

LEYTONSTONE ALLOTMENT HOLDERS ASSOCIATION AT RODING FARM - MARCH 2023 NEWSLETTER

Welcome

A very warm welcome to all our new and returning members. Late Autumn and the early part of the Winter was quite wet with some minor flooding – although the new drainage ditches seemed to help enormously. Since Christmas it has been very dry allowing some early preparation to be carried out. The site is predominately London clay over gravel so if there is no rain it will dry out quickly and can be difficult to cultivate. Aerating the soil is important in these early months, as is the addition of any organic matter you can lay your hands on. If you are operating a ‘no dig’ policy then the sooner you can add a thick layer of compost and organic matter the better as this will allow time for the worms to ‘work it in’. It has been a cold winter with night-time temperatures well below freezing on a number of occasions. Tempting as it maybe I would urge caution sowing too many seeds or planting out, as the soil is still very cold. Anything tender, or plants which have not been fully hardened off, should not be planted out until the third or fourth week of May when the site is usually free from night-time frosts. 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 growing year. Happy growing everyone.

Committee Update

Since the last Newsletter in October 2022, we have held a very well attended AGM in the Churchill Room at Wanstead Library and the newly elected Committee has met on two occasions.

The focus of our activities so far has been – collecting the 2023 membership subscriptions and plot rentals, agreeing a timetable of events for this year (more of which later) and discussing major projects to improve the site facilities. A lot was achieved last year but there is always more to do. Based upon member feedback together with the views of Committee it was agreed to focus on the following areas :-

- 1) Portacabin and surrounding areas – the portacabin needs a good clean up and ‘makeover’ after the burst pipe over winter – we also need to lay slabs to provide some hard standing, cut back some of the brambles which are threatening to envelop some of the cabins, replace the notice board and clear around the car park to maximise parking spaces for everyone.
- 2) Drainage ditches – last year we invested heavily in re-instating the drainage ditches on the eastern boundary of the site. They have ‘filled in’ slightly and need to be scoured and deepened which is something we should be able to do with a working party once they have dried out for the summer.
- 3) Site rules and code of practice – these have not been amended for a number of years and need to be reviewed and updated to reflect more modern practices, and to mirror some of the changes made by our landlord LB Waltham Forest to their allotment sites.



All this work will require some significant effort in addition to the day-to-day management of the site so the Committee would welcome help and support from members. We are a Committee of volunteers and get no help or support from the local authority. If you are able to offer help, please email the Secretary Linda on laharodingfarm@gmail.com

LEYTONSTONE ALLOTMENT HOLDERS ASSOCIATION AT RODING FARM - MARCH 2023 NEWSLETTER

Plot Inspections

One of the major 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 has agreed the process and procedure for inspections in 2023. It is identical to last year. Full details are 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 balance between individual members being free to cultivate their plot in the way they wish, whilst ensuring what they do, does not adversely affect others across the site. As always, should you anticipate having temporary problems cultivating your plot due to illness or working away from the area for a while, please advise the Secretary so we can take these issues into consideration.

Allotment supplies

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 cover, sundry garden items and equipment hire.

There is also plenty of time to order seeds for sowing this year – use the code SUGD170K – to enjoy the discount the Association has arranged with Dobies – order ‘on line’ at <https://www.dobies.co.uk/>

Dates for the Diary

- **Hot crossed buns - Sunday 9th April** - all morning we shall be serving coffee and hot crossed buns to celebrate Easter
- **Working Party - Saturday 15th April** - from 10.30am a working party to clean, clear and refurbish the portacabin plus the areas around it - skilled and unskilled tasks available, please give an hour or so of your time to help with this activity
- **Spring Plant Sale – Sunday 21st 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. As you start your seed sowing this year please put in a few extras to donate at this event. All proceeds go to support the Association.
- **Annual Flower and Vegetable Show – Sunday 3rd September** – a similar date to last year to maximise the bountiful harvest whilst avoiding the late summer bank holiday - everyone is free to enter, no expertise required, always an enjoyable day. It’s very much about the taking part and you never know you might win
- **Apple Pressing Day - Sunday 15th October** - bring along your apples and we will juice them for you
- **Mince Pies - Sunday 17th December** - we shall be serving coffee, mince pies and perhaps a glass of mulled wine - stop by and reminisce on the successes and near misses of the growing year



LEYTONSTONE ALLOTMENT HOLDERS ASSOCIATION AT RODING FARM - MARCH 2023 NEWSLETTER

Water

Possibly a strange topic for this time of year, however if you are thinking about rain water capture now is the time to set up your water tanks. If you decide to do so you should ensure, as far as possible, you create a sealed unit so the water you collect stays 'fresh' and uncontaminated as unlike our 'dip tanks' it will be free from the chemicals which are added to keep London water fresh.

Topical tips and Cultivation Advice

- 1) On warm days is very tempting to start planting out early vegetables and flowers, however it is still far too early for anything but the most hardy specimens – the site is not reliably 'frost free' until mid May and any tender plants or seeds will be 'wiped out' unless they are well covered up with fleece.
- 2) March/April 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 in April and early May depending upon the weather. Leave it 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) Weeds and grass are the first 'plants' to start into growth, flower and set seed – 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 retain the moisture in the soil so when you are ready and able to cultivate later in the season 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 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 from mid to late April. Runner beans and French beans need a little more heat to germinate successfully so I would wait until mid/late May before making a first outdoor sowing.

Finally ...

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

LAHA Committee

