



Charity No 1108144

'Growing Concerns'

The Newsletter for members of Harrow in LEAF

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Don't miss our next Harrow in LEAF events, both 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; parking is available).

Our Quiz Evening is on Saturday 16th April. Doors open at 6.30 pm. Tickets are the same price as last year, £9 per person, to include fish, chicken, pie or veggie burger, each with chips. To book (tables of 6 people) phone 020 8863 7558.

The Harrow in LEAF Plant Sale is on Saturday 14th May, 11 am to 2 pm. As always, there will be stalls selling a wide range of ornamental, vegetable and fruit plants at amazingly low prices. You will find familiar and unusual plants for your garden and allotment. If you have a few spare plants of your own, you can bring them along and donate them to Harrow in LEAF's own stall, which raises money to help run the society. Entrance is free and refreshments will be available. If you would like to sell your own plants, tables cost £7.50 on the day or £6.50 if booked and paid for in advance. To book, for further information, or to offer your help on the day phone 020 8863 7558 or e-mail the address above.



HARROW IN LEAF SHOW
SUNDAY 28th AND
MONDAY 29th AUGUST
12 noon–6 pm

HARROW IN LEAF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will be held on Wednesday 11th May at 7 pm at LEAF HQ. All members are welcome to attend, so do come and talk to us. You can hear about what we have done in the last year and tell us your views. If you have any questions, please contact the Harrow in LEAF Secretary (07502 300 956 or info@harrowinleaf.org.uk.)

Last August the Harrow in LEAF Horticultural Show was again a great success, in spite of some rather wet and windy weather on the Sunday. We were able to increase the number of stalls, including food stalls, which was much appreciated by visitors. We will be holding our seventh Horticultural Show on August Bank Holiday weekend again this year at the Headstone Manor site, in association with Harrow Museum and Heritage Centre. There will as usual be our Horticultural and Beekeepers' marquees, the Harrow in LEAF stall, as well as a variety of other stalls and entertainments. If you know someone who might be interested in having a stall, do talk to the Show Manager (020 8907 0508). Schedules will be available soon; if you entered the show last year you will be sent one, but it will also be available on the LEAF website or from the Show Manager.

You can help us make this year's Show a success again by volunteering to help for an hour or two in the marquees, on the gate, on our stall, or with traffic control and parking. We depend entirely on the help of volunteers to run our Show. Have you ever thought of entering an exhibit in the Show, in the horticultural, domestic or arts and crafts sections? We have produced a simple guide to showing. This will be on our website, or can be obtained from the Show Manager.



A popular attraction on the LEAF stall at the Show was the blind tasting trial of the tomatoes grown at our HQ. 130 people took part and their scoring of the different varieties showed a distinct preference for cherry tomatoes (Gardener's Delight, followed by Garden Pearl, then Chadwick's Cherry). The partly blight-resistant variety Feline did not do well for taste, though it was the least badly affected by blight.



Allotment news: There are currently vacancies on a few sites in Harrow: Pinner Village, Roxeth, West Harrow small site, and Yeading Avenue. All other sites have waiting lists, some long, others short. Harrow Council are planning to make 25 new half (5 pole) plots on the Streamside site and have chopped down the trees and the brambles in preparation. We hope that these plots will be available this spring, which would reduce or even eliminate the waiting list on the site. Harrow in LEAF have produced a booklet for new plot holders, which the Council will give to new tenants. It has information on subjects such as tackling an overgrown plot, tools you will need, planning your plot and what to grow, organic gardening, and pests and diseases. If you have recently taken on a plot, you can get a copy from us (info@harrowinleaf.org.uk or 07502 300 956). Council rent rises have been in the news recently: in Brent the price for a medium-size allotment has gone up from £33 to £75 per year, while a full-size plot that used to cost £66 is now £150 per year, and Barnet Council is proposing to increase the rent for its allotments from the present £6 per pole to £17 per pole for Barnet residents and £34 per pole for non-residents. The allotment holders are fighting these increases. Recently allotment holders have successfully fought proposed rent rises, in St Ives getting them reduced from 100% to 10%, and in Bolton from 80% to 3%. We believe that Harrow is proposing only a small rise, but we must wait and see. Many plot holders have expressed their fears that they may no longer be able to afford to keep their allotment if there are large rent rises.

Membership renewals are due at the end of March. A renewal slip is included with this newsletter.

A new pest has spread to allotments and gardens in the London area: **Allium leaf miner**. This tiny fly feeds by puncturing the leaves, leaving a row of white dots on the foliage. It can lay eggs in all the onion family, but leeks and spring-sown onions are worst affected. The white maggots tunnel into the leaves and bulbs and cause some damage, but this is usually only noticed when secondary rots set in. Some of the damage looks like that caused by leek moth, but the larva are headless and legless, whereas the moth caterpillars have small legs and a brown head. Pupae can sometimes be seen. There is no chemical treatment, but attacks can be prevented by covering crops with fleece or fine nylon mesh from February to April and October to November; fleece, but not mesh, can make the plants too hot and dry if left on in

And another pest..... Viburnum beetle replaced slugs and snails as the No. 1 pest in enquiries to the RHS in 2010. The larvae feed on *V. tinus* (laurustinus) and *V. opulus* (guelder rose, snowball bush) in April–June and the adults in July–September, leaving the leaves looking like lace and often with a nasty smell too.



