

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2010



In support of bees

The decline of the honey bee concerns us all - how can we help?

Flowering plants require insects for pollination. The most effective is the honey bee, which pollinates 90 commercial crops worldwide. Disturbing evidence that honey bees are in terminal decline has emerged from America where, for the fourth year in a row, more than a third of colonies have failed to survive the winter.

Potential causes range from parasites to viral and bacterial infections, pesticides and poor nutrition stemming from intensive farming methods.

In the UK it is still too early to judge how Britain's estimated 250,000 honey bee colonies have fared during the long winter. The government's National Bee Unit has always denied the existence of Colony Collapse Disorder in Britain, despite honey bee losses of 20% during the winter of 2008-09 and close to a third the previous year. It attributes the demise to the varroa mite – which is found in almost every UK hive – and rainy summers that stop bees foraging for food.

Mankind has been managing and transporting bees for centuries to pollinate food and produce honey, nature's natural sweetener and antiseptic. Their extinction would mean not only a colourless, meatless diet of cereals and rice, and cottonless clothes, but a landscape without orchards, allotments and meadows of wildflowers – and the collapse of the food chain that sustains wild birds and animals. (*edit taken from the Observer, May 2010*)

BE BEE FRIENDLY

1. THE RIGHT PLANTS

Attract and nourish honey bees with wild flowers, including asters, goldenrod, sunflowers and dandelions. Plant flowering vegetables and fruits: apples, apricots, cherries, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, peaches, pears, pumpkins, squash, watermelon, cantaloupe, and cucumbers are all good choices for your garden.

2. LONG BLOOMING FLOWERS

Plant long blooming plants, or a variety of plants that will bloom at different times throughout the spring and autumn. Honey bees need to eat until they retreat for the winter. Try to group at least ten bee plants.



3. HONEY BEES NEED WATER

Provide a pond, a fountain, or some other fresh water source. Not only do the bees need nectar, they need water as well.

4. NO PESTICIDES OR HERBICIDES

Some pesticides and herbicides are toxic to bees. Many of them will leave a residue for days or weeks. It is better to introduce good bugs to provide natural protection against pests, and to weed by hand.

5. NATIVE BEES WILL MAKE THEIR HOMES IN SAND

Provide a space in your garden for native bees to make their home. Native bees do not live in hives, but in single living units underground. Leave a space in your garden un-mulched for them to gain access and

set up house. A pile of undisturbed sand will work as well.

AND WHAT WE ARE DOING

Following a request from a plotholder to introduce a hive at the Spring Hill site, the Committee agreed that – subject to approval by the Council and our insurance company – this was not only acceptable but an excellent idea, particularly given the current plight of bees. We have now been given the green light on this and look forward to reports on progress. In preparation, the plotholder concerned has recently been on a beekeeping course at Hackney City Farm and has promises to be conscientious in his care of the bees.

HACKNEY HONEY

The Hackney Honey Bee Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project is inviting honey-lovers to join them. The project is offering annual shares with each one being worth one jar of honey and the opportunity to visit the apiary and help with the honey harvest during September. All proceeds go towards the costs of the hives and colonies. Any excess honey will be distributed to all members. Although locally produced honey may be slightly more expensive than supermarket honey and not provide your entire annual honey needs, the project will reconnect you with how your food is produced, as well as who produces it and how it connects with the wider urban environment. If you would like to join the CSA project, please email mikeytomkins@gmail.com. Payment details will be sent by return.



GARDENER'S CALENDAR - SUMMER SOWING

www.realseeds.co.uk

Don't be put off summer sowings if you don't have a polytunnel or greenhouse, most of these veggies will grow outdoors quite happily in most of the country. Often just keeping cold winds off is all you need to get a really successful crop.

BULBING OR 'FLORENCE' FENNEL

Sow Fennel up to the middle of August as it's much less likely to bolt than if sown in spring.

KALE

Kales are great for baby leaves (salads & cooked) in autumn, and then left to overwinter for delicious greens through to the following April.

LETTUCE

Keep on successional sowing summer lettuce varieties in July - August.

