

The Grapevine

Newsletter of the Finchley Horticultural Society



SPRING 2021

The Long Awaited Spring

Spring is finally here. It is off to a slow start with temperatures stubbornly keeping to around 9-11 degrees and plenty of rain and cold winds. But nothing is so beautiful as spring, and no-one better to put it than Gerard Manley Hopkins, of course. Here is an extract from his poem *Spring* that really captures the miracle of this season.

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring –

When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;

Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush

Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring

The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;

The glassy pear tree leaves and blooms, they brush

The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush

With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling...

We have been under what seems like an endless lockdown and we are all so eager to go out and embrace the spring, soak in the sun and meet up with friends. The vaccination campaign is moving apace and will hopefully allow us to socialise more but in the meantime we need to be careful. The travel ban is still in place and the government does not recommend booking those long-dreamt of holidays yet. Well, at least we have the plots to look after and enjoy. Surely, one advantage of the travel ban will be the redoubled energy and time spent by the plot holders on their allotments.

Because of the restrictions still in place, the popular Plant Sale this year will not open its doors to the general public in the usual way. However, as the plants that are being grown become available we shall put out a Mailchimp like we did last year and plot holders will be able to order the plants they want from the available selection. In the meantime, perennial plants can be purchased by members of the public individually on Sunday mornings.

The articles in the *Spring Issue* of the *Grapevine* are about the beauty and fragility of nature and about the role we can all play in preserving it by sustainable and organic cultivation of our plots.

Volunteers are Needed for the Trading Hut

We are looking for volunteers to help run the Sunday Trading Hut. The Hut is open every Sunday from 10.30 am to 12.30 am.

A number of people offered their services last year which was greatly appreciated. If you have some time to spare on a Sunday morning, please contact Tuuli Taylor on 07505365009.

The New Seed Swapping Scheme

There is now a box in the Green Room at Gordon Road where members can donate unwanted seeds and/or help themselves to any seeds that take their fancy. Come and have a look!

The 2021 AGM

The 2021 AGM took place by zoom on 23 March. Among the matters discussed were measures that would allow us to become even 'greener': a proposal to terminate the allotment bonfires (alternatives for disposing of pruned wood etc. to be considered) and a move to peat-free compost sold by the Trading Hut and used by our plant growers. The Royal Horticultural Society already stopped selling peat-based bagged compost in 2019, and from 2025 plants sold in its retail outlets and on display at its shows will be peat-free. For more information on peat-free composts see the RHS website: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/Search?query=peat%20free%20compost>

The Padlock

Some plot holders at Gordon Road have experienced problems with the gate padlock. In case of emergency, if you find yourself locked in/out, please contact Tony Ingram on 07967 274739.

Dollis Brookers

A group of volunteers have set up 'Friends of Dollis Brook' - the Dollis Brookers. We will start by tackling litter next to and in the stream, as well as dog fouling. As things develop we also hope to tackle pollution in the stream. Dollis Brookers are going to join forces with the Friends of Windsor Open Space and Darlands Conservation Trust. If you are interested, please look us up on Twitter: #DollisBrookers, on the NextDoor app - or better still, contact Jeffrey Newman jeffrey@jnewman.org.uk , tel. 07866 546673.

Kitchen Waste Collection

An online petition has been launched on the LBB website to re-start kitchen waste collection in Barnet. If you share my conviction that the scheme is an important environmental measure (food waste used to be incinerated and turned into wonderful compost for the allotment sites instead of going into landfills together with the rest of household rubbish), please sign the petition. Barnet only allow a few weeks for each petition before they remove them from their website.

<http://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/mgEPetitionDisplay.aspx?id=138>



Cherry Blossom

by *Shoko Higashitsuji*

Cherry blossoms are a big part of Japanese culture, and flowering and blooming dates are forecast and announced every year during this season. They play such an important role in Japanese culture because they are considered to be a symbol of spring, and the impermanence of beauty as these flowers only bloom for a short period of time.



