

STAA Newsletter August 2021

I have had requests from people to put an Index at the front so they don't to trawl through all the nonsense, but can just read what interests them.

I can't guarantee the page numbers will be right as I am rather busy online shopping for organic slug and pigeon repellents (is a shotgun organic?), cloches, growing fabrics to keep the heat in and outdoor heat lamps. 'Just in Case' for next year. Hurrah for climate change.

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I did find this organic rodent repellent on my plot last week.



I also intend to install a compost toilet as I plan a 24 hour slug-watch next year.

Hello all Brave Sheet and Tilmore Allotmenters,

To all those who are despairing with the weather we have had this year – these are a couple of extracts from previous years:

July 2017: *The weather has been, and continues to be a challenge. Not long ago it was too hot to be at the allotments, now it's too wet and windy. It's just a race against the weeds and to get everything picked.*

July 2020: *Well it is no mystery why we in the UK are so obsessed with the weather and talk about it constantly. We are in the middle of our 'summer' and I swear we had hail a few weeks ago. I have a car full of different emergency clothes just in case it suddenly goes from freezing cold to blisteringly hot. It is so confusing that we don't seem to have a climate here anymore do we – we simply have weather. And of course, if you don't like the weather right now – just wait 10 minutes.*

So we have had difficult years in the past but I have to say that this year has, without doubt, been the most challenging year weather-wise. Digging and tidying jobs normally done from Sept until March were impossible as it seemed to just rain, snow and be freezing cold the whole time.

So if you have just taken on a plot in the couple of years – just know that it is not usually as difficult as this year has been. We have all had to cram all our work, our planting and efforts into such a short space of time. Nature as well, has responded by suddenly growing everything at once. Bizarre doesn't begin to describe it.

Just so nobody thinks they are alone in the horror of this year, on Page 8 I have listed various problems that even the most seasoned allotmenters have experienced. Feel free to share your own personal allotment experiences on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/staa.petersfield> or on the website <http://sheetandtilmore.weebly.com/>

This years **AGM** is 10th November at the Half Moon, Sheet. The date is set, however, the format may have to be modified so details will be sent out nearer the time.

TILMORE ALLOTMENTS STRUCTURES UPDATE

The Committee are currently actively representing members views regarding the size of allotment structures including sheds, greenhouses, polytunnels and fruit cages. More news will follow.

[Sheet and Tilmore Allotments Association - member survey](#)

We have put together a short survey to help the committee plan their work for the upcoming year. Any suggestions and ideas are welcome and this is your chance to say what you would like from your committee. <https://forms.gle/UmMGvV88AqZ2HqMV9>

STAA COMMITTEE

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After many (many!) years of continuous service to the allotments, our illustrious Chairman is stepping down this year. It goes without saying he is totally irreplaceable however, if anyone has any candidate nominations for this prestigious role then please contact a member of the committee.

Welcome to our new secretary Georgie, who is a force to be reckoned with and was awarded a well deserved full marks for her Wildlife Area.

Welcome also to our new member Margaret whose input is much appreciated.

Also, many thanks to Ros Smith who has done such a wonderful job of the difficult Seed Order task and has now stepped down.

Thanks also go to Steve Elliot for his continued good work particularly in helping Abi manage the Shed – and is now her Shed Husband !

Also big thanks to Abi who has persevered with continued Shed supplier problems – in particular, one lot who apparently had not heard of Google Earth and assumed a massive lorry could negotiate Mill Lane at Sheet with ease. The stock had to be moved from the Half Moon carpark to the Shed by Abi and Steve – who should have called us to help!

Thanks of course to David who set up and maintains the Website and Facebook for us all.

Thanks to all of you who responded to our call for help and have stepped forward to offer support. Much Appreciated. You have all kept us going so that we are able to carry on providing you with all the stock available from Abi at the Shed on Mill Lane, half price seeds from Kings in November; 10% discount from Southern Fruit Trees; public liability for your plot and other wonderful things – all for only £5 a year. See website for details.

<http://sheetandtilmore.weebly.com/>

The **Allotment Competition** had quite a few entrants this year – thanks to everyone who was brave enough to enter and big congratulations to the winners – and to all who entered. It was a close run thing.

RESULTS

SHEET

1ST PLOTS 93/94 STEVE & JOHN ELLIOT

2ND PLOT 47 ROBERT DORAN

3RD PLOT 88 DAVID MOGG

BEST NEWCOMER: PLOT 7 TOM SPRAKE

TILMORE

1ST PLOT 14 FIONA OAKLEY

2ND PLOT 4 ANDY & JO SMITH

3RD PLOT 18A PAUL & DOT BARTON

BEST NEWCOMER: PLOT 29 JAMIE PARKINS

All prizes will be awarded at the AGM in November – location Half Moon Sheet.

