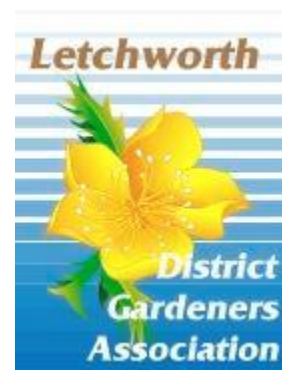


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# Gleanings from the Compost Heap



Winter 2003

## Editorial

It is fair to say that television and before that radio, is responsible for the tremendous increase in the public interest in growing things.

A well known name in "Gardeners' Question Time" revealed her lifelong interest in plants started when her father prepared a small patch in the garden and gave it to her for her own use. "A packet of Virginia Stock seed and I was hooked", she said. She was just 3 years old at the time.

Wouldn't it be great if our New Year's resolution was to encourage our little ones? One of the simplest routes is with something they eat!

It goes without saying that Junior Citizen must be involved at an early stage, getting hands in, hands on, hands dirty. Grandma (or Grandpa) giving encouragement all the way and showing methods they acquired from years of trial and error.

Select seeds which are large enough for small fingers to pick up and plant. Peas, beans, courgettes and sweet corn are a few suggestions.

At the appropriate time, flowers can be added. For starters, try nasturtiums and marigolds (calendula on the packet). Where the youngsters are old enough to cope with sowing smaller seeds, try radishes, lettuces and carrots in the vegetable patch and godetia with love-in-a-mist plus your favourite annuals for the floral scene. Keep things simple. Select low growing varieties which they can manage better.

Never mind if there are a few disasters. That's all part of the gardeners' world. Encourage them to 'press on regardless', nature will often come to the rescue.

Presuming all goes well, please bear in mind there are classes especially for children in both our shows. Have fun!

## The Annual General Meeting

There were 32 present on Thursday November 20<sup>th</sup>. From the twelve items on the agenda one of the noteworthy items was the problem of replacing Peter Harkness for our President. Peter has resigned as he feels his travelling commitments means he is unable to attend our major events. His long horticultural career, encyclopaedic knowledge of roses and his smile have been linked to the Association for many years. We shall miss him greatly.

So far we have not been able to secure a replacement. It was decided to keep the position open and continue our search.

The Committee has offered to stand again and this was accepted. There are vacancies for a secretary and for enthusiasts willing to join the committee. We really do want new faces.

We were delighted to invite Wally Toone to join our Vice Presidents, acknowledging the long and dedicated service he has given to the Association.

It was recorded with regret that there were no entries for the "Tanglewood Trophy".

Under a.o.b. was a question to Peter Faulkner reflecting newspaper reports of a crisis in the seed potato industry. We were relieved to learn our seed potatoes all come from 'clean' Scottish growers – no imported rubbish, thank you!

The evening concluded with Laurie Cook's Quiz. Five lots of ten questions tackled by 6 teams competing for boxes of chocolates. A hilarious event, with accusations and insults flying, the Tomkins and Hollingsworths team taking first prize with 41 points out of 50.

Thelma and Shiela ensured a steady flow of mince pies and other goodies, together with a merry glug-glug of wineglasses being filled.

My personal thanks to the Chairman Maureen for a brisk run through of the agenda and to Laurie and the ladies for the entertainment.

## The Second Garden

I have recently noticed an attractive leaflet published by the Leisure and Community Development section of the NHDC on the subject of allotments.

Firstly, they are called "allotment gardens". Secondly you are encouraged to grow flowers, fruit and perennial items such as asparagus.

Clearly, the local authority is following 21<sup>st</sup> century fashion by replacing the word "allotment" in the English language with something a bit more upmarket. The traditional concept of the allotment as a rather tatty field full of potatoes, carrots and cabbages, tended by old men to feed the large and hungry family is definitely on the way out.

Second gardens have had the full treatment from the media this year. TV presenter Monty Don took us through a site, talking to the workers, studying, discussing and commenting on their problems and successes. The "Radio Times" had a full page devoted to the programme with pictures including the annual produce show. The "Times" had another illustrated page devoted to a 16-plot site in an Oxfordshire village which described vividly the diverse characters who "got away from it all" in its peaceful location.

There was a police officer and his friend, a mum and a 7-year old son team (no mention of input from anyone else!) and the tenant of 20 years standing who said his secret of success was organic feeding in the autumn. "The old folk used to say you need rain once a week and a shower of sh\*t once a fortnight", he told the newspaper. Most gardening magazines devote space to "exotic" vegetables like the courgette, sweetcorn, peppers – even sweet potatoes – which reflect modern tastes of our multicultural society.

A recent chat at NHDC revealed that most of their sites in Hitchin and Baldock are fully taken, some with waiting lists. There is still a sprinkling of vacant plots in Letchworth.

With 12 sites covering over 500 plots this shows that the Council is keeping pace with demand. Hitchin residents are being offered vacant plots on the Wilbury site. This seems reasonable as the towns are of about the same population yet there are six sites in Letchworth and only four in Hitchin. One or two plots are slow to go. One has a noisy factory for a neighbour and others have a school next door. This brings the perennial problem of site security which the Council has yet to solve satisfactorily.

Anyone fancying an extension to their gardening from 80 up to 250 square metres is recommended to ring 01462-474253 for advice and information.

