

“ Light at the end of the tunnel ? ”. After a most difficult year, hopefully with the vaccine programme well advanced, we can look forward to greater freedoms and more normal times. It has been a very wet winter with the site and surrounding areas badly flooded in late January and February. Since then the rain has abated and the soil, whilst still cold, is drying nicely. So whilst it is still too early to plant anything but the hardiest plants and seeds outside there is plenty to be getting on with, preparing the soil and sowing seeds at home or in the greenhouse in preparation for the best growing year ever. Happy sowing everyone.

Committee Update

A very warm welcome to all our new and returning members from the Committee. In more normal years the first newsletter of the year would be used to introduce the new Committee and reflect upon our recent AGM. However things remain far from normal. It was with deep reluctance it was decided to postpone the AGM until a time at which we could meet properly and in person. Subject to the ongoing relaxation of Government restrictions this will not be possible until 21st July at the earliest. In the interim the Committee will continue to meet on a regular basis via video conferencing in order to carry out the routine day to day management of the site. Since the last Newsletter in October, the Committee has met three times, and sent out to everyone via email a full set of officer reports. Should anyone not have a copy they are available from the Secretary, Linda Kavanagh, email : LAHArodingfarm@gmail.com

The focus of our meetings so far has been – producing and publishing the 2020 Officer reports, options and possible arrangements for the AGM (obviously), collecting the 2021 membership subscriptions and plot rentals (thanks go to all members for their prompt responses and payments here), and agreeing a timetable of events for this year. With the current restrictions and continuing uncertainty we have decided upon a very limited programme, with a plant sale and Annual Show (details contained later in the newsletter), however if the situation improves significantly we would hope to do more. Offers of help with these two events would be greatly appreciated.

One issue which is starting to concern the Committee is the appearance of large piles of rubbish being ‘dumped’ on the ‘wilder’ areas of the site – this is not helpful. It is recognised some new members have inherited plastics and general rubbish which cannot be composed – although skip hire is expensive at around £300 a time - we will arrange for a skip to be provided to remove this. To all other members we ask them to take their rubbish away – both Redbridge and Waltham Forest offer free recycling facilities for residents. So please take it away. And before anyone asks – no we are NOT allowed to build bonfires or burn large quantities of wood – sorry – smoke is a serious hazard to passing traffic and could easily cause a road accident and fires are a breach of our lease agreement with LB Waltham Forest and would cause the site to be shut down.

What a difference a month makes



Site Water on

The site water has been reconnected on Tuesday 30th March and dip tanks should now be operating fully. Should anyone spot any leaks please report them immediately so we can avoid costly waste and flooding to members plots.

Discounted Seeds from Dobies

There is still plenty of time to order seeds for sowing this year – use the code GD1341G – if you want to enjoy the discount the Association has arranged with Dobies – order ‘on line’ at <https://www.dobies.co.uk/>

Diary dates

- **Trading hut reopening** – the Trading Hut will open on a more regular basis from around 10.30am to 12.00 noon on Sundays from mid April for the sale of fertilisers, canes, ground cover and sundry garden items.
- **Spring Plants sale – Sunday 16th May** – timed to avoid the last frost of the year (hopefully) and a chance to pick up some bargains from other members with a surplus stock. Last years ‘socially distanced’ event was very successful with lots of outstanding donations from members. As you start your seed sowing please put in a few extras to donate at this event.



- **Annual Flower and Vegetable Show – Sunday 22nd August** – a similar date to last year to maximise the summer harvest whilst avoiding the late summer bank holiday. Fingers crossed we hope to hold a normal show this year, free of restrictions and with a more extensive range of classes.



Topical tips and Cultivation Advice

- 1) Patience, patience, patience – whilst it is very tempting to start sowing seeds and planting out early vegetables and flowers it is still too early for anything but the most hardy specimens – the site is not reliably ‘frost free’ until mid May and therefore any frost tender plants or seeds will be ‘wiped out’ by the infamous ‘Roding Farm May frost’ unless they are well covered up with fleece - however there is still lots to be ‘getting on with’

- 2) It is the ideal time to get soil prepared by just lightly turning over the top few inches or so – this allows air into the soil and enables the sun to gently warm the soil ready for sowing and planting later in April and early May depending upon the weather. Leave it any later and there is a real danger our heavy clay soil will ‘set like concrete’ and make it very difficult to produce the perfect ‘fine tilth’ which is regularly sighted on ‘Gardeners World’
- 3) Despite a very cold and wet winter the weeds are starting to grow, flower and set seed very soon – so any areas you don’t have time to clear and weed should be covered with ground cover to stop the weeds taking over – it will keep the moisture in the soil so that when you are ready and able to cultivate later in the season – or even next year – the task will be so much easier.
- 4) Alternatively sow a crop of ‘green manure’ – suitable seed mixes including clover, mustard, beans, rye - are available for most seed suppliers including Dobies – sow immediately and ‘dig in’ later in the season it will add lots of healthy nutrients to your soil. If you prefer flowers then choose a flower mix which will help the bees and natural predators thrive.
- 5) Indoors at home on the window sill (Mrs M will kill me for saying this) or better still if you have greenhouse there are plenty of seeds which can be sown now including tomatoes, chillies, aubergines, leeks, onions all of which need warmth to germinate and a long growing season to produce the best crop.
- 6) Outside, if your soil is well prepared and not waterlogged, early potatoes can be planted, also broad beans and early peas can be sown.
- 7) Consider creating new wood chip paths on your plot to aid access – if the paths are dug out to a spades depth, the surplus soil can be used to create raised beds - this is really good for improving the drainage on waterlogged plots as the path acts as a drainage channel in winter.

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 finally ...

If you have any suggestions, or concerns regarding the site please do not hesitate to contact a Committee member – please remember we are all volunteers, not paid employees – so offers of help as well as suggestions for improvement are needed if we are to be able to action some great ideas.

LAHA Committee

