible afterwards. Thank you.

My beautiful (feathered) girlies

Richard (Grizz) Thorpe's chickens enjoy a palatial home on plot 15B. He explains here how he came to be keeping hens:

It's been five or more years now since I fulfilled an ambition to re-home some battery hens. It was not a straight forward task. The first hurdle was the town council as the allotment rules were 'no livestock', but after a bit of research I realised that I could have hens. So I informed the council of my intentions, told them that their 'no livestock' rule was unlawful and produced the 1950 Allotment Act, which they reluctantly accepted. The society of the time gave me the much coveted post of Poultry Warden.

The first job was to design a coop that would be strong enough to keep foxes away and also easy to keep clean, but above all give the hens a happy life - after all, I am trying to rescue them.

My first four girls came from Brindsley Animal Rescue, and they provided me with four eggs a day for two or more years but sadly, like all living things, they don't live forever.



Richard Thorpe and his chicken palace

If you are considering keeping hens on your plot build a coop that will comfortably home eight or ten girls but only have four or five, then when they get old and slow down and only lay once a week you have room to introduce three or so young girls - but expect trouble at first. By the time your new girls slow down the originals will have passed away

and you can top up again. That way you are never keeping hens without gathering eggs.

The one question I get asked is, do you have to visit every day. Although I do, it's not necessary, as the water and feeders hold enough to last for three or four days. I go every day because I take them treats, usually the leftovers from our meal the night before. If you feel you can give some hens a happy life please, consider re-homing some ex-battery hens. They will repay you with eggs and make you smile!

La Ribollita

This Italian vegetable soup is a substantial meal, and makes use of produce available at this time of year, either from store, or vegetables still in the ground. The name means 're-boiled', because the soup is made the day before it's needed and reheated to enhance the flavour. I've adapted the recipe from Ursula Ferrigno's 'Bringing Italy Home'. These quantities serve four people but they are easily adjusted to make bigger quantities – the soup lasts for days, and gets better with time.

Tin of cannellini beans (available at the Co-op)

1 large onion, sliced

2 carrots, chopped

2 celery sticks, chopped

2 cleaned leeks, chopped

A good handful of cavolo nero (black cabbage), or other kale or cabbage, chopped

4 tomatoes

2 tbsp olive oil

2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

1 tsp of dried chilli flakes, or to taste

A handful of fresh parsley and rosemary, chopped

2 bay leaves, fresh or dried

Salt and pepper

About 1 litre water or vegetable stock

To serve:

Good bread, white or brown, sliced

Extra virgin olive oil

A handful of fresh parsley, chopped

Put the tomatoes in boiling water, then into cold water and remove the skins. Cut into quarters, de-seed and chop. In a large pan fry the onion in 1 tbsp of olive oil for a few minutes. Add the rest of the vegetables and the tomatoes and mix. Add half the

garlic and all the chilli. Cook gently for 10 minutes. Add the beans and stir them in. Just cover with water or stock and simmer for about 45 minutes.

Puree briefly with a stick blender or remove about one third of the soup, blend or sieve, and return to the pan.

In a separate pan, warm 1 tbsp of olive oil and fry the remaining garlic, along with the chopped herbs and bay leaves, until they are lightly browned. Add to the pan and leave for 24 hours.

The next day, warm through uncovered. The mixture should be wet, but not sloppy. Season to taste. Lay a slice of bread in a bowl, spoon over the soup and top with a generous measure of extra virgin olive oil and a sprinkling of salt and chopped parsley.

Plant and produce sales



The spring plant sale will be on Saturday 16th May and the summer produce sale will take place in mid-August. Sales make an important contribution to allotment society funds, and any donations of plants and produce you can spare from your plot are very welcome. If you have some greenhouse space, please consider obtaining cheap plug plants and bringing them on ready for the spring sale.

Annual bedding plants such as lobelia, geraniums, violas, begonias and pansies sell very well, as do chilli plants. If you have room on your plot, could you sow a few more vegetable seeds so some extra produce will be ready to harvest in August?

2015 committee meetings

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 full list of dates is on the notice board.

ALL PLOT HOLDERS AND THEIR
FAMILIES ARE INVITED TO
COME TO
THE AGM
OF SYSTON
ALLOTMENT SOCIETY

ON TUESDAY 17TH MARCH 2015

From 8.00 to 9.00 pm

AT SYSTON SOCIAL CLUB
HIGH STREET SYSTON