

Springhill allotments plot number 12:  
Damson tree with feathered friend  
photo by Marlis

HACKNEY ALLOTMENT SOCIETY  
[www.hackneyallotments.org.uk](http://www.hackneyallotments.org.uk)

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**SPRING  
NEWSLETTER  
2020**

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In spite of everything Spring has arrived in all its beauty.



## TOP TIPS FROM CHRIS COLLINS, HEAD GARDENER AT GARDEN ORGANIC

A former BBC Blue Peter Gardener and Head Gardener at Westminster Abbey, Chris gave a very entertaining and informative talk in Hackney about propagation and how to save money when growing your own food.

### Seeds

Chris's number one tip is to buy a couple of heated propagators for the window sill to get seeds going early. He uses organic, peat free Melcourt seed compost which is available online. An alternative would be to make your own compost from leaf mould.

Sow all salad crops, rocket etc indoors in small pots top dressed with perlite. Prick out into larger trays when they have their first leaves- remember to plant deep. Turn and stroke seedlings to replicate outdoor conditions and to get even light.

Plant out after 2 weeks.

### Herbs for free

Divide shop bought basil, coriander etc – separate, prick out and plant up individually.

### September

Take semi ripe cuttings-(eg herbs)

Take current season's growth, tear off at heel with stem or cut just below leaf to length of 10-15cm. Remove most leaves,

leave 2 at the top and dip end into rooting powder before planting into cuttings compost. Cover pots with plastic bag and put in warm light position. Compost must be moist but not wet. When roots establish remove bag.

### November/ March

Take hardwood cuttings (eg fruit bushes)

Use healthy shoots from current year's growth. Remove the soft tip growth. Cut into sections 15-30cm long, cutting above a bud at the top, use a sloping cut to shed water and as a reminder which end is the top. Cut straight across at the base below a bud and dip the lower cut end in a hormone rooting powder. Dig a trench outdoors and add a layer of sand at the bottom. Put the cuttings into the ground with two-thirds of the cutting below the surface and allow 10-15cm between cuttings.

\* You can hear more from Chris on The Organic Gardening Podcasts.



## ESIAH LEVY AND THE SEEDS SHARE PROJECT

Annie, Springdale Road

I first heard about Esiah Levy on Radio 4's The Food Programme: The Search for Esiah's Seeds (the programme is still available). Esiah Levy set up Seeds Share in December 2016 to provide organic seeds to anyone who wanted to grow their own food, anywhere in the world. From his back garden in Croydon, London, Esiah sent small packets of the seed - for free - to growers all over the world.

Esiah worked full time at London Transport and was father to a young family but spent all his free time growing organic fruit and vegetables in his and his mother's garden. "Growing food you can say is in my blood having a father who's not too bad himself who grew food in Jamaica and after coming to live in Brixton London in the 1950's as part of the Windrush generation. What got me into gardening was actually the price of organic

*fruit/veg where I live and that the time wanting to make 100% vegan organic baby food for my son and the limited choice of fruit and veg which was available in the supermarkets and market stalls too".*

Having researched the "no-dig" method of gardening, Esiah stopped digging or pulling out old plants or buying fertiliser or compost. He used all his household waste such as banana peels, coffee grounds and eggshells and layered with them with cardboard over the soil to create a rich mulch. His garden overflowed with squash and a multitude of vegetables and soon there was no lawn left. He loved experimenting with growing different varieties of fruit and vegetables and one day counted the 350 seeds inside a squash he had grown and decided that he couldn't grow or eat them all - he would share them. In 2016 he founded SeedsShare.

*"Sharing seeds is to encourage food growing amongst the most important population we have: The Youth."*



*"I consider food growing art- a way to express a person's creative side, but in order to have full control a gardener, like a painter, needs to have access to any seed or colour they like".*

*"SeedsShare is basically a project which aims to encourage gardeners/food growers to share seeds instead of buying them. The aim is to raise awareness of the importance of saving heirloom seeds and encourage gardeners to grow not only their own food but also to create new varieties of fruit/veg of different shapes and colours using open-air pollination".*

Within two years of founding of SeedsShare, Esiah had posted seeds across much of the world from Japan to Ghana to Sweden. He saw the importance of getting others to save seeds and went to many community projects to show others how to save their own seeds from the crops they grew. He also made friends with other seed savers including Vivien Sansour, a Palestinian woman who had created a seed library to save disappearing crops on the West Bank.

