

The Grapevine

Newsletter of the Finchley Horticultural Society



Community News

Information to plot holders on all three of our allotment sites:

Invoices for 2021

Invoices to plot holders for 2021 will be sent by email in January. Please check with the Secretary that we have your correct email address if you have changed your address recently. Payment will be accepted by bank transfer and by cheque but we are no longer accepting cash. We will remind you again with a Mailchimp email in January, but the invoice will come from the FHS gmail account. You will not need to print the invoice, but if you are sending a cheque to Chris Ouseley, please put your name, the amount and invoice number on the back of the cheque. If you don't receive an invoice please let your allotment secretary know.

New Fence

We hope that Paul will start on the installation of the new fence along Gordon Road in February. This will finish the job of installing new fencing around the whole of the Gordon Road site making it much more secure. Paul will also work on the gate posts to make them stronger and better fitting.

The Allotment Committee is planting a native hedge along the fence by Dollis Road to shield the allotments from public view and to provide food and shelter for wildlife. The hedge will be made up of holly, blackthorn, whitethorn.

The 2021 AGM

The AGM for 2021 will be held on March 23rd 2021 and will be held on zoom. It's a shame we won't be able to get together in the usual way, but we're in COVID times. We'll send the relevant documents nearer the time as well as instructions on how to join the zoom meeting.

Winter is here

The difficult year 2020 is finally over. I daresay most of us will be glad to see it go. Yet, if anything, it brought home to us the wonderful resource that our allotments are to us. Throughout the different stages of lockdown, we have been able to visit our plots, enjoy the sunshine (and occasional downpour), chat (at a safe distance) with our neighbours, grow a wonderful variety of flowers, herbs, vegetables and fruit and even donate loads of surplus produce to the Felix Project, a London-based organisation that redistributes food to schools, care homes and charities helping the most vulnerable in our society. Hopefully, we can now look forward to 2021, with two vaccines approved and the vaccination programme started. This does not mean lowering our guard, though: with the new, more infectious strain of COVID-19 spreading very fast, it is more important than ever to keep ourselves and others safe by wearing a mask and gloves, using sanitiser and keeping a safe distance from other plot holders.

There is talk of the 'Beast from the East' again this year, but I am confident that it will not deter our resilient and resourceful plot holders who are already preparing for the next growing season. They are out there, in all weathers, tidying up, digging in manure, spreading wood chips on paths, sowing first seeds in cold frames and greenhouses.

A marvellous group of volunteers that included Rowena, Jo, Fumiko, Christine, Philip, Mark and Louise cleared the Plant Sale space in front of the polytunnel, lined it and built new raised beds that will house an even greater variety of plants for the Plant Sale (see the pictures below). We are hoping to be able to hold the Sale next spring though nobody can predict how things will pan out. Christine and Catherine will be asking for volunteers to help with planting and potting on next year.

The pandemic has also led to many creative solutions in a difficult situation. As gardens in the National Garden Scheme had to close to visitors, they moved online to enable virtual visits. There is nothing to match a visit in person but you may still enjoy some of the magic and pick up some useful gardening tips (see information below):



The National Garden Scheme

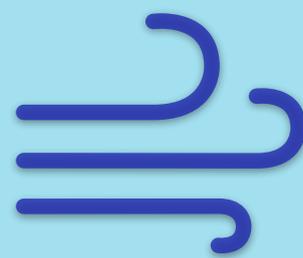
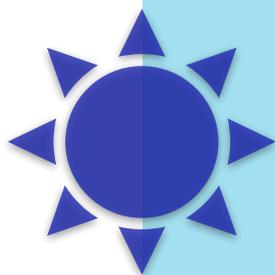
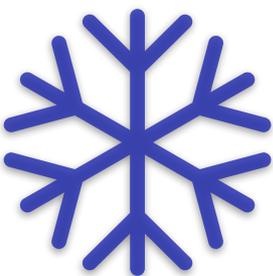
Enjoy our library of Virtual Garden Visits over the winter months

We have over 200 virtual garden visits for you to explore over the festive break, showcasing the truly wonderful types of gardens that open for the scheme. Shared above is Warton Gardens, Lancashire, a group of gardens that truly embodies the spirit of the National Garden Scheme - quality gardens packed full of fabulous planting and inspirational ideas and owners and with a strong passion for community, wildlife and wellbeing.