Cherry trees in Arashiyama, Kyoto

There are many cherry blossom viewing locations across the country, and there is a traditional custom of 'Hanami' which means 'flower viewing' and consists in looking at and enjoying cherry blossoms in full bloom. This is usually done with friends and family, often while having a picnic. Cherry blossom festivals are also held throughout the country at these viewing spots, where food stalls and bars serve food and drink, and light-up the blossoms at night. This year however, these festivals have been cancelled due to COVID restrictions.



Seiryouji Temple, Kyoto

The most common variety of cherry tree found in Japan is the Somei Yoshino. This tree produces pale pink flowers with five petals. This variety has also been imported to the UK from Japan.



Weeping Cherry Tree (Shidarezakura), in front of Hankyu-Arashiyama station

There are also cherry tree varieties native to the UK: Bird Cherry and Wild Cherry. The Bird Cherry produces clusters of small white flowers and black fruits, and the Wild Cherry produces similar flowers to the Yoshino, but its fruits are bright red.

Photos by the author

With the ongoing loss of biodiversity everywhere, including our allotments, it is increasingly important to stop using harmful chemicals and resort to natural methods of combatting pests and improving soil health and quality. Here are some of the methods to try this year.

COMPANION PLANTING

Companion planting is a traditional method that is often used in vegetable growing. Specific plants or herbs are planted alongside vegetables to protect them or improve their growth in three ways:

- A companion plant attracts beneficial insects to the vegetable patch, for example bees which will aid pollination to give you a bigger crop.
- A companion plant is planted as a "sacrificial crop" because it is attractive enough to lure pests (such as caterpillars) away from your vegetables and onto the companion plant instead.
- A companion plant is grown among the vegetables to specifically repel pests.

Here are some ideas for companion planting:



- **Borage**, or **Burgloss**, a lovely Mediterranean plant loved by bees can lure blackfly away from your beans. It can prevent attack from tomato hornworm and it is also said to improve the flavour of strawberries if planted nearby.



- **Calendula**, or **Marigold**, protects tomatoes against whitefly and lures aphids away from beans.
- Grow **Red Campion** to attract blackfly away from your broad beans.

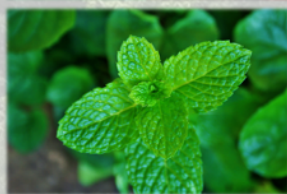


- **Comfrey** is a brilliant plant for attracting pollinators to your beds. It provides good protection against aphids and makes a wonderful mulch or liquid fertiliser for fruiting plants such as tomatoes or gooseberries that have a very high potassium demand. Watch Monty Don making a comfrey feed here <https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to-grow-plants/how-to-make-a-comfrey-feed/>



- **Coriander**, **Dill** and flowering **Parsley** attract natural predators such as hoverflies, ladybirds and lacewings which feed on pests such as aphids and cutworms and repel red spider mite. Parsley is also said to repel asparagus beetle.





- **Fennel**, if left to flower, produces yellow flowers that attract hoverflies that prey on aphids
- **Lavender** attracts a range of pollinators, while its strong scent can deter aphids. Plant with carrots and leeks to confuse pests.
- **Marigolds and Tagetes** are also useful companion plants in fighting aphids and greenfly. Planting Marigolds among tomatoes is one of the most well-known methods of companion planting. They also look pretty and attract bees for pollination.
- **Mint** –essential oil in chopped up mint leaves repels mice and rats; they can also be sprinkled around the base of carrots. The scent is said to mask the scent of carrots and thus deter the carrot root fly. Another effective way for dealing with carrot fly is to interplant carrots with Onions, Chives or Garlic whose smell repels the fly. Mint is also said to keep ants away from you veg patch.
- Loads of **Nasturtiums** can be grown as a sacrificial crop to the caterpillars of the cabbage white butterfly that are so fond of your brassicas as well as lure aphids away from French and runner beans.
- **Sage** has a strong scent which confuses pests of brassicas if planted alongside them. Its flowers attract bees and hoverflies, which also pollinate crops.
- **Thyme** makes a good companion for roses and beans as it deters blackfly. A tea made of thyme leaves and sprayed on cabbages can prevent whitefly.
- **Wormwood** also deters aphids and flea beetles away from neighbouring plants, as well as attracting aphids' predators - hoverflies, lacewings and ladybirds.