Why not walk round to your nearest site and see for yourself? But... this is an unofficial health warning! Neighbouring allotmenters are likely to offer surplus seed, plants and produce, which, with advice and general gossip, may seriously interfere with your own plans and progress!

### **Judging at our Shows – Paul Heydon**

I am often asked about the identity of our judges, their background and what they are looking for when examining entries on Show Day.

Their names appear on the front cover of the Show Schedule. They have extensive "grow and show" experience with the goods they are examining, some with specialist societies such as the National Dahlia Society. Ladies who are professional instructors in their subjects judge the Floral Art and Domestic entries.

Judges are only human. There are occasional mistakes and doubtless they have personal preferences. But the vital features are judged on merit, in the final analysis. They do not like marking an exhibit N.A.S. (not as scheduled) unless they must.

Our schedule has rules and these must be followed. It also has hints and tips for novices. When in doubt, ring me.

The judges look for clean, well-presented exhibits of uniform size and colour. You should make an effort to label your exhibits with the variety – judges view these favourably and they add interest for the viewing public. Remember our shows are an advertisement to the public who comes to see us.

Which brings me to a very important item – children's classes. These are always sympathetically judged. With support and encouragement they are the regular exhibitors of the future.

It was disappointing for us to note the poor support for the Floral Art section. We had to ask the judge not to come for both the 2003 shows. Finally, may I repeat the comment about hints and advice. Study the pages in the schedule, plan ahead and let's see every table packed with your best!

### **Store News** from Peter Faulkner

Having placed bulk orders with our suppliers I am getting feedback which may interest my readers.

Firstly, potatoes. Cara and Foremost are in short supply, so we may not get the full quantity we ordered. Marfona, a second early, will be coming in bigger volume, following demand here coupled with good reports. Prices look like staying unchanged generally although prices are creeping upwards amongst organic fertilisers, bone meal rising by 15%. There will be no more Fumite or Gamma Dust and when present stocks of Chlorophos have gone, no more for the future.

We shall be getting Sequestrene as granules to mix with water for application to your own compost. This is for use for plants who only thrive in an acidic growing medium.

Another new line will be flat-bottomed hanging baskets, which are easier to fill. They are coming in three sizes and we also expect some larger gravel trays.

My notes on the store's performance in 2003 appear in the Chairman's Annual Report.

**We open on Sunday, February 1<sup>st</sup> 2004.**

### **A few notes about us**

**from Peter Hollingsworth**

So, we have had a reasonable year with honours about even on losses and gains. Obviously it would be nice to increase the membership but with a 30/70 ratio in favour of the 60+ members the younger ones are not appearing as fast as we would like. However, life for most people begins at 60 or even younger these days and I am sure you have some neighbours who have taken the plunge into retirement whilst they are still 'young and fit'. Those are the people we want. For the price of our subscription, it pays for itself when you buy 10Kgs of Growmore. They have to be amazed at the value for money, free lectures, discounted garden supplies, two

shows for their produce and four Compost Heaps per year. What more could they ask for such a paltry sum!!! Unfortunately the paltry sum has to rise this year, as the printing and postage costs are eating into the subscription monies received. Therefore, the full fee will rise to £4.50 and the 60+ will be £3.00. I tried to keep it down but the package now costs over £2.00 to produce with the Compost Heap printing and delivery, we are only just breaking even in that area of the clubs finances.

I also lost some collectors over the year and would like to hear from anyone in the following areas: Central. Stofold, Arlesey, the Grange around Maycroft, Hitchin north side.

If any one in these areas or close by, would like to help out in January ( it's really a wonderful time to do it) and deliver the package and collect the money , please contact Peter Hollingsworth , on 01462 458 296 or e-mail at [peterhollingsworth@ntlworld.com](mailto:peterhollingsworth@ntlworld.com).

#### **From Steve Carr**

As far as the 'Posties' are concerned, nobody has yet offered to do the little Ickleford patch which has about a dozen members. If you live in Bygrave or Weston, which have only six members each, helpers are needed there as well.

For the Garden City, two are wanted for the Grange one for the Central district and one for Pixmore area.

If you enjoy your 'CH' and can spare 3 mornings not a week, not a month, but **three mornings A YEAR** to pop it through your neighbours' letter boxes, please ring me Steve Carr on 01462 683186

#### **Finally**

If you have Internet access please remember our Web site at [www.ldga.org.uk](http://www.ldga.org.uk). We will be adding more information in the New Year so keep dropping by. If there is anything you would like us to include please e-mail our Chairman at **maureen @ hersee.net**.

### **We are in serious difficulties.**

**For some months we have been without a General Secretary Ron has been holding the fort since Marion's resignation but has commitments that prevent him doing this job regularly.**

**The Association cannot function efficiently without a Secretary. Surely from among our 1000 members, we have somebody who can take minutes, operate a computer and deal with correspondence?**

**If you are able and willing please contact Maureen Hersee to discuss what is involved.**

**We really do need you**

*If you have any comments on the "Compost Heap", have an article suitable for future issues, or are willing to help with distribution in your area, please contact me Jack Collins on tel 01462 682723 or at:- 12 Cashio Lane Letchworth Herts SG6 1AX. If you are prepared to help with the annual membership renewal contact Peter Hollingsworth at 143 Wymondley Road Hitchin tel 01462 458206*