He was passionate about getting young people involved in growing their own food. He wrote *"It's a radical movement... Sharing seeds is to encourage food growing amongst the most important population we have The Youth."*

When asked what inspired him to create

SeedsShare, he replied:

*"It's simple freedom! I consider food growing art- a way to express a person's creative side, but in order to have full control a gardener, like a painter, needs to have access to any seed or colour they like".*

Sadly on Monday 21st January 2019, Esiah Levy died. The post-mortem would show that Esiah had suffered the unexplainable, Sudden Arrhythmic Death Syndrome. He was 32 years old.

By the time he died, Esiah's campaign of radical seed sharing had touched hundreds of gardeners and growers. His seeds live on across the world.

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**\* The Food Programme , The Search for Esiah's Seeds.**

\* For a short film about Esiah Levy and seed sharing see [vimeo.com/323696478](https://vimeo.com/323696478)

\* **Esiah's Instagram:** for countless tips on growing food and saving seeds.



*photo by  
Annie, Springdale Rd*



## HAS SEED SWAP

The Covid virus outbreak has led to garden centres and nurseries closing down but also to a problem in getting hold of seeds.

Are you struggling to get hold of certain seeds or have you got seeds or seedlings you can share?

Contact your site rep with your request for seeds or offers of seeds or seedlings and they will liaise with other plot holders on your site or reps from local sites so that they can be shared or swapped safely.

**PLANTS ARE A GREAT WAY TO BRIGHTEN OUR LIVES IN THESE RESTRICTED TIMES. CAN YOU OFFER SPARE SEEDS, SEEDLINGS OR CUTTINGS TO FRIENDS AND OTHERS?**



I came back with lots of packets, including Tigrella and Black Crimea tomato seeds (which I noticed germinated much more quickly than the shop bought ones), Zimbabwean pumpkin seeds, loofah seeds and Douce Provence peas. I also bought a miniature blueberry bush and some perennial clumping onions. Seedy Sunday has a website, so you can check out when the next one is, it's definitely worth a visit.

**To learn more about seeds and seed-saving:**

⌘ **London Freedom Seed Bank:** a network of food growers and gardeners dedicated to saving, storing and distributing open-pollinated seed.

⌘ **Seeds for a Better World Project:** a project that aims to teach about the natural cycle of growing and seed saving.

⌘ **Garden Organic:** on reasons to save seeds.

⌘ **Grow Veg:** a guide to saving and sharing seeds.  
⌘ **Global Seed Network:** on how to preserve plant diversity through seed-sharing.

## SEEDY SUNDAY

Annie, Springdale Road

**O**n 2nd February I went to the biggest Seed Swap in the UK which is held annually in Brighton. Not only are there hundreds, if not thousands, of packets of seeds to swap or buy for 50p but growers from all over the south east selling fruit bushes, seed potatoes, onions and many rare and unusual edible plants.

# USES FOR FREE WOODCHIP

Kay Kante, Spring Hill

We don't get free compost deliveries any more, but we do get free woodchip. I thought I'd share my ideas on how I'm trying to make the most of a free resource.

**1 Paths:** Like many of you, I put a liberal depth of this on my border paths. I put a weed-proof membrane underneath, and I have a (nearly...) weed-proof firewall around my plot

**2 Thick mulch around all my perennials:** I have a permaculture 'forest garden' approach to my allotment, so have lots of bushes and perennials.

Digging evil weeds out from perennials is not my idea of fun, so a good weed-suppressing (and water-retaining) mulch is great, particularly if it is free.

Over time, the woodchip mulch breaks down into good compost to feed the plants. Perennials have deep root systems (often well over a metre), so an inch or so of fresh woodchip on the surface has no adverse impact on their feeding.

**3 Potatoes in pots:** I try not to dig my plot (I don't like to disturb plant root/

fungal networks and I'm lazy) which makes growing potatoes a challenge.

Last autumn, I filled some large pots with woodchip. I left them out over the winter, so the woodchip was slightly softened/starting to decompose by spring.

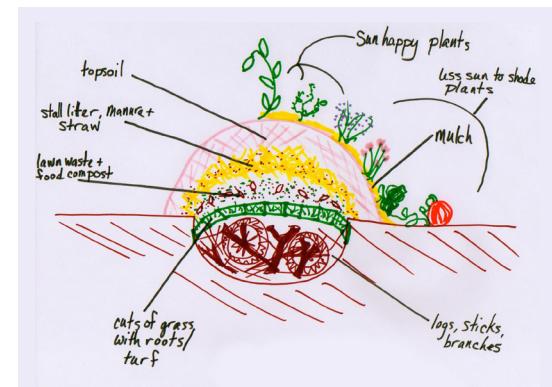
I planted potatoes directly into the woodchip. I 'earthed' up just once with a couple more inches of fresh woodchip.