[Browse all our Virtual Garden Visits](#)

Excitement is building for our 2021 snowdrop openings with over 90 gardens displaying these winter beauties. Garden owner Avril Hughes has been fascinated by snowdrops ever since a friend bought her a selection over ten years ago. Here, she shares her excitement and insights for the snowdrop season ahead...

[Snowdrop tips from a garden owner](#)



Winter allows for a planned transition from autumn to spring

by Shoko Higashitsuji

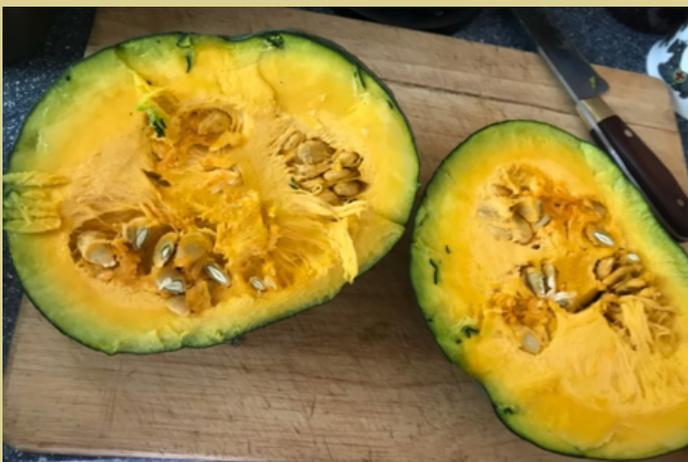
Autumn harvest

Fumiko and I had a lot of success with growing squash this year; this is a variety of squash called 'Blue Kuri' which can be ordered from the catalogue that can be picked up at the allotment. This variety of Kabocha squash is grown in the northern area of Japan, in Hokkaido, and has a subtle sweet taste. A recipe that I particularly love is Kabocha cheesecake, as it retains the flavour of the squash well and it does not use much sugar as sweetness comes from the squash. There are so many varieties of pumpkin and squash to choose from so why not grow different varieties and swap with each other next year!

Recommended recipe for sweet squash: Kabocha Cheesecake:

200g Kabocha squash
60g sugar
200g cream cheese (room temperature)
100g double cream
2 Eggs (beaten, room temperature)

After measuring 200g of squash, heat it in the microwave for around 5 minutes and mash. Add sugar, cream cheese, double cream, and eggs to the mixture and mix well. When there are no lumps, put the mixture in a tin and bake at 170°C for 35 minutes.



Getting ready for the next season

Although it is cold and daylight hours are short, there is still plenty of things you can do to make the most of your plot in the coming season, many of which you can do from the comfort of your home. You could start by planning your plot, and ordering your seeds if you haven't done so already; it's important to rotate your crops in order to avoid pests and diseases developing. You can begin to sow your seeds inside, in a warm area by the window sill or in a greenhouse. Depending on the weather, salad leaves can be sown as early as February, and will be ready to pick in early spring. If it is not too cold outside it is also a good time to start digging.

It is also important to finish pruning fruit trees before spring comes; for apple and pear trees, cut back long branches as excessive growth will lead to a congested canopy and less productivity. Aim to create a goblet shape with plenty of space for light to reach the centre of the tree. Avoid pruning too much, as regrowth will produce stronger branches. Aim to prune up to 20% of the canopy, and even if it is tempting to go further, it is better to leave the rest to the following year. As for soft fruit such as raspberries, canes from the previous season should be cut to ground level, leaving a few of the strongest canes to prune just the tips off.



Juvenile Robin on the allotments.

