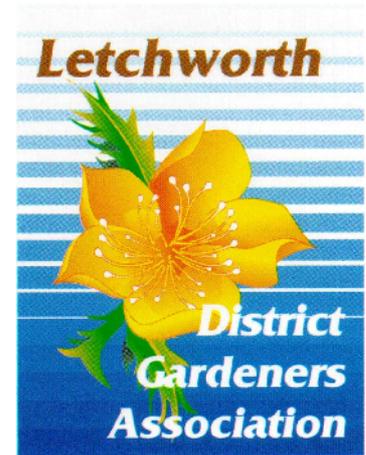


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Gleanings from the

Compost Heap

Summer 2008



Summer time and the picking is easy

I've just come in from the vegetable patch with the latest harvest of broad beans. I always sow these in the Autumn and despite snow and frost they survive and have an early start for the next year. Now I only grow Aquadulce Claudia, which seem to be toughest and tastiest. I have tried others, but haven't found they crop as well or taste as good. The great advantage is not just the early crop, but the outwitting of blackfly. I have had to pinch tops from three of the plants, which had just started to attract infestations, but that isn't much of a problem as the flowers have all gone, pods are set and it's just a question of letting the beans develop.

One of the tricks for good plant development seems to be to protect them from wind in the winter. When I started growing over-wintering beans and only grew a few, I used to surround them with an open cold-frame. Now, at my husband's request (he loves broad beans) I grow a lot more and have to erect a shelter with canes and plastic sheeting. It doesn't look wonderful, but the garden in winter isn't somewhere to spend a lot of time - and the protection works. If there are very heavy frosts the plants do blacken, but they have usually built up a strong root system, which survives and enables the beans to grow away quickly as soon as mild Spring weather appears. With the prospect of warmer winters, broad bean harvests should be even better.

Nothing tastes quite as good as produce straight from the garden to the pot and this is especially true of broad beans. You really need that tender, juicy taste of freshly-

picked beans to appreciate how good a vegetable they really are. Rather than just boiling or steaming them, try them as a starter or, with a larger quantity, as a main course. Boil/steam the beans as usual, then add vinaigrette dressing while they're still warm, so they absorb the oil and vinegar flavours. Then, either cube a good garlic sausage and toss with the beans, or better still, top the beans with curls of cured ham, ideally jamon serrano from Spain, or Parma ham.

Alpine Strawberries

Another garden favourite at the moment are Alpine strawberries. I have no idea what variety they are as I inherited them from the woman who owned our previous garden in Sussex. She was quite a plantswoman and had a vigorous patch of these strawberries in the vegetable garden. When we moved to Stotfold, three pots of Alpine strawberries came with us (along with a large selection of other interesting plants from the garden).

From these three plants, I now have a ten foot by two foot border of vigorous strawberries. They not only spread by runners, but seem to self-seed happily also. I can't recommend Alpine strawberries too highly. They have attractive light green foliage, pretty white and gold flowers and then a succession of thumbnail-sized, sweet strawberries from now for the next few months. They seem to rest a little at the end of the Summer and then I get a late crop of berries before frosts set in. They start before the larger, proper strawberries and crop longer. Yes, they are small, but you can

easily fill a bowlful when they are really under way and the taste is amazing.

The plants form excellent ground cover, so no weeds grow. I do little to them, except to drag a cultivator through the border in Spring to pull out dead leaves and some of the weaker growth. I don't thin them or pamper them in any way. They get a scattering of organic pelleted chicken manure in Spring after the tidying up and then I leave them alone. I do find I have some competition from the birds and from tiny black slugs, but there are more than enough fruit for all of us. The only disadvantage is that the berries tend to hide under the leaves, so you have to hunt carefully for them.

I'm experimenting with celeriac this year and am looking forward using them raw and grated in salads, or braised with garlic and herbs. I'll keep you posted on progress.

SUMMER SHOW: Paul Heydon

The annual Summer Show on July 5th will be held in St George's Hall, Common View. You should have received an information form giving details of the sections and giving tips on showing. If you have any queries, contact Paul Heydon at the telephone number at the end of this page.

We welcome anyone interested in becoming a steward on the day. This means being available from 12-2 pm and accompanying the judges as they make their decisions, recording the prize winners and filling out the prize stickers. You get a good insight into the way the judges' minds work and what makes a winner. Also, if anyone is interested in being available for general helping out on the day, please contact Paul. Please note: anyone exhibiting is not eligible to be a steward.

There is an error in the booklet about the City Championship. If you need details, again phone Paul.

MEMBERSHIP: Maureen Hersee

The Committee send their best wishes to Kathy Bee for a speedy recovery.

In Kathy's absence, Jo Schurch has taken over as membership secretary, so please

contact Jo if you have membership queries, on 01462 674195.

Apologies to any of you who did not receive your copies of the Spring edition of Compost Heap. This was unavoidable and you should receive copies of both the Spring and Summer editions together.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:

July 17th: visit to Pioneer Nurseries.

Hosted by our President, John Hoyland. This was very popular last year, so if you are interested, sign up via one of the Committee as soon as possible.

August 21st: Flower arranging.

How to make the best of flowers you buy or grow yourself.

September 19th:

Day trip to Anglesey Abbey and Scotsdale Nursery (members only)

September 20th: Autumn Show, St George's Hall, Common View. Show off your vegetables, flowers and produce.

October 16th: Wine and buffet. Come along to review gardening events of 2008.

November 20th; Annual General Meeting.

Your chance to enjoy a glass of wine, find out how LDGA is run and have your say on what you would like to happen in 2009.

All events, unless stated otherwise, take place at 7.30 in the Guide Headquarters, Icknield Way, Letchworth Garden City. If you need directions to venues, contact one of the Committee.

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For more information on membership telephone: Jo Schurch on 01462 674195, visit our web site : www.ldga.org.uk. or call in at our trading centre at Flint Road, Letchworth Garden City between 09.30 and 12 noon on a Sunday morning.