

## chairman's comments

I am writing these comments shortly after National Allotments Week and I hope that those of you who took part in any allotment related activities enjoyed the occasion and found it worthwhile. Events and activities took place over most of the country, culminating in an open day at Barnsdale. The garden was set up by the iconic Geoff Hamilton, in Rutland and was carried on by his son.

During the last couple of weeks certain celebrities have been expressing their opinions, to which they are entitled, about allotment plot sizes. As is not unusual for celebrities, they either speak without thinking, speak on subjects they know nothing about or speak for effect.

The standard plot size in the UK is historically 10 Rods or approximately 250 square meters. This is the size recommended to be sufficient to provide fresh fruit and vegetables for a family of four people. The recent claim that a quarter of a plot is sufficient is, to be blunt, total rubbish and deserves about as much support as the attempts by some local authorities to reduce plot sizes in a similar way, simply to reduce waiting lists and increase their apparent allotment stock.

There are occasions, of course, when a smaller plot may meet the needs of a tenant and this situation has long been met by allotment associations who would split a plot into two or maybe three if that

resulted in a part plot that met the needs of the prospective tenant. A couple with a young family and a full time job, maybe new to allotment gardening as well, could find attending to a full plot rather daunting; similarly, a pensioner may feel he does not require all the produce he can grow on a full plot and would like to downsize, thus freeing land for someone on the waiting list.

However, reducing plot sizes is not the answer; splitting a plot allows for the gardener who, with experience, wishes to take on more, or the pensioner, with time on his hands, may wish to help his grown-up family and could apply for the "other half" of his plot and on most sites he would be allowed to do so. The NAS firmly supports the continuance of the full size plot and its ability to support a family. Split plots are all very well, but small plots should not become the norm.

By the time you read this you should be well into planning for next season and an important part of that exercise is of course the Kings Seeds catalogue. Existing plot holders should be well aware of the financial advantages of using Kings Seeds and site secretaries should also be aware of the generous discounts available. Relatively small orders could save the

gardener considerably more than the NAS subscription costs and the association could earn sufficient discounts to pay for the site insurance or a similar expense. For those of you not familiar with Kings products, it may be beneficial to know that whilst Kings prices are extremely competitive, they are still high quality seeds. As well as Kings supplying allotment sites and retail outlets, they are

also seed merchants supplying seeds to the trade, so you may well still be using Kings Seeds even though you bought them from another supplier with another name.

I will close by reporting the loss of a staff member, Holly. In the months since she joined us, Holly, who is a qualified law graduate, had proved to be an asset to the office. In recent months she started to assist Liz Bunting with some of the many legal enquiries we get each week. I understand that Holly is in fact emigrating to Australia and while we will certainly miss her, we wish her all the best in her new life.

Weather permitting I will now get on with harvesting and clearing my plot.

**Tony Heeson,**  
Management Committee Chairman

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a quarter of a plot is  
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## How does your garden grow?

Allotments are now diverse places with all ages, genders and nationalities following a variety of gardening philosophies. They all work alongside each other although there is potential for conflict – a dandelion is a weed to some and a salad ingredient for others. Pesticide spray can drift on to other plots, but so can dandelion seeds. In this article we take a look at how some of the different growing methods approach steps in the cultivation calendar.

### Organic Principles

#### Soil preparation

- Minimum soil cultivation, apart from working in green manures or digging clay soil, to allow frost to break up clods or to deal with soil compaction.
- Keep soil covered with thick mulches of organic materials e.g. composted leaves, homemade compost or green manures, this both protects and adds nutrients.
- Crop rotation important to prevent build-up of pests and diseases.

#### Choosing seeds

- Organic seeds are harvested from plants grown without synthetic chemical fertilizers, pesticides and fungicides and therefore harbour no residues from these chemicals.

#### Growing on and feeding

- Only use organic fertilisers such as chicken pellets, rock dust, seaweed meal etc where a soil deficiency has been recognised.
- Feed plants with liquid seaweed extract, compost tea or mulch with home grown nettle or comfrey leaves.
- Start off with healthy material tubers, plants etc.
- Grow produce that is suitable for your soil and region.
- Water the soil, not over the plants.
- Grow varieties with resistance to disease.
- Sow and plant at times that avoid pests e.g. sow carrots in June to avoid carrot fly.