Prizes are: £50 cash 1st prize (kindly donated by PTC and SPC), 2nd prize £20 Shed voucher, 3rd prize £10 Shed voucher, Best Newcomer £20 Shed voucher.

Please Note: All Shed vouchers are valid for one year only.

Competition Scoring Criteria

Contrary to popular belief, the judging of the allotments is not just based on us standing, pointing and saying “Ooooh, isn’t that a great plot, let’s give it a prize.”

We do have categories, specific maximum marks for each, and the awarding of those marks is rather strict. The Chairman is rather strict – even when we are confronted with a plot that is clearly not going to score a great deal, he will insist we mark it and record those marks.

VARIETY OF PRODUCE {max 12 marks}

Half a mark is given for every different thing that is being grown. I should point out that potatoes are potatoes – you will only ever get half a mark for potatoes, regardless of how many different types you have. Similarly, squash is squash, beans are beans, fruit trees are fruit trees. If you really do have something extraordinary then just drop us a message to tell us – you can always point things out in case they might be missed because they look like something else. Complaining after your plot has been judged may not be the best strategy. You could also LABEL things.

QUALITY OF PRODUCE (max 20 marks)

Size, lushness, full rows. This varies every year of course and interestingly, we have noticed that brassicas in particular generally seem to do far better at Sheet than Tilmore.

PLAN (max 10 marks)

You do need a rotation plan: potatoes, alliums, brassicas are the main ones which could end up with disease if always planted in the same place. The Chairman will look to see if plants in these categories are grouped together and being rotated.

COMPOST HEAPS (max 10 marks)

You need 3 compost heaps for max marks here. One current, one ‘cooking’ and one being used for compost. Covering the one that’s cooking is a good idea – or grow a squash or courgette in it.

CLEANLINESS (max 20 marks)

A high scoring category because it really is important to keep your plot clear of weeds that rob your soil of nutrients and will seed onto other people’s plots.

This can be a tricky one – because ‘what is a weed?’ - companion planting can be so beneficial. So if you are growing clover or nasturtiums round your brassicas to confuse the cabbage white butterfly, you still need to make sure there are no other random weeds in there.

The Chairman tires easily and may forget what he is doing if he has to hunt for your produce amongst lots of flowers and other plants.

PATHS (max 10 marks)

We all have edges that need to be kept under control and defined, and if you have paths on your plot then they also need to be clear and well defined.

WILDLIFE AREA (max 10 marks)

Pollinating flowers (not random weeds) and in a clearly defined area. You will also get marks for displaying a 'No Pesticides' sign, for bird feeders, insect houses, a pond, water for hedgehogs & insects, comfrey and/or comfrey feed.

A few cheeky ploholders, on receiving a letter from the council/parish suggesting they may benefit from tidying their plot a bit, claimed it was a wildlife area. Full marks for effort but sadly non cultivation is not what we are encouraging.

Tomatoes Not Ripening

Lately I have been binge-listening Gardeners Question Time and took notes on this interesting topic.

Main points:

- * The weather was hot and then went so much cooler – so that didn't help.
- * Don't overfeed tomatoes – give them a high potash fertilizer every 2 weeks. NOT a general purpose fertilizer and don't over manure the ground as too much nitrogen stops them from going red (Ooooh - who knew!).
- * Slowly reduce the amount of watering.
- * Take all the lower leaves off so the light can get to the fruit.
- * Top them out, pinch out the growing tip and get the plants to focus on the existing fruit.
- * If all else fails, take off the green tomatoes and put them in a bowl with ripe tomatoes and/or a nice ripe banana or apple.
Apparently you do this when the tomatoes have gone from greeny-white, to greeny-green. If you do it when they are greeny-white they won't ripen.

Annus Horribilis

One could indeed describe this as a 'disastrous or unfortunate' year. Though if we'd had a bit of warning then it would have been fine – after all, our crops have had plenty of rain and some really nice growing weather. Problem is – we never do have any warning about these things – like a lot of stuff that happens, it has just not been at all what we expected. Even the best of us have been blind-sided this year.

All the right conditions but not necessarily in the right order !

The judging was not the usual jolly experience with the Chairman tripping over fences and rolling in muddy puddles, and us being accosted by angry ploholders demanding a recount, however there was much impressive innovation. There was also, sadly an air of desperation – some plots reminded us of the Marie Celeste with wheelbarrows, spades and watering cans abandoned as though someone had thrown their hands in the air and simply walked away sobbing.

Plus, of course, the terrible devastation that is potato and tomato blight which had swept through everywhere without mercy. It was all very upsetting.

Where brave souls had managed to battle the weather, keep on top of things and not loose their nerve, the standard was high and the results impressive.