NO-DIG POTATOES (as inspired by Charles Dowding)

Traditional potato cultivation involves quite intensive soil tillage; it is hard on your back and it is hard on your soil. If you want to be kind both to yourself and to the environment, why not try the no-dig method that is gaining momentum all over the world.

The method is quite simply to grow the potatoes in an undug flat bed. The soil should be in good condition and not be compacted, so avoid walking on it by working from the side of the bed.

Ground preparation

The ground preparation is exactly the same as for any other vegetable. The best thing about this method is that you do not need to dig a trench. What you have is simply undisturbed, undug soil with mulch on top. For mulch you can use the compost you have made yourself or spent mushroom compost, well rotted leaf mould, well rotted woodchips or straw. The layer does not have to be too deep – a 10-15 cm (trowel deep) layer is sufficient.

Types of potatoes

There are three main types of potatoes – first earlies, earlies and main crop. FE are the ones that mature quickly and are often ready in June, second earlies come a month later, and the main crop potatoes follow a month or two later. First earlies finish growing in June and are ready to be picked. There is no point in keeping them in the ground much longer as they are not going to grow any more and will be damaged by slugs and rats/mice.



When to grow

The best time to plant potatoes is early April, or even slightly later, when all the risk of frost is gone. The frost does not usually kill your potato plants but it slows down their development.

Chitting

Before putting potatoes in the ground, it is good to chit them – put them, most eyes upright, in a light, cool but frost-free place at about 50F (10C) to develop chits – small shoots that will mature into the stems and leaves. If you are short of seed potatoes, you can cut each one into two or three chunks, with one or two chits each, to increase the quantity. The seed potatoes you plant will develop roots which love the undisturbed no-dig soil underneath, whereas the tubers will need soft conditions to develop – hence the mulch that lies on top.

Planting

Make a little slit the depth of the trowel and slide the potato with chits facing upwards into it, after which just cover it over with the compost.

Earthing

At about 8-10 weeks after planting when your potatoes have grown into decent plants, take a 2 litre pot of compost/other mulch and just drop it around the stem (or earth up using the surrounding compost in a more traditional way) to stop the light getting to the developing tubers and turning them green. This will also help you to control weeds. You can also use a cover crop. However, in this case it may be necessary, early in the season, to cut back the cover crop to prevent it out-competing the potatoes.



Watering

It is important in a potato crop to keep the soil continuously damp. In dry weather we can irrigate, but, if the potatoes are being grown in the traditional way (in ridges), irrigation is not always very effective. The water can simply run off the sides of the ridges into the furrows, by-passing the potatoes altogether, especially when, as often happens in very dry weather, the soil has become water repellent.

There is less watering with the no-dig method and in dry weather this method will usually give a higher yield of better quality potatoes, because, firstly, a flat bed will dry out more slowly than ridges and, secondly, if you have to irrigate, more of the water will reach the roots of the potato plants than in a ridge system. The best time to water is near harvest time when the tubers are swelling.

Harvesting

Harvest first early potatoes once their leaves have started to go yellow. You can harvest main crop potatoes over a much longer period – after they have flowered onwards. Harvesting no-dig potatoes should be quite easy as the ground underneath the tubers has not been loosened, forked or dug so the tubers do not manage to get down very deep and it is easier to get them out. Plus the no-dig potatoes come out cleaner than when the soil is disturbed using the traditional method.

Yield

Most trials show that the yield of no-dig potatoes is equal to or greater than the yield of traditionally grown potatoes. One of the reasons could be that soil disturbance damages the useful fungi and microorganism present in the soil and leads to general soil degradation, erosion and leaching of nitrates.

For more information please see the link below:

<https://www.notillgrowers.com/blog/2019/7/10/some-videos-on-no-till-potatoes>



Long Live the Worms!

If like me, you are unhappy about Barnet Council's decision to stop kitchen waste recycling (stopped in 2018, several petitions later the battle is still ongoing), you might consider investing in a wormery in the meantime.