Result: potatoes! (and very easily harvested!)

**4 Hügelkultur experiment:** Classic Hügelkultur is a permaculture technique from Eastern Europe/Germany that involves digging top soil from a shallow trench, and then creating a layered mound, giving a long raised bed with sloping sides.

Decaying tree trunks/stumps/branches go at the bottom, green waste goes in the middle (including any removed turf, upside down), and the topsoil is put back in a layer all over the top and sides.

Adapting this experimentally to my little plot, I have screwed together some tall galvanised steel raised beds. I've put them in various places on my plot, after scraping away a layer of earth. I've 3/4 filled them with woodchip then topped the woodchip with a layer of horse manure (aka



partly composted grass/hay). The scraped-away soil went back on top.

In theory the composting woodchip will hold water, generate heat, and release nutrients.

I have one more raised bed to go. I'm planning to do the same, but instead of using (bought) horse manure, I'm going to drop free green waste on top of the woodchip while I'm gardening, using it like a compost bin, and will put the earth back on it when there's a thick layer.

I have no idea how successful my experiment will be, but it's going to be fun to find out.



## **RUSSIAN RED KALE**

Bron Jones, Aden Terrace

I highly recommend growing Russian Red Kale. It's nothing like Curly Red Kale, being much more tender and open leaved (see photo).

We grew some the year before for the first time, placing them 18 inches apart, they grew quite tall and leggy and we used the leaves from the sides.

I was surprised how delicious and tender they were, even the stems, hardly needing any cooking, a bit like a cross between spinach and greens in texture without the acidity of spinach.

I looked it up on line and found that it could also be grown much closer together and harvested from the top many times.

So last year I planted the seedlings out about 9 inches to 1 foot apart, filling a whole bed with lots of plants easily grown from seed. It grew slowly over winter but now for the past 3 weeks we've been taking the leaves from the centre, cutting through the main stem and they're already producing fresh new shoots which are growing really fast.

It seems to like the climate and it's never attracted whitefly or blackfly so far.

It's definitely become one of my favourite greens.

# HOW TO COMPOST

Jon, Spring Hill

**S**oil erosion and loss of fertility is a problem in every country in the world, some worse than others. We can do our small bit towards stopping this by composting our garden rubbish. Healthy soil needs constant replenishment of nutrients and fibre. This occurs naturally in uncultivated land, but in our gardens and allotments we risk removing nutrients or allowing them to leach out especially in these years of heavy rain storms. Composting replaces this loss and truthfully every plot should have access to a compost heap.

Composting is not difficult, but it helps to understand some basic principles. The four important constituents of the compost heap are Nitrogen (found mainly green material) Carbon (found mainly in brown material), water and air. Of course the agents of turning plant material are the fungi, bacteria, and animals that are found in the compost heap. It is our job to make the compost bin or heap the best place for these agents to get to work. Getting the right balance of carbon, nitrogen, water and air does that.

The balance between green and brown materials is important. To much green creates too much moisture and the compost heap becomes too wet for composting to take place

properly, too much brown material and the compost heap is likely to be too dry. If the heap is too wet there will be too little air in the spaces between the material for the composting fungi and bacteria to work, different bacteria take over and the heap to create a smelly mess. Similarly if it too dry composting takes place very slowly if at all, and you are left with a pile of dried out material. The best advice to

have slightly more brown than green material, and make sure it is all mixed up together. Good sources of brown stuff are sawdust, clippings, torn up newspaper (never use glossy magazines which have toxic chemicals in the colour prints), torn up cardboard, straw, dead leaves. The addition of material from a previous compost heap is a

good stimulator for a new heap.

Green waste can come from leafy plants, uncooked kitchen waste, grass clippings. If you have access to grass clippings mix them with brown material or soil before adding them to the heap. Grass compacts very easily and can become very wet, excluding air and preventing proper compost formation (in moderation and not too thick, grass cuttings make a good mulch to put around established plants).

The majority of compost heaps are 'cold'. The temperature in a compost heap should go up,



but rarely enough to kill weed seeds. Municipal compost gets hot enough to kill seeds by piling the material at least three meters high and turning it regularly.

