



Charity No 1108144

'Growing Concerns'

The Newsletter for members of Harrow in Leaf

Summer 2010

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Newsletter 20

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Don't forget our BARBECUE on 31st July, 6 pm, at Leaf HQ (on West Harrow large allotment site, entrance in The Gardens, beside West Harrow tube station; our HQ is at the end of the roadway).

Tickets £7.50, under 12s £3, under 3s free. Vegetarian option available. To book, phone 07502 300956 by 28th July.



HARROW IN LEAF SHOW

SUNDAY 29th AND
MONDAY 30th AUGUST
12 noon-6 pm

Preparations are going well for our 6th Horticultural Show, to be held on August Bank Holiday weekend at the Headstone Manor site, in association with Harrow Museum and Heritage Centre. Why not get involved and help us to make it even better than last year by entering an exhibit or volunteering your help for a couple of hours? Show schedules and information are available on our website or from the Show Manager (020 8907 0508). As well as the horticultural classes (vegetables, fruit, flowers, pot plants) and domestic section, there are classes for photography, painting, crafts, and floral art for the artistic, including children.



To make everything run smoothly **we need volunteers** to help in the marquees, on the gates, and with traffic control and parking, as well as with setting up and taking down marquees. To volunteer, please phone 020 8866 6066 or e-mail dichurch@btinternet.com. Anyone who volunteers to help will, of course, be able to spend time at the show, for free.

What will there be to see at this year's show? As well as the Horticultural and Beekeepers' Marquees, there will be plenty of music, craft stalls with jewellery and stained glass, cards, gifts and trinket boxes, and plants from a local nursery. There will be activities and entertainment for children, making it an enjoyable family day out—and entry is free for under-12s. We have booked swing boats, a bucking bronco and a bouncy castle. Our Harrow in Leaf marquee will have information about horticulture, allotments, and local associations, and we will have plants and bird boxes for sale. There will be a raffle and tombolas, with one especially for children.



As usual, the Beekeepers' Marquee will amaze us with beeswax artworks, candles and polish, and displays and information about bees.



EARTH PROJECT TO CLOSE We were shocked to learn that the Earth Project, situated at the rear of the Newton Park East allotment site is to close. The Project, which is a horticultural learning centre, was set up 3 years ago, and was managed by Harrow College on behalf of Harrow Council. The staff worked tremendously hard and enthusiastically to build up the Project, and to see this supreme effort and the massive financial investment wasted with little concern for the end users, mainly disadvantaged people and school groups, would indeed be a tragedy. There had been an undertaking that local groups, including those on the Newton Park allotment sites, would be consulted about any closure, but this did not happen.

We would appeal to anyone who would like the Project to remain open, or who may be able to contribute time or resources in enabling a new organisation to continue and build on the work that has been going on there, to contact us or to write to your local councillor or the paper. We feel most strongly that the Project should not be allowed to close permanently, and will support any initiative that continues the horticultural, educational and social aims of this valuable resource.

ALLOTMENT NEWS The demand for plots in Harrow remains high, with over 600 on the waiting lists. Many sites are now full. Over the past year we have been instrumental in having sites at Pleasant Place, behind Shaftesbury Avenue, and Orchard Grove, in Kenton, reopened. Both had been out of use for some years, but we leafletted surrounding roads, provided the council with a list of residents interested in taking allotments there, and encouraged them to open up the sites. Pleasant Place is now a flourishing site, and some of the plots at the recently reopened Orchard Grove are already let. The council have also extended the site at Kenton Recreation Ground to provide 15 new plots and have recently made long-unused plots at Montesoles available to those on the waiting list.

However, although the situation has improved, there are still problems with getting information from the council and with the letting of plots.

Our **PLANT SALE**, on a glorious sunny day in May, was a great success. We had more tables and plenty of customers. In fact one stall closed early because they had sold all their plants. Members grew a wonderful selection of plants for sale on the Leaf stall, and our bird boxes also sold well. The popular refreshments helped us to raise much more money than ever before for our funds, so thank you to all those who hired a table or who came and bought.

This year we are carrying out a **TRIAL OF TOMATO VARIETIES** at Leaf HQ, with 6 plants of each variety chosen. Although this trial is not large enough to have any scientific validity, we do hope that it will be of some interest to you in comparing the vigour, disease resistance, yield and taste of several different tomato cultivars, grown in the local area. We hope to have a taste test of the varieties at our Show in August.

Volunteers dug a long, narrow bed from the grass where there would be sunlight for most of the day. The turf was piled up for composting, and to improve the soil some well-rotted horse manure and compost were dug into the bed, and piles of stones were removed.