What is a wormery?

A 'worm bin' or 'wormery' usually consists of at least two compartments; a lower compartment for collecting the liquid and an upper composting area where the kitchen waste goes in and the worms do their work. However, single compartment wormeries can be also used.

The worms used for composting are known by various names: brandling, manure, red or tiger worms (these include species such as *Eisenia foetida*, *E. andrei* and *Dendrobaena veneta*). Composting worms live in decaying organic matter and are smaller and darker red than the common earthworm, *Lumbricus terrestris*, which is unsuitable for using in worm composting.



You can feed your worms any raw vegetables, except for onions, shallots, leeks and garlic that are best used in small amounts or cooked first, any cooked vegetables, all fruit, except citrus peel, which needs to be limited or preferably cooked before adding, tea bags, eggshells, coffee grounds and small amounts of bread, pasta and rice, small amounts of garden waste such as annual weeds, leaves and other soft green material and limited amounts of newspaper, shredded office paper and cardboard, but not glossy magazines.

Try to avoid: dairy products, fat, grease, meat, fish and bones as these are likely to attract unwanted pests and flies.

If you are planning to go on holiday over the summer (may not be relevant this summer), do not worry. An established wormery can be left without the addition of food for up to four weeks. However, the liquid may accumulate in the bottom of the wormery and needs to be drained off to avoid waterlogging.

Wormeries are usually emptied when they are full; this takes about 8 to 12 months. You must separate the worms before using the compost.

The worms tend to congregate in the area just below the top layer of food waste. Simply remove the top 20cm (8in) layer and use it to restart the wormery again.

The worm compost can be used as a general soil conditioner; it is rich in nitrogen and potassium. The liquid drained from wormeries can be used as a liquid fertilizer on garden plants after diluting with water at a rate of 1 part liquid to 10 parts water.

The wormery is not a substitute for a compost heap or bin as it cannot cope with a large amount of garden waste but it does an excellent job on your kitchen leftovers.



Here are some suppliers of wormeries:

Original Organics Ltd

The Organic Gardening Catalogue

The Recycle Works Ltd.

Wiggly Wigglers

Worms Direct UK

Yorkshire Worms

Veggiebox Scheme is Back!

Hello allotment growers!

Spring is here and Charity Veggiebox is warming up ready to start another season of re-distributing your surplus or 'grow to give' crops to community kitchens and schools throughout North London. Growing conditions allowing, we should start our collections by the end of May when your crops are ready for the cooking pots.

To help us grow this year we have a new website where people can find out all about us and our wonderful growing community. Take a look and as the season unfolds we will be posting news on our website.

<https://www.charityveggiebox.co.uk/>

Thanks to all you amazing growers who leave veggies in our collection crates, we love being able to deliver it on your behalf to the Felix Project. Here is a message from the Felix Project -

"Working with Charity Veggiebox and receiving fresh, local, produce for distribution to those who need it across more than 400 charities and schools in London is an exciting initiative. In 2020 The Felix Project redistributed more than 21 million meals across London and fresh produce donated by Charity Veggiebox is part of that achievement! Thank you!"



We wish you all a fruitful season and look forward to visiting your allotment sites.

Friends of Finchley Way Open Space (FoFWOS)

If you walk down Finchley Way or Hamilton Way you may have seen our posters. You may have heard of us via the West Finchley Residents' Association. You may have had our leaflet through your door.

Even if you haven't heard of us, if you enjoy horticulture, meeting people and working with others to improve the neighbourhood for people and wildlife, we'd love you to join us.



How did we come about?

FoFWOS grew out of the development of the West Finchley Neighbourhood Plan. The plan identifies several areas of open space that local residents and businesses want to retain as open space. For more information on the plan, see: <https://www.wf-ra.co.uk/neighbourhood-plan>

Who are we?

In the autumn of 2019, the Neighbourhood Plan Green Spaces subcommittee decided to set up a Friends group for Finchley Way Open Space. Leaflets were distributed to over 1,000 addresses within about 04.km of the site. In December 2019 at a meeting at Finchley Lawn Tennis Club the group was established. A vision, aims and objectives agreed and a committee elected to take forward the vision.