In summer it may be necessary to water the heap sometimes if it getting too dry. Turning compost allows in air, remixes the material, and puts the material at the edges (which tend to be dry and under composted) into the centre. The more often a heap is turned, the faster the composting process.

Composting is best done in some kind of container. The commonest one are the conical plastic bins which can be simply lifted off the heap when it needs turning or it has finished and is ready to go on the garden. Which magazine looked into different compost bins and could not find any one design which outshone the others. The rather expensive rotating bins probably make compost quickest, but in limited amounts. Cheap and cheerful bins are as good as any other. The exception to this are 'hot bins'. These are made from polystyrene and retain the heat generated by the composting process and can get quite hot. You can put cooked food, meat and bones in them. Vermin cannot get into them, and they get too hot for them anyway. They are quite expensive, and they do need careful management to keep balance correct to keep the process going healthily.

Don't put pernicious weeds in the compost, such as bindweed, couch grass and some other grasses. Don't put diseased material in the compost. Let the council deal with these in their big hot piles. Don't put cat or dog (or fox) faeces or litter trays into the compost (human urine however is a good activator). Wood ash is good, coal ash is not. Cooked food, dairy products attract rats and foxes. Don't put too many pieces of wood in, they can be stacked out of the way and will rot down slowly and can be added as brown material when they have done so.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Growing lots of healthy , pesticide -free and zero-food- miles fruit and veg.... for gardens and allotments can be remarkably productive places where humans and wildlife can thrive together in harmony rather than in conflict.

*Dave Goulson*

The plot is embarrassingly abundant, providing more than we can eat. I have taken to passing out parcels at work like a Red Cross mercy mission; colleagues will soon start hiding.

*Allan Jenkins*



**The Garden Jungle or  
Gardening to save the Planet**  
*by Dave Goulson*  
Cape £16.99

This is a book all allotment plot holders should read (and garden owners). Dave Goulson is an academic who has researched and read extensively, and practiced, how best to keep your garden best for wildlife. He provides practical advice for making the best environment for insects, birds and mammals in the garden without too best effort, or indeed needing too much expertise. Don't tidy up too much, plant a variety of flowers, leave some weeds, never use pesticides, have a compost heap, dig a pond. He can tell you the correct size hole for solitary bees to nest in, and points out just how productive allotments are compared to agricultural land. Buy it or borrow it and read it.

*Jon, Spring Hill*



**PLOT 29** a memoir

*Allan Jenkins*

'Brave, exquisitely written and utterly compelling' Nigel Slater

**Plot 29**  
*Allan Jenkins*  
4th Estate, £9.99

This book was first published in 2017, but I came across it only last year. Allan Jenkins works for The Observer, lives in London and has an allotment. He describes his childhood, his life with his brother and their foster parents, his reflections on the quality of parenting he received and the impact this had on his mental health as an adult. But he also writes about his allotment, what he grows, other plot holders, their collective work days and their cooking on site of what they grew. It sounded like a real community of growers.

I enjoyed his personal reflections on his life and his writings about his plot - highly recommended for anyone with an allotment.

*Nancy Korman*



### The Gibberd Garden

Near Harlow Mill Station, this garden is a bit further but well worth a visit sculpture & ceramic pots abound around the gardens, designed by Sir Frederick Gibberd  
<https://www.thegibberdgarden.co.uk>

**INTERESTING  
GARDENS  
TO VISIT,  
WHEN WE'RE  
NO LONGER  
RESTRICTED**



### Myddleton House Garden

Left: Myddleton House Garden in Enfield has 8 acre grounds. Famous for irises & 'Lunatic Asylum' beds with contorted plants.

A huge Victorian glasshouse with sub-tropical plants.

<https://www.visitleevalley.org.uk/en/content/cms/nature/gardens-heritage/myddleton-house-gardens/>



### Capel Manor Gardens

Capel Manor is nearby with 60 gardens to explore.

<https://www.capelmanorgardens.co.uk>



# RECIPE FOR RHUBARB POLENTA CAKE

Sue Sharples

**Ingredients:**

- 250g/9oz butter or marg
- 250g/9oz caster sugar
- 4 eggs
- 190g/7oz fine polenta
- 150g/5oz flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- Grated orange zest
- juice 2 oranges & sugar simmered to a syrup
- 4 sticks rhubarb stewed to thick compote with sugar to taste

(I halve these measures for a decent sized cake for the two of us) **Option:** combine fruit ingredients like blueberries, or dried cranberries).