OTHER SALADS

Land Cress is great in salads but can also be eaten cooked as a pretty much identical substitute for watercress in soup. It is sown in autumn and grown over winter. Also try 'Bianca Riccia da Taglio' Salad Endive, which is hardy and has a good non-bitter flavour. Sow spring, summer or autumn.

And don't forget plenty of mizuna, chinese cabbage and mispoona, for endless delicious salads in winter.

COOKING RADISHES

This is a large root vegetable- tennis ball sized and bigger. They are great eaten raw grated into salads, with a mild zing to them, or try Weiner Runder Kohlschwarzer in soups, stews and stir-fries. Sow them from July to Sept, for pulling all winter.

BEETROOT

Beetroot are ideal for sowing outdoors or in a tunnel in July and August for pulling as tender baby beet in autumn.

BROCCOLI/CALABRESE

Sow quick heading broccoli outdoors in midsummer for autumn harvest.

CARROTS

Carry on sowing carrots in July and August to pull as tender carrots in autumn. We recommend 'Giant Red' Dark Orange Carrot as the best for summer sowing.

CHARDS & GREENS

Sow leaf beet and chard up until end July for a supply of greens in autumn and into next spring.

SUMMER HERBS

Successional sow Coriander until the end of July for a continual supply of fresh leaves. Parsley can also be sown up to midsummer.



Penny Miller, the HAS's new chair

20 years experience, ups and downs, and still going strong

I am now halfway through my first year as Chair of the Committee, my first attempt at such a job, and so far, it seems to be going ok.

Here are a few of my thoughts on allotmenting: many people take on an allotment plot after waiting for years, and then give it up within the year, because they feel overwhelmed by the task. I have a plot at Aden Terrace, which I have had for about 20 years, and, for a lot of that time, I struggled with it. Now, however, I have found the secret of success – to visit the plot everyday for at least 15 minutes (though this sometimes stretches to as much as 6 hours.) Luckily I just moved closer to

Aden Terrace, making this possible. If it's snowing, then home-based allotment work is a good substitute (ie ordering seeds, poring over catalogues.) For anyone feeling overwhelmed, I would recommend a book by Lia Leendertz ("The Half-Hour Allotment"), which will help you overcome the difficulties.

Over the years, I have learnt. I did a course at Capel Manor College on Allotment Gardening which I would recommend. I started with a bed system, but eventually realised that it does not work well if you have bindweed. I noticed that Maria, an Italian neighbour, has a plot free of perennial weeds– because she digs the whole plot over every year, starting at one corner and going on til it's all dug. I have taken up this method, and it works well, with the bindweed in retreat. When I got

my plot it was sticky clay. With the addition of regular large amounts of manure, home-made compost, sand, gravel and mushroom compost, I now have a much improved soil. Luckily clay is full of nutrients that can be released this way.

I am very interested in organic ways of growing, and endeavour to follow this route as much as possible, using nettle and comfrey fertiliser and minimal use of slug pellets – water is a good barrier to protect seedlings. My favourite crops are

raspberries and salads, with sprouting broccoli a close third. I also grow flowers amongst my crops; pot marigold, tagetes, cosmos, cornflower, sunflower,

which encourage beneficial insects, as well as looking nice.

In real life I am a psychotherapist, which luckily leaves me free time in the day to visit my plot. My plan for this year is to build a shed to my own design, a project I'm really looking forward to. (There is something of a shed competition going on at Aden Terrace, which for many years was virtually shed-free, but the vandals have gone away or grown up, and we are free to build and create.)

My allotment is a very important part of my life; in being allotmenters, we benefit from having a green oasis in the midst of the busy concrete jungle of Hackney. As chair of HAS, I hope to be approachable, to represent the committee as an accessible place, willing and eager to hear the views of plot holders, present and in-waiting.

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VOLUNTEERS NEEDED - to help develop the Allotment Society

Please contact the secretary if you enjoy
spotting opportunities and have TIME to commit to:

- liaise with relevant officers at LB Hackney to find further allotment sites
- keep an eye on growing initiatives and grants which we might be eligible for
- approach suppliers who might donate materials



More allotments please HAS and the Hackney Council Scrutiny review of Local Food Growing

Since the beginning of this year, Simon Hughes from Spring Lane and Martin Klucowicz from Aden Terrace have on behalf of the Society attended two meetings of the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission review of local food growing initiatives. Simon and Martin raised the issues of the enormous demand for sites and the obligation on councils to consider and address this.

