

STAA Newsletter Oct 2018

If you can't be bothered to read this then here's a summary:

Free Manure to STAA members – first time ever – be IN IT to WIN IT!

AGM is TUESDAY 13th Nov, 7.30pm Half Moon, Sheet

Potato Orders from the Shed – get them in ASAP

Kings Seeds HALF PRICE to STAA members

Plant Swap a great success – thanks to all who made that happen

Website: Many thanks to David Mogg for keeping the website updated with minutes, great recipes and other information. <https://sheetandtilmore.weebly.com/>

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Help Save Our Bees

Thanks for this important information Vanessa Harvey

We all know how important bees are to us. However, I certainly was unaware of how threatened they are until I read this post by Sir David Attenborough:

“ In the last five years the bee population has dropped by a third. If bees were to disappear from the face of the earth, humans would have just four years left to live. This time of year, bees can often look like they are dying or dead. However, they are far from it.

Bees can become tired and they simply don't have enough energy to return to the hive which can often result in them being swept away. If you find a tired bee, a simple solution of sugar and water will help revive an exhausted bee. Mix two tablespoons of white, granulated sugar with one tablespoon of water and put it on a spoon for the bee to reach.”

If the eminent Sir David Attenborough is so concerned about this issue that he made this post, then we all should be very concerned too.

Case Study:

A couple rescued an exhausted bumble bee from a water trough and took it home wrapped in a tissue to dry it off. They fed it the sugar water (it ate lots) and left it on some grass by their wood burner overnight, not feeling very optimistic. However, in the morning it was dry, fluffy and very much alive and flew away strongly.

A Beekeepers View

Bees don't need to be fed, but feeding them a bit of sugar water from a spoon won't do any harm provided this is a one time thing. The problem is that people are starting to leave out bowls full of the stuff, or even adding it to their bird baths.

Beekeepers warn that this can have serious consequences. Bees take short cuts. If they can get sugar easily from a bowl rather than visiting a hundred flowers, they will do that. Upon returning to the hive they'll tell their buddies and the rest of the colony to do the same. Before you know it, you have hundreds of bees.

Not a big deal you say, but not only are the bees visiting your sugar source and not out there pollinating the flowers, but they also store this sugar water in the hive along with the honey. They effectively make watered down honey. That is not good for the bees and nobody wants to buy watered down honey. So the Beekeepers are asking you not to do this.

FIRST EVER SEED and PLANT SWAP 2018

Thank you to everyone who came to the plant swap at Tilmore. It was a cornucopia of cakes, a plethora of plants, a selection of seeds and most importantly - a bunch of amazing allotmenters making it such a huge success. We raised a fantastic £0 and there wasn't a carbon footprint in sight. It doesn't get better than that. Same time same place next year. *Happy planting.*



Thanks so much to Mike & Helen for letting us use their plot and to Julie and Helena for making this wonderful event happen.

Caption Competition

Do we know what Keith is looking at?



Feeling hot, hot, hot

Autumn seems to have arrived. After the heat of the summer and the ongoing lack of rain – this has been a really strange year. There has been no blight and it's the first time in my 5 allotmenting years I have ever seen a tomato plant just die back and go yellow – rather than turning black and having to be burnt. Some of my main crop potatoes are still green and growing and I've hardly dug up any yet. Those I have dug up don't seem to be nibbled very much at all. I always want to dig some up on Christmas Eve but I usually go into an over-excited digging frenzy about now and end up digging them all up.

I have put a secure cage around my Brussel sprouts - they are looking really good right now and I remember a couple of years ago having my sprouts stolen – I think it must have been Christmas morning – I was quite flattered mine were chosen because they were hardly the biggest and best around. It may have been because they were easy to get at, and well hidden. I would like to have seen the person who did it – the one with the apron on, saucepan in hand, a fearful look on their ashen face because they'd forgotten to buy the sprouts. The most appalling scene witnessed in Waitrose last Christmas was of two rather well to do ladies savagely fighting over the last packet of sprouts. Do NOT get involved in sprout wars ladies – it just ain't worth it.

The good thing, really good thing about our long dry summer was that I only had to mow my grass once. Hurrah! Of course, I mowed it really short at the beginning, thinking it would buy me two weeks of no mowing, and then all the grass – and my oregano path – just died. Happily (or not) – it's now all come back with a vengeance, almost overnight. I am no longer startled the strongest things growing are those I'd rather not have on my allotment at all and certainly do not recall planting. Though the marigolds and nasturtiums are a picture right now – and I can always pretend I have potatoes growing under it all.

I mow the paths for my allotments (I have two – though together they add up to one full sized plot – but that gives me quite a lot of edges to mow and clip), plus I do a neighbour's paths and edges because I am kind like that and he grows really nice apples which I scump at will, believing I have earned that right. As I mow and occasionally, fitness allowing, also clip his edges - you would think my neighbour would be extremely grateful - however it would seem not. Rather than marvelling at his neat paths earlier this year, and all the effort I had saved him, he chose to focus on the fact I had accidentally mown through his recently harvested pile of 'I know not what' which had been carelessly left lying in the long grass. I would have known what these award winning vegetables were had they not been so effectively reduced to a mound of finely chopped pie filling – I can only assume my mower is designed by Kenwood.