**Method:**

1. Blend butter & sugar.
2. Add eggs, then polenta, flour & baking powder, mix well.
3. Place in shallow tin & swirl in rhubarb compote.
4. Cook @ 160C / Gas 3 for 50 mins. Pour syrup over after taking from oven.



# RECIPE FOR CHARD & CARDAMON LASAGNA

Guy Dehn , Leeside

**Serves 4****Ingredients**

- 1 cup Tomato sauce
- 9 Dried pasta sheets
- 1lb Chard
- 4 cloves Garlic sliced
- 3 teaspoon Cardamon seeds
- 1/2 lb mozzarella shredded
- 1 pt Béchamel sauce
- 1 Egg
- Grated Cheese to taste (gruyere/ comte, and Parmesan)  
(Vegan alternative below)

**Tomato Sauce:**

If allotment toms: halve, put in roasting tray, sprinkle with slivers of garlic, thyme and olive oil and season well. Toss around leaving tomatoes cut side up. Then roast high up in a preheated medium-hot oven til edges of tomatoes start to char (about 30 mins). Liquidise.

If tinned: add to a tin of plum tomatoes half an onion, a bay leaf, a teaspoon of

sugar, a splash of red wine vinegar and olive oil. Cook on low - medium flame for 40 mins. Remove onion and bay. Liquidise.

**Lasagna**

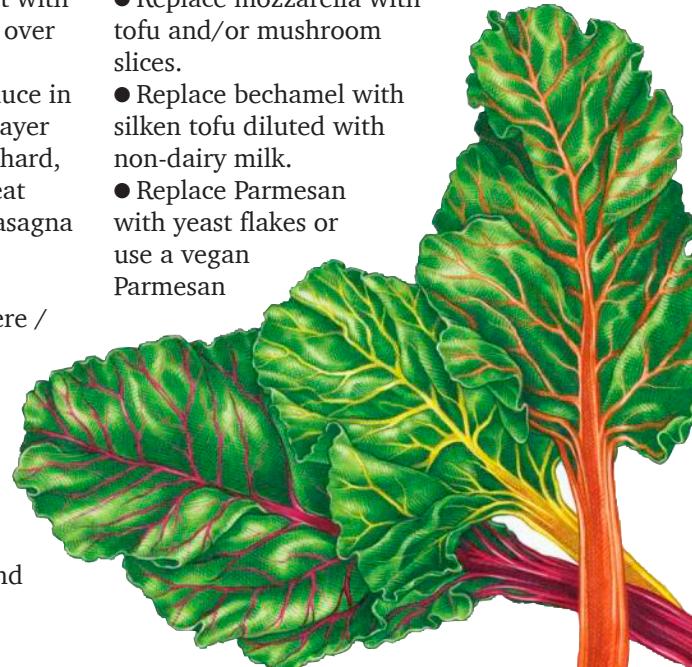
1. Wash and chop up chard. Slice and add garlic. Cook over medium heat with lid on for 5 mins. It will reduce by over half. Stir in cardamon seeds.
2. Spread a thin layer of tomato sauce in a rectangular baking tray. Then a layer of lasagna sheets, then a layer of chard, then scatter with mozzarella. Repeat layering twice more ending with lasagna sheet at top.
3. Make béchamel sauce. When lukewarm, mix in the grated gruyere / comte then stir a broken egg into it. Pour over lasagna. Prod and slash with knife so sauce gets down through lasagna sheets and doesn't just rest on top. Sprinkle with Parmesan.
4. Bake in a medium hot oven for 40 mins till beginning to bubble and

turn attractive speckled brown on top. Remove from oven and let rest for 5-10 mins.

5. Serve with salad and if hungry potatoes too.

**Vegan option**

- Replace mozzarella with tofu and/or mushroom slices.
- Replace bechamel with silken tofu diluted with non-dairy milk.
- Replace Parmesan with yeast flakes or use a vegan Parmesan





An allotment with rocket, broccoli and cavolo nero in flower - it looked as beautiful as a garden and was buzzing with bees!

*Annie, Springdale Road*



PEAR  
BLOSSOMS



APPLE  
BLOSSOMS

photos by  
Sylvia Cummins

SPRING  
HILL IN THE  
SUNSHINE

**PLEASE**  
**be sensible and think of**  
**others when going to**  
**your allotment:**

Wear gloves or apply hand sanitiser before and after touching ANY hard surfaces: ie padlock, chain, fence rails, watering cans and taps.

Covid19 can stay on metal, glass & plastic for as long as 9 days.

The HAS newsletter is compiled by Annie Wilson. Thanks to all contributors.  
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