They noted that Community groups were getting most attention from the Council, one of the reasons being that they have developed PR strategies to achieve funding, but also because they are more socially inclusive - in some cases even providing employment.

Considering this, HAS still has several advantages:

- knowledge of setting up and managing sites
- not requiring revenue funding
- a ready supply of growers as an allotment still is an aspiration for most community gardeners and it is questionable whether estate /community sites will be sustainable with limited volunteer input
- although it seems HAS is unlikely to lose existing sites, to expand we need ideas on how to gain more land for new plots, eg:
 - providing information to members on the waiting list to lobby for development of more sites {http://www.allotmoreallotments.org.uk/local_campaigns.htm }
 - and encouraging them to form a development group to explore, lobby and push options. Local Authorities have an obligation to assess demand, and consider how to make sufficient allotment

plots available for residents. Anyone interested in getting involved in furthering the Society's search for more land, please contact the secretary: secretary@hackneyallotments.org.uk

- capturing unsuccessful enquiries to demonstrate hidden demand
- possibly a petition on the website.

Hackney's Overview & Scrutiny Officer has let us know a few of the suggested outcomes of the review which will be revisited in June.

It is worth noting that the suggestions below have not been formally agreed, so some may change or not be used at all:

- Seek clarity over council contacts relating to food growing locally

A document, published by LGA/CLG, called 'A Place to Grow' provides guidance on how allotment officers and associations can manage waiting lists, maximise the potential of existing sites and work in partnership to meet demand. It also provides an overview of allotment legislation and planning policy and sets out alternative gardening options. Available to download it at <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/publications/publication-display.do?id=9027596>

- Start a guide for residents wanting to start a local food growing initiative
- Publicise existing groups better (incl providing support for activities between sites)

HOME GROWN FESTIVAL

In conjunction with the review, the Parks Events team are eager to engage as many local food growing organisations as possible in the 'Home Grown Festival', the Parks 4 Life event in Springfield Park (22nd August). Rather than just providing information they're keen for groups to offer interactive displays and activities. There will be more information here <<http://www.hackney.gov.uk/parksforlife>> as the programme develops. Anyone interested in participating, please contact the parks events team directly: Georgie Mackie: georgina.mackie@hackney.gov.uk Telephone: 0208 356 5378

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Plot Awards 2010

Get your sites and plots looking their best for this year's site visits and awards

Site visits take place annually so the SHAS committee remains familiar with all sites and also to give plot holders a chance to meet the committee members.

Plots will be judged on creativity, variety of crops, most improved and productivity. Other factors include tidiness of verges, reasonable control of weeds and the overall attractiveness of the plot. As well as deciding on the awards, failing plots will be taken note of.

Dates of visits are to be confirmed, but are currently scheduled for the evening of Wednesday 7 July:

E5 (Leaside Rd, Overbury St, Spring Hill, Spring Lane and Queensbridge Rd) ;
N16 (Aden Terrace, Church Walk, St Kilda's, Springdale Rd).

All members are invited to attend. Prizes will be announced at the AGM. *As judges, committee members are out of the running for the awards.*



PLEASE NOTE

The AGM has been booked for Wed 6th Oct 2010, at St Mary's Community Centre, 7 Defoe Rd, N16, for 7.30pm



NOTICEBOARD *Have your say*

FRUIT TREES

Committee permission is needed before planting fruit trees on plots and existing trees need to be pruned to ensure they do not shade other people's plots.

From the bye-laws: 'No fruit or rose bush shall be planted within 3ft of road or path.'

Dwarf rootstock is a good idea. 'www.bernwodefruittrees.co.uk' has been recommended previously.

Please also remember that everyone is responsible for controlling growth around plot - and site - boundaries and that paths should be kept clear.

KEEP US INFORMED

Please remember to advise the HAS of any change of address (including email, phone no. etc), or you may risk being excluded from the communication loop and possibly even losing your place on the waiting list. It would also be helpful if you could specify your site preference - eg N16 only, or N16 preferred but any considered.

email: secretary@hackneyallotments.org.uk