

LEYTONSTONE ALLOTMENT HOLDERS ASSOCIATION AT RODING FARM

AUGUST 2021 NEWSLETTER

Don't despair or lose heart

'It was the best of times it was the worst of times' said Charles Dickens and he might have been referring to the 2021 growing conditions. By nature farmers always complain about the weather – too hot, too cold, too dry, too wet – however this year I fear I have joined ranks with them after the excessive rain of February and May sandwiching the cold of April, we finally had some warmth and sunshine only for it to break down with some very humid and thundery weather in late June, early July. These are ideal conditions for blight, a fungal disease, which affects tomatoes and potatoes and, like the rest of Southern England, we have been badly affected. It often occurs later in the year but unfortunately it has arrived incredibly early this year. There is precious little that can be done except to dig up affected tomatoes and take them off to the council recycling. Don't be tempted to compost them as this can lead to the spores remaining in the compost and reappearing on site early next year. Potatoes tops should be 'cut back' and potatoes harvested as soon as possible to stop the disease spreading to the tubers. As if that was not bad enough we had the Wanstead monsoon arrive on Sunday 25th July. Flooding was extensive in the area and so obviously the site was affected. Lots of plants are now showing signs of 'wilt' as though they are short of water, when in actual fact the reverse is the case. There are some suggestions about what to do in the topical tips section.



So, without doubt this has been one of the most difficult growing years I have ever experienced – but don't lose heart – there is still time for some late sowings – and I'm sure it will be better next year

Committee Update

The Committee have met twice since the last newsletter. We had hoped to have met 'face to face' but as the lockdown restrictions remained in place meetings continued to take place over 'video conferencing'.

We discussed the important topic of the AGM. Thanks to all 57 members (around 42% of the total membership) who expressed their opinions. The overwhelming view, expressed by 47 members (82% of those responding) was to postpone the AGM and hold a 'double AGM' in 2022 and so this is what the Committee has decided to do.

Preparations are well 'in hand' for a more normal Annual Flower and Vegetable Show which will take place on **Sunday 22nd August**. Exhibits to be staged in the morning with judging commencing around 11.30am. A full schedule and details will be sent out to everyone in the next week or so. We are planning to have a more extensive range of classes and we would encourage everyone to enter something if they can. It's a great day. As we did last year, for safety reasons, we have decided not to run a BBQ or a bar, but members are very welcome to bring along their own picnics and refreshments and make a day of it. Hopefully the weather will be kind to us – I think we are owed some.

Wanstead Festival 2021

As we write there are plans to hold the Wanstead Festival once again on Christ Church Green on **Sunday 12th September**. The Association is planning to run a stall and should you have any surplus flowers or vegetables we would really appreciate donations which we can sell on the stall. We usually make a tidy sum for the Association as well as contributing to the local community. Any offers of help to set up, help on the stall, and take down would be great – just let one of the Committee know what you can do.

Main Path

We have started reseeding the main path in the hope that it will be less muddy this winter. Wherever possible please can you stay off the seeded areas so they get a chance to germinate. This particularly applies to cyclists whose narrow wheels have a tendency to create ruts in damp conditions.

Topical tips and Cultivation Advice

- 1) As mentioned earlier it has been a most difficult of years with the recent flooding adding 'insult to injury'. If your plot has been flooded for more than four or five days it is likely this year's crops will have been spoiled and there is nothing else you can do except to dig everything up and start again.
- 2) Potatoes need to be harvested as soon as possible if they have been flooded or have blight – a browning of the otherwise healthy green leaves - is a sign of this and not the natural dying down of the whole plant. If you are not sure ask an experienced allotmentee to have a look and tell you what they think.
- 3) Similarly, if your tomatoes have brown patches on the leaves and/or the stems it is sign they have blight and all you can do is dig them up as any fruits will not ripen. In future years try to buy 'blight resistant' varieties. There is an increasing number on the market – often they are available only as seeds – but they are easy to germinate and 'grow on' at home before planting out. Unfortunately all of the more popular or 'heritage' varieties are not blight resistant.
- 4) Any salad crops – lettuce, radish, beetroot, spring onion, courgettes, cucumbers, should be ready to harvest now. Pick them young – they taste so much better – and re-sow in any gaps you have created.
- 5) Garlic should also be harvested if you have now already done so – leaving it in the ground only causes the bulbs to start to rot – dry them off for a couple of weeks and then store in a cool dry place for use throughout the winter – hard neck garlic stores better than soft neck so use the soft neck first.
- 6) It's still not too late for a final sowing of peas, which can produce a wonderful crop before autumn – but be quick.
- 7) Soft fruit – strawberries, raspberries, currants and other berries – will be fruiting now and should be harvested as soon as they are ripe.
- 8) Flowers are a great 'crop' – sunflowers and dahlias should be starting to flower and produce a lovely display if taken home. Early chrysanthemums are also starting to come into flower and depending upon the variety will provide 'colour' right through summer and into the Autumn.
- 9) Brassicas – cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli and kale – should be transplanted into their final positions – give them plenty of space and plant them firmly. They can survive a bit of winter wet and taste wonderful. Just make sure you 'net' them to prevent the pigeons eating them before you do.

Further information

Further useful Association information, including copies of the monthly Committee minutes, are available on the LAHA web site at <https://www.laha.org.uk/> and for those who like a bit of social media you can find us :-

LAHA Committee

