

LEYTONSTONE ALLOTMENT HOLDERS ASSOCIATION AT RODING FARM - APRIL 2022 NEWSLETTER

Welcome one and all.

A very warm welcome to all our new and returning members. After two very unusual and difficult years, we hope 2022 will bring greater freedoms and much more normal times. It has not been too wet this winter. Whilst there was a little bit of flooding in January and February – which is to be expected as we are located on what were once ‘water meadows’ bordering the original course of the River Roding - since then there has been fine bright sunny weather with temperatures well above last year. Nevertheless, I would urge caution in planting out, or sowing too many seeds as the heavy clay soil is still cold, and there is always a chance of a late frost. Certainly, anything tender, or plants which have not been fully hardened off, should not be planted out until the second or third week of May when the site is usually free from night frost. Any plants or seeds will grow away so much better if planted slightly later and always ‘catch up’. However, there is still 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

Since the last Newsletter in October 2021, we have held our first AGM for two years in the Churchill Room at Wanstead Library and the newly elected Committee has met ‘face to face’ on two occasions.

The focus of our meetings has been – collecting the 2022 membership subscriptions and plot rentals (thanks to all members for their prompt response and payments here, which are now all complete), agreeing a timetable of events for this year (more of which later) and discussing major projects to improve the site facilities. Based upon member feedback together with the views from the experienced Committee members it was agreed to explore, cost and examine the feasibility of four major areas :-

- 1) Water supply - replacement of the main water pipe from the water metre outside the main gate through to all site dip tanks thus improving the re-fill rate of tanks, which we know is an issue on hot summer days and at weekends.
- 2) Portacabin and car park areas - upgrading and improvement of the Portacabin and area around it to make an area where members can sit and gather in greater comfort. This will involve the decluttering, clearing and cleaning of the Portacabin, and the possible addition of a nicer and more clearly defined seating area. The last two years have made what was once a very friendly and sociable allotment society harder to achieve so we want to enhance the facilities which make this possible.

LEYTONSTONE ALLOTMENT HOLDERS ASSOCIATION AT RODING FARM - APRIL 2022 NEWSLETTER

- 3) Toilet facilities – we know the toilets are something of an 'issue'. The problem is clear, the solution less so. But we are going to explore possibilities and costs for replacement and ongoing maintenance and see what is possible and realistic.
- 4) Drainage – in some areas the drainage ditches across the site have 'silted up' and been 'filled in'. We will look at plan of digging out and re-instatement in some areas and simple 'scouring' elsewhere.

All this work will require some major effort in addition to the day-to-day management of the site so the Committee will need help and support from members to achieve some of these ambitions. We are a Committee of volunteers and get no help or support from the local authority, as they do on some sites. So, if you are able to help, please email the Secretary Linda on laharodingfarm@gmail.com In previous 'pre Covid' years we have also arranged working parties to complete some of the simpler tasks and we will be returning to that approach this year. Once again if you are able to offer a couple of hours of help please advise Linda and we can let you know what needs to be done.

On that note whilst we do have an elected Committee we are 'on the look out' for new participants. We especially want to encourage members who have never been on the committee to have a go. No special qualifications required, just some energy, enthusiasm and a willingness to help out. If you are interested please send an email to the Secretary or just come and talk to one of the Committee on a Sunday morning or at any of the events we are holding this year.



Plot Inspections

One of the tasks of the Committee is to ensure that plots are cultivated and maintained in good order and in accordance with the obligations of our Waltham Forest lease agreement. The Committee discussed and agreed the process and procedure for inspections in 2022. Full details are contained on the website at www.laha.org.uk together with lots of other useful information. Inspections will start later this month and it is hoped once again we will strike the right balance between individual members being free to cultivate their plot in the way they wish, whilst ensuring what they do, does not adversely affect other plots across the site.

LEYTONSTONE ALLOTMENT HOLDERS ASSOCIATION AT RODING FARM - APRIL 2022 NEWSLETTER

The Birds, the Bees and other Allotment Wildlife

On site, as well as the plentiful but less desirable wildlife – pigeons and slugs to name but two - we have a large number of beneficial and helpful insects and mammals. We have a small hedgehog population present on site which do their best to keep down our population of slugs. As you are clearing your sheds and compost heaps this Spring please take care in case you disturb any hibernating hedgehogs. And if you strim, rough grass and brush with any mechanical tools please take extra care. We want our hedgehog population to grow and thrive. If you do use slug pellets, please use them very sparingly, ensure they are the safe organic type made of Ferric or iron Phosphate which are available from the Trading Hut and not the old metaldehyde type which kill hedgehogs and are now banned.



Discounted Seeds from Dobies

There is still plenty of time to order seeds for sowing this year – use the code SUGD1204Z – 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 opening** – the Trading Hut will be open on a regular basis from around 10.30am to 12.00 noon on Sundays for the sale of fertilisers, canes, ground, sundry garden items and equipment hire.
- **Ask the ‘Experts’** – Saturday 30th April and Sunday 15th May – with teas and coffee – on the basis you learn most from your mistakes we have a number of ‘experts’ able to offer horticultural advice and answer any allotment questions you might have. We will be outside the Portacabin between 10.30am to 12.00 noon on both days so please come over and ask any burning questions you have. There may even be the odd cake and biscuit available to accompany the hot beverages.



- **Spring Plant Sale – Sunday 29th May** – timed to avoid the last frost of the year (hopefully) and a chance to pick up some bargains from other members with surplus stock. Last year’s event was very successful with lots of outstanding donations from members. So, as you start your seed sowing this year please put in a few extras to donate at this event.
- **Annual Flower and Vegetable Show – Sunday 4th September** – a similar date to last year to maximise the summer harvest whilst avoiding the late summer bank holiday.

LEYTONSTONE ALLOTMENT HOLDERS ASSOCIATION AT RODING FARM - APRIL 2022 NEWSLETTER

Topical tips and Cultivation Advice

- 1) Let me repeat my earlier advice. Whilst it is very tempting to start planting out early vegetables and flowers it is still a little too early for anything but the most hardy specimens – the site is not reliably ‘frost free’ until mid May and any frost tender plants or seeds will be ‘wiped out’ unless they are well covered up with fleece.
- 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 in late 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’.
- 3) As always, grass and weeds are starting to grow, flower and set seed very soon – so any areas you don’t have time to cultivate should be covered with ground cover to stop the weeds taking over – it will also keep the moisture in the soil so 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, or better still if you have a greenhouse, there are plenty of seeds which can be sown now including tomatoes, chillies, aubergines, and sweet corn all of which need warmth to germinate and a long growing season to produce the best crops.
- 6) Outside, if your soil is well prepared, early potatoes can be planted, broad beans, early peas, parsnips, carrots, leeks, brassicas and beetroot can all be sown. Runner beans and French beans need a little more heat to germinate successfully so I would wait until mid May before making a first sowing.
- 7) Consider creating 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.

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 action your great ideas.

LAHA Committee