10:13 ✓

Birds on the allotment - Guy Cook

Birds are a nuisance. Magpies pick at young seedlings; Blackbirds strip off berries; Wood Pigeons - the worst culprits - do both. Preventing them means more work, extra expense, and constant vigilance. Surely we would be better off without them.

But it is not so simple. There are also helpful Robins pecking up the bugs we uncover, as Starlings also do. There are also Great, Blue, Coal, and Long-tailed Tits; good numbers of Goldfinches, occasional Chaffinches. None of these do any harm. And every year there is a pair of Mistle Thrushes around the trading hut.

As a large open space, our allotments also offer a splendid view of the sky. Jackdaws commute from the Dollis Road viaduct and the North Finchley Arts Centre. Swifts circle overhead in the summer. There is a significant array of passing birds of prey including regular Sparrowhawks, the odd Kestrel, an occasional Hobby, Buzzard or Red Kite. Two years ago a migrating Osprey passed southward over Finchley, logged at every stage of its journey by the capital's many enthusiastic birders. We also border Dollis Brook, where there are Kingfishers, Grey Herons, Moorhens, and Mallards along the stream, and Nuthatches, Treecreepers, Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers in the trees, and Tawny Owls for those who like gardening at night! There are more recent arrivals too: the bright noisy high-speed Ring-necked Parakeets, and the elegant snow-white Little Egrets which live on the Dollis Brook, and can be seen occasionally flying along the edge of the allotments. This beautiful species was once nearly hunted to extinction in Britain to provide feathers for Victorian ladies' hats. In response, in 1889, Emily Williamson, a lady who did *not* want these feathers in her hat, founded the Society for the Protection of Birds (SPB), the precursor of today's RSPB.

So there is plenty to see. But all birds are in real trouble. The overall UK bird population has dropped by an estimated 40 million since 1970. Some species we ought have on our allotments have disappeared. You will not see a Greenfinch (down 67% since 2007), or a Spotted Flycatcher (down 77% since 1999) - both once common birds. Only a few years ago Collared Doves, which also damage our crops, were one of the commonest birds in this area. Now they are hardly ever seen. The same is true for Bullfinches (down 53% since 1999) once regarded as a pest. On the timescale of evolution these rates of decline are truly alarming. Birds have been on earth for around a hundred million years; now populations plummet in just a few years.

So we should not be complacent, even about our established enemies such as the Magpies and Wood Pigeons. Even they can disappear over time. We should treasure and preserve all our birds, even while protecting our crops against some of them. There is a lot we can do. We can stop using chemical weedkillers and insecticides which damage bird populations indirectly - this could be allotment policy. We can put up bird feeders, plant bird friendly plants. Maybe even tolerate the Magpies and Wood Pigeons too.



Little Egret.

10:15 ✓

The Wildlife Plot by Helen Skelton

The wildlife plot is found near the entrance to the Gordon Road Allotments. Recently, Edo Kace, Ekta Shah and Helen Skelton have volunteered to help manage and develop this area. It currently contains two apple trees, a bramble patch and 2 small ponds.

The aim of the plot is to:

- 1) Encourage a diverse range of helpful predators that will help control pests on the site
- 2) Create places for pollinators to feed and breed e.g. hoverflies, bumble bees
- 3) Contribute to the care of protected species we have on the site e.g. slow worms with an aim to encouraging other such species
- 4) Enhance the contribution to Biodiversity made by the Gordon Road Allotments
- 5) Set a standard of good practice for other Barnet Allotment sites.

We are hoping to build a large bug hotel, (Edo is hoping to use his DIY skills to convert some pallets), and we also want to convert the small ponds into bog gardens. Ekta is hoping to plant Blue Flag Iris, Pilwort, Rigid Hornwort, Frogbit which she has identified as being beneficial to aquatic life. If anyone is able to donate these plants please contact Helen on helenskelton1964@gmail.com.

Helen has a bat box to donate to the allotments though a good position needs to be identified for it. She is hoping to plant more plants for pollinators as well as some native berry bushes for birds. She recently planted some crocuses to provide nectar early in the spring (hoping that the squirrels have not eaten them).