I didn't really get into a 'groove' with my allotment this year – finding my normal practice of going up there in the afternoons, or early in the morning was just not possible – it was simply too hot. I should have got into the habit of going up there later in the day – maybe after 6pm – that would have worked. In theory you only need an hour a day to keep on top of everything. I know it's been a hard year because I am so enjoying imagining which parts (most of it) I am about to cover with black plastic for the winter. No green manure for me this year – no way – I want to have a peaceful winter, lift the plastic next March and discover weed free, warm and welcoming soil. Don't judge me – it doesn't make me a bad person. I will remind you of the good sense of my cunning plan when we have a really mild few months until December and you are all frantically still weeding and all I'm having to do is hoe my onions.

I am now thinking about this year's (if Oct to Oct = allotment year) crops. The onions and garlic and winter broad beans need to go in soon and I need to work out my rotation plan. I have to say, the club root

resistant brassica pack from Kings Seeds (half price for STAA members – membership £5 – it's a no-brainer!) has been amazing – I have grown 5 cauliflowers and didn't even realise I'd actually planted any – I thought they'd all died. Brassicas eh! They all look the same until they grow a bit. (Note: I am sure there are people who can easily sniff out the difference between a broccoli seedling and a cauliflower seedling – I am NOT one of those people).

My fruit has been strange this year. I had high hopes for a plum (singular), but it shrivelled up and dropped off. I got 3 cooking apples (last year I had loads), and lots of eaters. This is MY apple trees BTW, not my neighbours trees – which I see as emergency back-ups. Elsewhere I had no apples at all. I have been reliably informed this was due to when the tree had blossom as (frost + blossom) = (dead blossom) = (no apples). Makes sense.

Summer raspberries were fine and tasty but my autumn ones were sparse and small and have only just NOW started to show in any great numbers – and now, with the rain they look good but are very watery and tasteless. Currants were magnificent.

The weeds this year have been interesting. I put in a few tall sticks and sure enough, the bindweed all headed for them and climbed straight up – rather than through and around everything else. The only problem was that it looked so nice I didn't pull it out, which is what I should have done. So now I will have a really strong bindweed root system going on in those places it's hard to dig – fruit bushes and the like. I've found with bindweed and Mares Tail (see note below) that as there is no known weed killer even coming close to working, the only way to eventually drive Mares Tail away is to just keep at it. Keep hoeing the Mares Tail away, or pull the Mares Tail (did I mention it's Mares Tail) up with as much root as possible. These weeds are survivors and if persistently attacked will just move away over time (though it would appear that 'over time' could mean about 10 years – not a project for the faint hearted although a real improvement can be seen after just 2 years if you are serious about it). Digging them out can initially suppress it somewhat – though Mares Tail seems to take the dig strategy as a personal challenge and come back really strong and rather annoyed – but digging can never work totally as the roots on these two – particularly Mares Tail - are deliberately brittle. I also read that Mares Tail roots can go down about 15 foot. Therein madness lies.

Happy Allotmenting!

Note: Strictly speaking it's Horses Tail that we have, Mares Tail grows near water – thanks to the very interesting person who gave me that info about our Mares Tail.



Wessex Mill 6 Seed Flour Bread Recipe

Thanks to David Mogg for this great recipe

<https://www.wessexmill.co.uk/index.html>

Ingredients

- 500g Wessex Mill 6 seed bread flour – from the Bran Tub
- 100g Bachelde Watermill organic, stoneground, strong, unbleached white flour (Bran Tub)
- 7g salt
- 21g caster sugar
- 1g vitamin C powder (Holland & Barrett)
- 25g unsalted butter
- 370g lukewarm water; not ice cold out the tap. 390g gives a more open loaf that is a bit too big for our bread-maker
- 1 sachet Allinson Easy-Bake yeast (in a green carton of 6x7g sachets)

Method

I like starting the evening before and setting the timer. It not only means you wake-up to the smell of freshly baked bread but also gives a nicer and slightly bigger loaf that fits our bread-maker.

1. Add the yeast to the bread maker bowl and spread evenly over the bottom, of the bowl that is.
2. Weigh out the flours, salt, caster sugar, vitamin C powder and butter, cutting up the butter into small pieces and mix together well.
3. Put the mix on top of the yeast and add the water.
4. Our settings are: 5:00 hours, Wholewheat, Bake and Large.

The top of the loaf I cut up into 4 bits that make lovely rolls to have with the soups that I make.

Six Seed Bread Flour



Judges comment "The flour performed perfectly and produced a loaf of excellent texture, flavour and crust. The mixture of seeds was well chosen, well judged in quantity, and made for really delicious eating with a most enjoyable finish.."

Ingredients

Wheat Flour, Kibbled Malted

Wheat 8%, Linseed 2.5%, Millet

Seed 2.5%, Poppy Seed 1.5%

Sunflower Seed 1.3% Sesame

Seed 1.3%, Barley Malt Flour

Calcium*, Niacin*, Iron*, Thiamin*