Allium miner pupae

Peat-free compost, soil improver and mulch: As most people are now aware, peat bogs are a valuable and rapidly diminishing habitat that also stores huge amounts of CO₂ which is released when the peat dries and degrades in compost. The government's target to phase out peat by 2010 has not been met, and the new target is 2020 for amateur gardeners and 2030 for all growers. Products made from green-waste compost, coir, wood bark, wood fibre and other wood waste may be used to replace peat, and the quality and characteristics of peat-free composts can be variable. They retain more water and so need watering with care, and plants often need feeding sooner. The RHS recommends the use of peat-free products, except in a few very specialised cases such as growing insectivorous bog plants. Peat-free compost is now widely available and often no more expensive than good brands of compost containing peat. For the second year in a row, the top-performing container compost in a recent test in Which? was peat free, and was cheaper than the best compost containing peat.

Potatoes: Even if you only have a little space, why not grow a few potatoes? Many allotment trading huts sell seed potatoes at very good prices. UN analysts have concluded that potatoes produce more nutritious food more quickly, on less land, and in harsher climates than any other major crop. Up to 85% of the plant is edible, compared with about 50% in cereals. Chris Voigt, the Executive Director of the US Washington Potato Commission, spent a 2-month stint eating nothing but potatoes. Although they are a good source of fibre, folic acid, iron and vitamins B1, B6 and C, potatoes are low in protein, calcium, essential fatty acids and vitamins A, E and K. One average sized baked potato contains 45%–50% of the RDA for vitamin C.



You can return your pots: If you buy plants from the horticultural charity The Shaw Trust, for example at one of their spring Open Days in Clomp Hill, they would appreciate the return to their nursery of any empty pots printed with their name. They can reuse these and they are expensive for them to buy. If you are able to bring them to the LEAF Plant Sale (May 14th at our HQ) we will return them for you.

Good news after the last two winters: the very cold weather has allowed some creatures to hibernate properly and has decreased the incidence of some diseases. The rare heath and marsh fritillary butterflies have been seen in increasing numbers on Exmoor and populations of the large blue butterfly are the highest ever in Somerset. Some garden plants succumbed to the cold, but others proved surprisingly hardy.

Petals and pollinators: The amazing diversity of flowers is a biological mystery that has long intrigued scientists, including Charles Darwin, but the link between flowers and insect pollinators is probably the primary cause. The different insects that carry pollen from one flower to another vary in their size, shape, mouthpart structure, colour vision, sense of smell and taste, ability to grip the flower, and a host of other traits. As flowers evolved to become dependent on pollinators for reproduction, they also started to acquire a whole range of flower forms that were attractive to subsets of all of these different animals. Some have flowers that mimic their pollinating insects, and scientists at Cambridge University have been studying the genes that control this in a South African daisy with spots that mimic a fly. Without the black spots, the flies don't visit the flowers and the flowers don't set seed. They have also been studying cells that allow bees to grip onto the petals when they land. Some flowers have lost these cells, and in these the bees hold on to the stamens and transfer the pollen to their bodies by vibrating their wings. Scientists have been studying how replacing these cells in the flowers affects the behaviour of the bees.



Dates for your diary

Harrow in LEAF Quiz night 16th April; AGM 11th May; Plant Sale 14th May; LEAF HQ

Belmont Horticultural Society: Shows 2nd July in St Anselm's Church Hall and 3rd Sept in St Anselm's Church, both in Uppingham Avenue, Stanmore; 3 pm.

Federation of Middlesex Horticultural Societies Shows: Sunday 3rd April & Sunday 11th September, 2.30 pm, Perivale Community Centre, Horsenden Lane South, Greenford.

Hatch End Horticultural Society Summer Show: 25th June, 2 pm, Hatch End Guide & Scout HQ, off Grimsdyke Road, Hatch End.

Harrow Fuchsia Society Shows: Saturday 7th August, 2.30 pm, and Thursday 25th August, 8 pm; St Andrew's Church Hall, Malvern Avenue, South Harrow.

Harrow Recreation Ground Users' Association Kite Day, late April; Music in the Park 5th June, 3rd July, 7th August; Tea in the Park and Arts Day 17th July; Fun Day 4th September; all 2.30 pm. Tree Dressing 4th December, 2.15 pm; all free, Harrow Recreation Ground.

Newton Park Horticultural Society Show: Saturday 3rd September, 2.30 pm, Tithe Farm Social Centre, Rayners Lane.

Roxbourne Horticultural Society Plant Sales: Saturday 7th May 2.30–4.30 pm and Sunday 8th May 10.30–12.30 am, at their site Hut in Yeading Avenue, near Rayners Lane.