I really cannot remember a year when the weather has affected so many people. Being a relative newcomer of 8 years, I was astounded to see how many really seasoned allotment holders have struggled this year to keep up with things. So if you have just taken on an allotment, do not despair – it has been a really difficult year for many people and is not usually like this.

Normally I would have spent Oct to Mar digging, replanting and sorting things out. However, the weather was so awful - cold, wet and windy - that I didn't start until the end of March. Then it was just a race to get things in but the ground was still cold and we reckon (Gardeners World agrees) the planting and growth was all around 6 weeks behind.

Some horror stories I have gleaned that you may relate to:

Runner beans put straight into the ground simply vanished or didn't germinate at all. Those sown inside to bring them on a bit were getting so leggy that they had to be put out even though the weather and the ground was still so cold – so they didn't do well. The only success has been to leave the sowing until later in the year and those seem to have done well.

There were far too many slugs and what they didn't eat was gobbled up by hungry pigeons.

Many people's onions ended up with badly twisted leaves and many of them just dying. I am told this was probably onion fly.

One person put their onion sets in THREE times before he felt he was succeeding with them.

Many of my white onions went to seed and I had a really poor crop from the rest. I will mostly be doing a lot of pickled onions they were so small.

NB: Interestingly, one person who grew their onions from seed reported absolutely no issues at all and a good healthy and hearty crop.

There didn't seem to be too many of those black aphids on the broad beans this year, however, they were late and got far too leggy with that burst of warmth after all that rain, then the high winds came through and blew them all over. Nice crop though.

Brassicas grown outside were really late germinating and will hopefully catch up now once the pigeons leave them alone.

The sweet corn for many people just hasn't had the growing season that it needs this year. Not enough prolonged sunshine.

Then of course, we have all had the dreaded potato and tomato blight Even in greenhouses at people's homes it has blown into every corner. Hardly surprising as it was so wet and then humid – ideal conditions We have been very lucky to not have blight at all the last few years.

I found the lettuces, spinach and chard all went to seed really fast, I spent much time cutting off the thick flower stalks to prolong their edible lives but lost the battle in the end.

A lot of things rotted in the ground, vanished or ended up looking really sad and sorry.

There was plenty of growing going on but it seemed to be all at the wrong time.

Even though the potatoes got the blight and all the growing leaves had to be cut off, the potatoes themselves have been wonderful. Those that weren't attacked and eaten in the ground.

A Good Tip

Avoid pulling your compost bin towards you to loosen, remove and empty it.

This occurred to me whilst lying, pinned down by my still full, heavy compost bin as I spat out bits of compost. Presumably my mouth had been wide open in a silent scream as I fell backwards.

Mushrooms

We have had lots of mushrooms & fungi and Gardeners World have said this shows lovely organic soil and they will help everything break down. So that's something optimistic. If you really don't like the look of them then just scrape them away and throw them on your compost heap.

The weed mantra . . .

- It's only another type of green manure
- A weed is just something growing in the wrong place
- Shows my soil is good (tricky as we all know a determined weed will grow on a plastic bag)
- Plant as much as you can and crowd the weeds out
- Cover dug soil with black plastic or cardboard – slows weeds, warms soil and makes me look like I have a plan

One Person Can Make a Difference

Last year, my plot gave an incredible poppy & foxglove display and the amount of insects and wildlife on it was overwhelmingly wonderful. So many busy bees I can't tell you.

Julie at the bottom had stag beetles – just through getting the council to NOT spray her part of the boundary fence. She also had hardly any slugs and snails as she had an abundance of beetles on her plot which eat all the eggs.

There are very practical reasons for letting those wild flowers grow, because research has shown if you present insects with a straight line of cabbages, of course they will find them and lay their eggs on them – but if your cabbages are surrounded by nasturtiums etc – there's a 90% chance the cabbage white won't find them – read the article, the results may surprise you.



Confusing or repelling pests is one of the main goals of companion planting.

By monitoring several common pests of cabbage family plants including diamondback moths, cabbage white butterflies and cabbage root fly, they discovered that growing

cabbages and other brassicas among clover resulted in fewer eggs being laid on the edible crop. This ranged from a 60% reduction in eggs laid by diamondback moths, to a more than 90% reduction for cabbage moths.

And it doesn't have to be clover!

Findings suggest that insects will land on any green surface in their quest for a plant that they can lay their eggs on or around. If they often land on plants that don't interest them, they conclude that they're wasting their time and will skedaddle to a more favourable location . . . like that beautifully hoed clear line of cabbages on your neighbour's plot!!

<https://www.growveg.co.uk/guides/confuse-pests-with-companion-planting/>



Of course, having wild flowers around your crops is NOT the same as just letting all the weeds grow. It does have to be organised and cultured. An area of 'jungle' in the corner of your plot which you haven't done anything with, is not necessarily able to be claimed to be a wildlife area. Especially if it is not clearly marked as such.