#### Crop Protection

- Prevention is better than cure; a biologically diverse plot will have a healthy ecosystem with beneficial insects and natural predators.

- Feed plants (compost tea, seaweed extract) to encourage their natural defences.
- Any pesticide use will break the food chain and may be harmful to other life forms so should be avoided, ensure you use biological controls sparingly.
- Use barrier methods and physical methods to remove pests.

### Permaculture Principles

Permaculture is not just about gardening; it covers all areas of human life and has three main ethical principles – caring for the earth, caring for people and sharing fairly. The design of the growing area is important and must be considered in three dimensions not just two, as the relationships between the various elements will affect the temperature, soil fertility and energy etc.

#### Soil preparation

- No-dig technique is popular with permaculturists
- Only use materials produced within the plot system e.g. green manure or garden compost to mulch.

#### Sowing and choosing seeds

- Save your own seeds from the plot
- Buy open pollinated seeds

#### Growing on and feeding

- Grow different crops together in the same bed e.g. the North American "3 sisters system" where sweetcorn squash and climbing green beans are grown together.
- Feed with compost tea, mulch with comfrey or nettle grown on the plot.
- Use companion planting to influence health and growth of other plants.
- Use swales (a gully) to harvest water – channeling rainwater to where it is needed at the plants roots.

#### Crop Protection

- Using nature to achieve a balance.
- Avoid use of chemicals.



### **Bio-dynamics**

Founded by Rudolf Steiner, this method uses non chemical management principles, planting and sowing according to the phases of the moon and the addition to the soil of 'horn manure', which is a preparation of cow manure that has been buried and fermented in a horn and 'horn silica', which is finely ground quartz meal 'energised' through spending all summer in the soil inside a cow horn. The preparations mentioned must then be diluted and stirred at the correct time of day – when the earth is either breathing in or out.

#### **Soil preparation**

- Best done in the last quarter phase of the moon

#### **Sowing and choosing seeds**

- At the new moon, plant above ground annual crops that produce their seeds outside the fruit. Examples are lettuce, spinach, celery, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and grain crops.
- At the second quarter of the moon, plant annuals that produce above ground, but their seeds form inside the fruit, such as beans, melons, peas, peppers, squash, and tomatoes.
- The full moon is a favourable time for planting root crops, including beets, carrots, onions and potatoes.

#### **Growing on and feeding**

- In the fourth quarter of the moon, there is decreased gravitational pull and moonlight, and it is considered a resting period. This is also the best time to weed and mulch, make compost and manure teas, harvest, transplant and prune.

#### **Crop Protection**

- Bio-Dynamic followers believe that by following the Lunar Planting Calendar, gardeners will utilise the cosmic forces to improve crop growth and development, which increases the power of plants to resist any pest and disease incidences.

### **Traditional**

#### **Soil preparation**

- Many people enjoy the ritual of digging over their plots and enjoy the exercise of Double Digging – this is a technique for digging over your allotment which was widely practiced a generation ago. It involves digging a trench two spades deep and bringing the bottom layer of soil to the top, aerating the soil and breaking up big clumps. However, there is also a school of thought which believes the practice serves little good, as the subsoil is often low in nutrients, meaning there is little benefit to your plants. These critics prefer a technique of digging just one spade's depth and turning the soil as you go. If digging over winter, leave it roughly dug to allow the frost to help break up the clumps, before raking and forking in the spring to a fine tilth, ready for planting.
- Rotovation to break up the soil.
- Liming the soil routinely.

#### **Sowing seeds**

- Waiting until the soil was warm enough for direct sowing of seeds was the traditional method before we had central heating and could start plants off on window sills.

#### **Growing on and feeding**

- Traditional allotment gardeners follow many of the same principles of organic gardeners. Rotation is vital to preserve a healthy soil and mulching with manure and other organic materials has been practiced for centuries; however they do use inorganic products such as Grow-more to promote growth.

#### **Crop Protection**

- Non-organic gardeners are more likely to use chemical herbicides and pesticides along with barrier methods but we hope that the current concern for the health of humans, bees and the planet will mean the use of these chemicals amongst allotment holders will begin to reduce.

