

Moorside Allotments association: Autumn newsletter

Welcome to the Autumn edition of our newsletter. Our annual Vegetable and Flower show took place on Saturday 5th September. Despite earlier worries the weather settled down and gave us a dry day to host the event. Apart from the flowers and vegetables on display there were also a number of stalls, including a BBQ, teas and cakes, plants, books, paintings and a raffle. It was encouraging to see many members of the public also in attendance. The event raised a profit for the association and the committee hopes to buy with the proceeds a tailor-made tarpaulin to cover the area between the trading hut and the community hut. On behalf of all of our members we would like to thank everyone who helped to make the occasion so successful.

List of winners:

Master Gardener:- Charlie (68)
 Champion Veg Grower:- Charlie (68)
 Junior Master Gardener:- Anthony (72)
 Best Exhibit:- George (104)
 Best Allotment:- John and Marie (48)
 Trevor Storey Unsung Hero:- Sue (29)

Our members also won a good number of first, second and third prizes at the **City Show**, held the following weekend.

The **FIRST PRIZE** winners were:

Champion City Show Display:	Frank (66)
Garden Compost:	Harry (33)
Mixed Flowers:	Ethnie (33)
Single Rose:	Ethnie (33)
Largest Runner Bean:	Nicola (15)
Radishes:	Adi (76)
Biggest Sunflower:	James (8)
Minigarden:	Adi (76)
Scarecrow:	Abdel (76)
Jar of Jam:	Audrey (3)
Pears:	David (8)
Plums:	David (8)
Peas:	Nicola (15)
Runner Beans:	Charleigh (68)
Salad Collection:	John (64)
Shallots:	Charleigh (68)



CITY: George receives first prize for "best plot with glass".



CITY: Frank receives first prize for "best wildlife friendly plot".



CITY: Peter collecting second prize for Moorside large allotment site.



CITY: Frank's Top Plate award.
(overleaf- some photographs from our show)



Clearing weeds the organic way.

Now that Autumn is upon us once more the prospect of clearing weeds can arise – if you have just taken over a plot or unfortunately lost control of your existing one this season. If you wish to clear it without using weedkillers then you might find the following advice given by Bob Flowerdew from “Gardener’s question time” interesting.

Question: How do I start on a weedy allotment without weedkillers?

“Traditionally you skim off the topmost layer and stack it to rot down, then fork over the soil, removing weed roots as you go. This is best done from late Autumn to early Winter so that the soil can consolidate again before the Spring. You never get all of the roots, and hosts of weeds come from seed, so it is absolutely critical to hoe off the weeds as fast as they appear for the first six months or so...

The first Spring grow only widely spaced crops so that it is easier to hoe the weeds. Tomatoes, brassicas, squashes, courgettes and sweetcorn are all good crops for the first year...

Alternatively, only bring half of your allotment under cultivation initially and put the other half down to grass and keep cutting it. Return the clippings as this will improve fertility and control the weeds... for a year or so... There are very few weeds that survive regular close cutting and these are removed when the topmost layer is skimmed off.

Another control method that can be used is to mulch out the weeds. Although most established weeds thrive with a loose mulch, they are soon killed by the lack of light under a black plastic sheet. It must be totally light proof however... All weeds that come up in the dark turn yellow and rot away, exhausting the roots which also rot...

The plastic light-exclusion method works best if applied just before the Spring flush of growth, so it should be laid in late February or early March. It can be removed in Autumn and the soil will be in amazing condition... Once the plastic is removed the soil can be forked over and it will require only simple maintenance hoeing.”

Extracted from an article in, "Gardener's question time", published by Rigel publications for Marks and Spencer plc. 2003.

Dealing with “Mares Tail”, in an organic way

Information provided by “Garden Organic”, at www.gardenorganic.co.uk

- **Digging it out:** really not a viable proposition unless you only have a small patch and a lot of time!
- **Shading:** as they do not have significant leaves, horsetails do not compete well with vigorously growing crops. In the vegetable garden a couple of crops of potatoes, for example would help to control this weed. A tall growing summer green manure, such as Phacelia tanacetifolia or buckwheat, might be an alternative. One reference states that a crop of nasturtiums will smother it out, but this is not something we have tried. It will take several seasons before the weed is controlled.
- **Hoeing off the tops:** another reference says that continual removing of the tops should kill off the weed in 3-4 years. A combination of hoeing and growing a smothering crop might well be a good method to try.
- **Mulching:** a heavy, light-excluding mulch can be used around ornamentals to keep this weed in hand. Try newspaper or cardboard, covered with woodchips, bark or leafmould to make it look more attractive.
- **Improve the soil:** horsetail tends to thrive in poor conditions, so improve the soil by adding plenty of organic matter.

An old gardener’s piece of advice for dealing with any weed:

“The diligent daily use of the Hoe cures all known weed

Rusty Leeks: (*Puccinia allii*).

If you are a Leek grower then you may well have come across this problem at some point. Your Leeks become covered in tiny bright-orange raised pustules. These erupt, producing lots of obvious orange spores. The leaves can turn yellow and eventually die back. The inner growth however may not be affected. It is unsightly however and can affect the growth and size of the plant. It is encouraged by damp conditions and wet weather. As the Autumn weather cools down the problem is reduced. The following ideas should help you to limit this problem if you suffer from it.

- 1) Practice as long a crop rotation as you can, (ideally four to five years), so Leeks are not grown on the same soil regularly.
- 2) Avoid excessive use of high-Nitrogen fertilizers, as this encourages soft, sappy growth in the plants which makes them more susceptible to the rust fungus.
- 3) When planting apply Sulphate of Potash to the soil at 15 – 20g per square metre to harden growth slightly.
- 4) Space plants more widely apart to improve the air circulation between them.
- 5) Burn or remove from the site all affected leaves at the earliest opportunity. Do not leave old Leek debris lying around the site after the harvest as this can provide a refuge for rust spores.
- 6) If growing for exhibition use, then maintain a close eye upon the plants and at the first sign of the pustules cover them with *Vaseline* to prevent them from bursting and spreading the spores to the other plants.
- 7) Grow modern Leek cultivars which have a measure of inbuilt resistance to this disease: for example, *Walton mammoth*, *Neptune*, *Apollo*, *Poristo*, *Poribleu* and *Splendid*.

Andrew (plot 80B) has sent in this tip which has worked well for him.

“In early December dig a two foot trench in your plot and fill it with kitchen waste and then cover it with 4 inches of soil. Then come spring, plant the vegetable seedlings as normal and hopefully you should get a good crop of vegetables.”

Using this method Andrew obtained two big heads of Calabrese weighing a total of 2.75 lbs this year.

Interesting news item:

Queen plants an allotment

The Queen is growing fruit and vegetables at Buckingham Palace for the first time since the Second World War.

The new organic vegetable patch is approximately 10m x 8m in size – the equivalent to about half an allotment. It includes a wide range of herbs, fruit and vegetables, including six old heirloom varieties donated by Garden Organic's Heritage Seed Library. They include the purple-podded climbing French bean, 'Blue Queen', and Tomato 'Golden Queen', an American strain dating back to 1882. The garden is being run along organic lines, using liquid seaweed feed and garlic drenches to deter aphids. Deputy gardens manager Claire Midgeley has departed from the conventional straight rows and designed the garden in a circular pattern, with low hedges of purple sage around central obelisks and supports for tomatoes and beans.

The garden will be on show to visitors attending the Queen's garden parties and those on public tours of the garden this summer.

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Articles and photographs from members for the newsletter are always welcome. Please pass them to Rob (103). Thank you.