In December 2020 Friends of Finchley Way Open Space became a registered charity. No one knew everyone now involved when we started. It's a great way to broaden your local network.

What are we trying to achieve?

The aim is to contribute to the economic, educational, social and environmental well-being of the people of Finchley by protecting and enhancing the environment. We will be planting a wider range of native plants than currently found on the site in order to diversify the wildlife. For more information see: www.fofwos.org

How are we funded?

We are funded by donations from the public and grants from various sources. So far, in addition to public donations, we have received £5,000 from Barnet Council, Edward Harvist Charity, £2,305 from the National Lottery Community Fund and £10,000 from the Finchley and Golders Green Area Committee.

What have we achieved so far?

We have cut paths through the wooded areas and these have been partly edged with logs. We hope to get wood chippings to improve the surfaces of the paths. We also regularly litter pick – a never ending task.

The first grant from Barnet Council has enabled some of the areas densely overgrown with brambles and ivy to be cleared by contractors ready for new planting. That grant also paid for us to commission an ecology survey from Arbtech and run a public consultation with neighbours within about 0.4km of the site. Both were completed before the clearance to guide the work. A volunteer mapped the trees across the wooded area to complement work done by the Council on the Field. The National Lottery Community Fund grant enables us to buy tools for volunteers, people counters and covers a year's running costs. Even though all the administration is done by volunteers there are incidentals to be covered. The latest grant from the Area Committee will enable us to replace the collapsed part of the fence and gates along Hamilton Way.

What's next?

We are drawing-up plans for the cleared areas in line with the ecology survey and the consultation findings. Once agreed with the Council, volunteers will do the final preparations for planting. We plan to plant a few mature native trees, shrubs and wildflowers to enhance the existing woodland and attract more wildlife. The grant also covers the installation of an information board at the entrance in Finchley Way and a volunteer is helping with this. It will also support improvements to the entrances in Finchley Way and Hamilton Way, some of which is likely to be done by volunteers. We also need volunteers to finish the paths.



How can you get involved?

You can take part in regular work parties usually the last Sunday in the month at 10.30 am. To keep things moving during lockdown you can work with your just household after an online briefing.

Tasks include litter picking, preparing the ground for planting, planting, sourcing plants and other materials like seating, path cover and edging and so on. You'll be covered by Barnet Council's insurance while you're working.

You can help on 'mini projects' which are specific aspects of the overall project. These come up in our monthly newsletter to Friends. If you're not a Friend, email fofwos@gmail.com to become one – it's free to join.

You can join the management committee and help to design and organise the whole site. You could also become a trustee, now that we're a registered charity.

We need support with social media communications, management of volunteers and fundraising.

Most of all we need volunteers to get stuck in to the labouring!

An Obituary of Mr. Antoniou

by *June Brookes*

We were all very sad to hear of the death of Mr. Antoniou. For some reason it was always Mr. Antoniou, we never used his first name.

He loved growing his mediterranean fruit and vegetables and took great delight in handing out dead-looking branches which magically turned into fig trees. His legacy to Gordon Road are the number of fig trees which are still growing there and thriving.

Mr. Antoniou was so happy when his medlar tree suddenly blossomed after about ten years and bore fruit and he made sure that everyone on the allotment saw this 'miracle.'

My only wonder was why he grew so much horseradish on his plot. I always said there was 'enough horseradish there to feed everyone in Finchley.' Nobody could like horseradish that much!



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

Events Diary

Book 2021 Flower Show tickets this
autumn:

RHS Garden Hyde Hall
Orchid and Plant Show
(18-20 June)

RHS Garden Harlow Carr
Flower Show
(25-27 June)

RHS Hampton Palace Court Garden
Festival
(6-11 July)

RHS Flower Show Tatton Park
(21-25 July)

RHS Garden Hyde Hall
Flower Show
(4-8 August)

RHS Chelsea Flower Show
(21-26 September)

RHS Malvern Autumn Show
(25-26 September)

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.