Having your own allotment is the best way to provide affordable, fresh, healthy fruit and vegetables for you and your family. The hot topic at the moment is to whether to produce them organically using the more traditional growing methods or inorganically using modern sophisticated chemicals. On your allotment plot you have the choice and control over how you want to grow them. The important thing is to make a responsible and enlightened decision based upon all of the up-to-date information that is available – especially in respect to pest and disease control.



## Growing Health – making gardening and food growing a natural part of the health service

Many of us are fully aware of the benefits to both our mind and body of gardening and growing, particularly growing food with its added bonus of being able to harvest delicious healthy produce. However, it has not always been easy to convince others, particularly the NHS, that they should more actively use food growing projects as a tool to improve health. That is why a partnership of charities and community food growing groups have pulled together the growing body of evidence to support the health, wellbeing and social benefits of gardening, horticultural therapy and community food growing.

Growing Health is a project run by Garden Organic and Sustain, funded by the Tudor Trust. The vision for the project is for community food growing to become routinely used by health and social care services to deliver health outcomes. The team and the partners are working to raise awareness among health professionals on how food growing can be used and also how to support community projects overcome the barriers hindering them from becoming commissioned.

We have identified examples of community growing projects that are currently working with the health service. Many of them have been documented in case study reports highlighting their achievements, and, importantly, showcasing how more NHS and public health departments could be working with projects like these to achieve their aims. "The case studies show how food growing is being used to deliver health outcomes in both community and health professional led settings" explained Sarah Williams, of the Growing Health team. "We are also starting to see projects being commissioned by the NHS, public health and social care". The case studies cover a variety of settings, from occupational therapy to care farming, to work with people with learning disabilities or dementia.

The Growing Health project has also reviewed the academic literature and published a report full of the evidence of the benefits of gardening and food growing for health and wellbeing (Schmutz et al. 2014). This includes a helpful table with the evidence listed by area of health, covering mental health, physical health as well as treatment and prevention. The key findings have been summarised in three fact sheets covering key areas of health:

- Healthy weights
- Dementia
- Stress and stress related illness

This information presents a compelling case for action by health professionals and the NHS by local authority planners and by communities themselves, to create the environment in which gardening and community

food growing can thrive for the benefit of everyone. It is hoped that this information will help growing groups to get a foot in the door with their local commissioners, GPs or health services or as evidence to support their funding proposals.

The project has been sharing this information through events throughout the country and through the Growing Health Network, as well as with health professional bodies. This year the project has also recruited Growing Health Champions to support the project's mission and to be advocates for the use of community food growing to deliver health and wellbeing. There are now more than 30 Growing Health Champions, a mixture of health professionals and community food growing representatives. If you are involved in a food growing project or are a health/charity professional and interested in becoming a Growing Health Champion, please get in touch.

To download the evidence review, the fact sheets and the case study reports please visit [www.growinghealth.info](http://www.growinghealth.info) or email [growinghealth@sustainweb.org](mailto:growinghealth@sustainweb.org) to join the network or to register your interest in becoming a Growing Health Champion.

### Reference:

Schmutz U., M. Lennartsson, S. Williams, M. Devereaux and G. Davies (2014), *The benefits of gardening and food growing for health and wellbeing*. Garden Organic and Sustain (online) [www.growinghealth.info](http://www.growinghealth.info)

Margi Lennartsson

Growing Health, Garden Organic



### The benefits of gardening and food growing for health and wellbeing

By Garden Organic and Sustain  
Ulrich Schmutz, Margi Lennartsson, Sarah Williams, Maria Devereaux and Gareth Davies  
April 2014



### Sydenham Garden Sydenham, London Borough of Lewisham



### Growing Health Case Study Health area: Mental health and dementia

This series of Growing Health case studies provide examples of projects which use food growing in the community to provide health benefit.

### Case study 1- Sydenham Garden, Lewisham, London

- An excellent example of a community garden promoting physical and mental wellbeing.
- Founded in 2002 by a group of residents, including a local GP, converting a neglected nature reserve into a community garden.
- Commissioned by Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Group to provide therapeutic gardening and creative art sessions for co-workers.
- Weekly sessions for adult mental health groups focusing on recovery and rehabilitation and for people with dementia focusing on improving quality of life and slow dementia symptoms from getting worse.
- Received 269 referrals in the year 2014/15.
- Typical placement lasts 12 months.
- Engaged with 75 regular volunteers in the year 2014/15.