GALLERY OF OPTIMISM



THANKS GEORGIE AND ABI FOR THESE PLOT TRIUMPHS IN SUCH A TERRIBLE YEAR.

As the whole growing season seems to have slipped, I have included RHS August jobs as they are still ongoing for many people.

Aug	Sept	Oct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water well during dry spells. Irregular watering can lead to problems with blossom end rot in tomatoes, splitting of root vegetables • Plant out rooted strawberry runners. • In the south of England you can still sow quick maturing salad crops such as summer lettuce, radish, rocket, sorrel, chicory and fennel. • Continue to sow spring cabbage, turnips, Oriental vegetables and overwintering onions, in the south of England. • Sow green manures such as crimson clover and Italian ryegrass to act as a soil improver and to cover bare areas. When dug in, they conserve nutrients and improve soil texture. • Check plants regularly for aphids and deal with them as soon as you see them. • Look out for tomato and potato blight and deal with it as soon as you spot it. • Watch tomatoes for blossom end rot, and other ripening problems. • Look out for fungal spots on bean and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue planting new strawberry beds. • Continue to sow vegetables for overwintering, to mature next spring, including: turnip, spinach, winter lettuce, Oriental vegetables. • Plant overwintering onion sets. • Spring cabbages sown last month are probably ready for planting out. Cover with fleece or netting to stop the pigeons • Sow green manures such as crimson clover and Italian ryegrass to act as a soil improver and to cover bare areas. • Cut back old canes of blackberries and hybrid berries after fruiting and tie in the new canes. • Prune blackcurrants. • Watch tomatoes for blossom end rot, and other ripening problems. • clear debris when lifting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October is a good time for digging over vacant areas of the vegetable plot, as the approaching cold weather may help to improve the soil structure by breaking down large clumps into crumbly particles. • Plant cranberries and lingonberries. • Take cuttings of blueberries, currants and gooseberries and dig up rooted layers of black- and hybrid berries. • In mild areas you can sow overwintering broad beans in situ. Cover broad beans with fleece or cloches to provide insulation in colder areas, and pigeon protection. • Carrots and peas can still be sown in cold frames, but only in mild areas. • Plant out spring cabbages if not already done. Remember to net them for protection from pigeons. • Finish planting autumn onion sets for a crop in early to mid-summer next year. • Plant garlic cloves. • green manures can still be sown until the middle of the month. • Cut back the dying tops of Jerusalem artichokes to ground level. • Cut back asparagus foliage if not already done last month.

<p>pea pods and leaves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove any sweetcorn cobs affected by smut. • Carrot fly is still about. • Check stored onions for softness and the grey or black mould of neck rot. • Deal with brown rot on tree fruit. • Protect grapes from wasps. • Deal with powdery mildew on grapes and melons. • Weeds can also compete with vegetables for water, and act as hosts for pests and diseases, so remove regularly by hoeing. • Marrows should be raised off the ground slightly, to prevent them discolouring from contact with the soil. • Continue earthing up celery, putting a layer of paper between the stems and the soil. • Take care when thinning out any late-sown carrot seedlings to prevent the scent released attracting carrot fly females. 	<p>potatoes, and take care not to damage the tubers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect grapes from wasps. • When asparagus foliage turns brown, it is time to cut it down. Take care of the spines, and give the plants a good mulch afterwards. • Irregular watering can lead to blossom end rot in tomatoes, splitting of root vegetables and flower drop in runner beans. Water well during dry spells. • Keep up with watering winter squash and pumpkins to prevent their growth from being checked. Use stored rainwater wherever possible. • Celery can be earthed-up for the final time this month, leaving just a tuft of foliage sticking out of the trench or collar in order to blanch the stems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check stored apples regularly for rotting fruit and remove. • Brussels sprouts - remove yellowing leaves to prevent grey mould • Remove all plant debris from the vegetable patch or allotment, to reduce the spread and the overwintering of disease and pests. • Place mouse controls near your stored vegetables. • Flea beetle can still be a problem until the end of October. • Control winter moth with grease bands. • Remove damaged stems from stone fruits and paint the wounds. • Take cuttings of blueberries, currants and gooseberries and dig up rooted layers of black- and hybrid berries. • Dig up outdoor tomato plants and hang them upside-down in the greenhouse to allow the fruits to ripen. Any that don't ripen can be used green in chutneys. • Now is a good time to get ahead and prepare new asparagus beds for planting up in the spring. • When clearing old pea and bean plants, simply cut off the tops for the compost heap, and dig the roots into the soil. They return valuable nitrogen to the earth, acting as a natural fertiliser.
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Editors' Note: Lifted from <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/in-month/july> etc.