PHEW, NOT A SCORCHER! Do leaves really get sunburn? An article in the Summer 2010 edition of the Kew magazine questions the danger of watering plants in bright sunlight. It is widely believed that the droplets will act like magnifying glasses and focus the sun's rays to burn the leaf. However, no one had gone to the trouble of checking. Now scientists at Eötvös University in Hungary have done just that. Although they found that small glass spheres could indeed focus the rays and cause burns, water droplets were less effective lenses, partly because they are rarely spherical. On smooth and easily wettable leaves, droplets flatten out, but even on more water-repellant leaves, where they hold their shape better, they failed to cause burns, as they were not able to focus the sunlight to a point on the leaf surface. The scientists concluded that burns would occur only on hairy leaves, where the water droplets would be held high enough off the leaves for the light to be focussed on the surface, and they found this to be the case with a floating fern with waxy-haired leaves. However, it took 2 hours to cause scorch marks, and in nature water would normally roll off leaves long before any harm was done.

In spite of these findings, it is still better not to water plants at midday, as much of the water evaporates and is wasted. Stick to early evening and to watering the roots, the parts that actually need the water.

Police spent four days digging on Kenton Lane allotment site looking for the body of a man who has been missing for nine years, but abandoned the search after finding nothing. The allotment tenant at the time of his disappearance was the man's father in law; his wife and daughter have been arrested on suspicion of murder and are now on bail.

THE MINISTRY OF FOOD exhibition at the Imperial War Museum until 3rd Jan 2011 marks the 70th anniversary of the introduction of food rationing. It shows how growing your own food, eating seasonal fruit and vegetables, reducing imports, recycling, and healthy nutrition were just as important in 1940 as they are today. There's a wartime greenhouse, a 1940s grocer's shop, and a typical kitchen complete with larder, gas cooker and an ample stock of economy recipe books. You can listen to advice on gardening and learn why the number of allotment holders more than doubled during the war years and how 'Lending a Hand on the Land', 'Digging for Victory', taking up the 'War on Waste', and being both frugal and inventive on the 'Kitchen Front' helped to get Britain through the dark days of the Second World War.

POTATO LATE BLIGHT (*Phytophthora infestans*) originated in Mexico. In the 1990s new strains were imported that spread more rapidly and cause more severe epidemics. Blight affects both potatoes and tomatoes, though early potatoes usually escape, as they are harvested before blight sets in. Infections are carried up to several miles on the wind but need moisture on the leaf surface to germinate. The danger of blight is greatest when the weather is warm and humid (Smith Periods, ie when for at least two consecutive days the minimum temperature is 10°C or above and the relative humidity is over 90% for at least 11 hours on each day).

You can reduce the chance of blight by

1. Growing resistant varieties. The Sarpo varieties of potato have good resistance, but many people report that their flavour and cooking quality are poor. Some tomato varieties are claimed to be less susceptible, and this is one of the things we will look at in the Leaf tomato trial.
2. Not planting too closely.
3. Not wetting the leaves or fruit when watering.
4. Growing your rows at right angles to the prevailing wind and intercropping with rows of non-susceptible types of plant. This may help to prevent an infection spreading.
5. Spraying regularly with fungicide before blight strikes, probably from early July. All leaf surfaces must be covered and new growth will be vulnerable. Dithane 945 is very effective, but will be withdrawn from sale for amateur use in December 2010, and must be used up by the end of 2011. Bordeaux mixture is approved for organic use, and relies on copper to prevent germination of blight spores. Used in agriculture it can pollute watercourses and is harmful to fish, livestock and—because of potential build up of copper in the soil—earthworms. It is regarded by many as more harmful than Dithane 945, which, unlike Bordeaux mixture, breaks down rapidly in soil.

There are useful information and factsheets for amateurs at <http://www.potato.org.uk>, via the link to Fight against Blight. You can get blight warnings from www.blightwatch.co.uk, a website aimed at professional potato growers, but anyone can sign up. It gives warnings of Smith Periods for your postcode.

Dates for your diary from Member Societies

Belmont Horticultural Society Show Sept 4th, 3 pm, St Anselm's Church Hall, Uppingham Avenue

Harrow Fuchsia Society Meetings every 4th Thursday (except Dec), 8 pm. Shows 7th August, 2.30 pm, and 26th August, 8 pm, all St Andrews Church Hall, Malvern Ave, S. Harrow.

Harrow Recreation Ground Users' Association Jazz Band, 1st August; Fun Day and Band Concert, 5th September (both 2.30 pm); Tree Dressing, 5th December, 2.15 pm. All events free, at Harrow Recreation Ground

Hatch End Horticultural Society Autumn Show, 18th September, 2.00 pm, Scout and Guide HQs, Grimsdyke Road, Hatch End

Newton Park Horticultural Society Show, 4th September, 2.00 pm, Tithe Farm Sports Club, Rayners Lane

It's now cucumber season. Did you try any of the **AMAZING CUCUMBERS** ideas (Growing Matters 19)? I have yet to be convinced that all work. How many other things did the New York Times try before they decided that the cucumber is the answer to every problem?