We also hope to survey the plants and wildlife that can be found on the site - more information on how we will do this to follow.



We are looking for a volunteer to take over managing the FHS website. <http://www.finchleyhorticulturalsociety.org.uk/>

Experience of Wordpress welcome but not essential. Tasks would include uploading the newsletter, 4 times a year and updating the news and events page. And of course any suggestions for improving the website always welcome.

For more information contact Judy Woollett via finchleyhorticulturalsociety@gmail.com

More things to do in January, as advised by Sara Raven

Bulbs and Tubers

Check your stored dahlias periodically for signs of disease or rot. Any individual tubers infected can be cut from the main crown of the plant and the cut area dusted with flowers of sulphur.

Weeds

Keep on top of winter-germinating weeds. Early weeds such as *bittercress* and *groundsel* will germinate and grow fast in mild spells over the next few weeks. Tackle these as they appear with a hoe or rake.

Spread a layer of compost around shrubs and along the base of hedges

Plan the veg you want to grow this year

Cover ground to keep out the wet.

Sow Swiss chard under cover.

Place netting over brassicas to protect them from pigeons.

Pick off yellowing leaves from the stems of *Brussels sprouts*.

Sow *leeks*, *onions*, *broad beans*, *hardy peas*, *spinach* and *carrots* under cover.

Sow greenhouse *tomatoes* for early crop.

Use cloches or clear plastic to warm the soil for early sowings.

Chit early *seed potatoes*.

Sow some crunchy *radishes*, and you'll have a salad feast within 6-8 weeks.

Herbs

You can sow some herbs under cover now too - really hardy annuals and biennials such as *chervil*, *parsley* and *coriander*. Wash the *parsley seeds* in warm water the night before you want to sow them and then lay them out to dry on kitchen paper overnight. This washes off the germinator inhibitor in the seed coat and will give you a harvest in a shorter time.

Dig up and pot up roots of *mint* to force early shoots.

There are a few perennial herbs that you could start off now too - French sorrel, *chives*, lovage and leaf fennel. There's no hurry on these, but with a little bottom heat, they will germinate fine and get you ahead.

Fruit

Cover *rhubarb* plants with forcers as soon as they show signs of growth. This will encourage early and very tender stems.

If it's not too frosty, you can plant *fruit bushes* and trees now too.

Prune grape vines now, before the sap starts to rise. Vines can bleed profusely if you leave pruning too late and this will eventually weaken the plant. All new growth should be reduced back to one (gives you bigger bunches), or two buds to each spur, with the spurs tied in firmly. Also, using a blunt knife, scrape all the loose bark from the main vine stems and around the spurs. This does two things - it gets rid of overwintering pests and allows new shoots to grow through more easily in the spring.

Continue planting fruit trees and winter-pruning of *apples and pears*.

Cut down canes of autumn-fruiting *raspberries* to soil level.

Bring potted *strawberries* under cover for an earlier crop.

Established *blackcurrants* should be pruned now: take out a third of two year, or older, wood down to the base. Mature *redcurrants* and *whitecurrants* can have their side shoots shortened to one bud, and the tip of the main branch pruned.

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Member of the Barnet Federation of
Allotment and Horticultural Societies
Affiliated to the
Royal Horticultural Society

Newsletter

If you received a paper copy of this newsletter
and are now able to receive it by e-mail, please
inform Christine Williams,
finchleyhorticulturalsociety@gmail.com
This saves us time and money.

Events Diary

AGM 23rd March 2021 7.30 Zoom

**Book 2021 Flower Show
tickets this autumn:**

RHS Malvern Spring Festival
(6-9 May)

RHS Chelsea Flower Show
(18-22 May)

RHS Hampton Palace Court
Garden Festival
(5-11 July)

RHS Flower Show Tatton Park
(21-25 July)

Look out for on-sale dates in the
members' e-newsletter or visit
rhs.org.uk/shows

In order to run Covid-secure shows
in 2021 the RHS have introduced
enhanced measures across all their
sites to ensure that these primary
outdoor events can operate safely
for everyone.



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