

# The Grapevine



*Newsletter of the Finchley Horticultural Society*

SUMMER 2021

## SUMMER ON THE ALLOTMENTS

*Summertime  
And the livin' is easy  
Slugs are jumpin'  
And the bindweed is high...*

This year's summer has been marked by plenty of rain and nice warm weather. Everything is growing fast and looks very lush and green. However, that same weather has contributed to many fungal diseases spreading through the plots: **fireblight** affecting apple, cherry and pear trees, **powdery mildews** striking apple and plum trees, courgettes, cucumbers, peas and flowers, **silver leaf** developing on plums, **blight** ruining tomatoes and potatoes. Well, one has to remain philosophical and accept that every year some plants will do very well, and others will fail. The good thing is that there are still plenty of fruit and veg to savour and enjoy while the flowers look particularly wonderful this year. We have the photographic plot competition event coming up next weekend and I hope many of the plot holders consider entering it – there is a lot to be proud of even if your plot does not look its best. Nature is perfect in its very imperfection. The articles in this issue of Grapevine reflect that mixture of wonder and heartbreak we all experience every time we see our plots.

## **Information to plot holders on our allotment site**

### **Padlock problems**

Plot holders who find themselves locked out, should use the emergency exit gate if unable to leave through the main gate. People to contact in case of emergency are:

Tony Ingram on 07967 274739  
or Felicity Nock on 07443 432181.

### **RHS Gardens reduced price entry cards**

We have three RHS Gardens reduced price entry cards that expire end of February 2022. Each card allows one member of the FHS and one guest a 30% reduction on the normal entry rate to any of the four RHS gardens. The card must be produced to allow a reduced entry ticket. If any plotholder wants to borrow a card please contact Jo Cuttell or Chris Ousley (details in the Grapevine contacts).

### **Annual Plot Competition - Photographic Event** **24/25 July 2021**

As there is still uncertainty about lifting Covid restrictions, BAF has decided to run the Photographic Plot Competition again this year.

If you want to participate, please contact your Chair/Secretary who will arrange for a committee member to take 3 photos of your plot (just one plot if you have more). These will be taken over the weekend of 24/25 July and the deadline for receiving the photos will be 31 July. Each society may enter a maximum of 6 plots.

The independent judges from last year will decide which plots will be classified as first, second and third prize winners. In addition to a trophy, there is a prize of £50 for 1st, £30 for 2nd and £20 for 3rd.

We hope you will take part.

# THE PLANT SALE – AN ENDANGERED SPECIES?

## Volunteers Needed

As our plot holders know, the annual Plant Sale is our biggest event, both in terms of the money it brings for the allotments (up to £4,000 in a good year) and the interest it generates in the community. People come to the plant sale to buy their yearly stock of vegetables and soft fruit to grow on, annual and perennial flowers and, in recent years, house plants – all at very reasonable prices. The plants sold in the Plant Sale are not imported; they are locally grown and are therefore better suited to our conditions and do not harbour new dangerous pests and diseases.

The actual plant sale is accompanied by the sale of teas and home-made cakes, honeys and jams, site excursions, talks on bee-keeping, music and fun. There was also a spin-off of the Plant Sale - the autumn sale of fruit and vegetables grown by the plot holders. That took off when the FHS started doing National Garden Scheme open days about 10 years ago and combined selling fruit, vegetables and cut flowers grown by the plot holders with holding raffles, offerings teas, coffees and cakes.

It is important to remember that the Plant Sale is a valuable social event that brings the community together and gets more people involved in growing. I was first attracted to Gordon Road many years ago after seeing a leaflet about the annual Plant Sale and coming along to buy some plants for the garden. Once I visited the site, I realised that I, too, wanted to have a plot there and put my name on the waiting list.

There have been many people involved in raising the plants for the sale over the years but today the backbone of the plant sale are two dedicated women – **Catherine Schmitt and Christine Williams**. Catherine who is President of Finchley Horticultural Society has been a member since 1973, and together with its then chairman Ivor Kitchener organised the first plant sale for the FHS in **1980** to raise money for a garage which was to serve as a trading hut (now a storage place for the lawn mowers). It raised £148.



Many of the original growers for the Plant Sale were Gordon Road residents – Ivor Kitchener, Joyce Pankhurst, Jackie Hurst. They were later joined by others, including June Brookes, Claudine Fear, Catherine Schmitt, who contributed some perennial plants to begin with, became a regular grower in mid-1990s. Christine Williams got involved later: she had been running a plants stall at Moss Hall School Summer Fair and was asked by someone if she would come to Gordon Road to help with the Plant Sale in exchange for some plants.

To function well, the Plant Sale needs about 6 people who keep a regular schedule of work to be done and do everything from planting to pricking out, potting on and later, selling the plants. For perennials' growers it is a year-round job, for annuals and vegetables the work starts in November-December with ordering seeds, compost etc.

In the past June Brooks and Claudine Fear would sit down together to decide which seeds to order: June - vegetables, Claudine – flowers. Decisions were made based on what sold well the previous year. As things come and go out of fashion – one year, antirrhinums would sell well, another year they were no longer required and the growers would sow cosmos instead. Sadly, June and Claudine cannot do this work any more, so Catherine and Christine will have to do it on top of the rest of their duties.

Sowing begins in the first week of February until about the end of April. Things get especially busy around March-April. Once the seedlings are big enough, they are pricked out, usually into little 7cm square pots or, with some vegetables, three or four in a strip. It is quite labour-intensive and it uses a lot of compost. After the end of May many volunteers concentrate on their own plots, leaving Catherine and Christine to do most of the work on their own.



In order to get help, Catherine and Christine used to have a meeting in January after which they would send out an e-mail asking for volunteers, explaining about the work required and the dates by which things had to be done. Some people would come for an hour or two, others may come twice a week.

The jobs that need to be done are many. "Apart from sowing the seed, pricking and potting on, there is also watering and looking after the plants, which can be quite intensive. Sometimes you have to move things around and you might look at a tray and think: these aren't coming along quick enough, we need to put them in a warmer greenhouse – or, they're going too fast, we need

to put them in a poly tunnel so they're at least cool at night and it just slows them down a bit so everything hopefully is looking good for the middle of May, when the sale is. One of the jobs when you're pricking out is just having someone to fill the pots with compost. When you're doing the squashes and courgettes, they go in bigger pots and they've all got to be carried around in trays or put on the beds in the poly tunnel. It's quite physical", - remarks Christine.

This year because of COVID-19 things have been much harder for the growers. During lockdowns fewer plot holders came to the allotment, social distancing meant fewer people in a greenhouse together and so on. The Plant Sale itself was a much reduced affair, with only small numbers of visitors allowed to come in on Sunday mornings to purchase the plants.

What has become quite clear is that there needs to be a bigger pool of volunteers to keep the Plant Sale going. For all their hard work and enthusiasm, Catherine and Christine simply cannot manage everything required to do on their own. They would love to train new people who would eventually take over from them. They say that they are quite flexible and would be happy to arrange a time that suits people.

According to Catherine, unless they get help next year there is going to be a much diminished variety and quantity of plants for sale.

In conclusion, the Plant Sale needs more volunteers to come forward. They do not have to be plot holders only, but also friends or neighbours, or friends of friends. Anyone who can spare a couple of hours a week during the busiest times of the year. From those who want to learn a new skill of propagating plants from scratch to those who just want to be with other people, socialize in a friendly environment and do something useful for the community. We can all spread the word by printing a few leaflets and delivering them to local schools, or talking to our neighbours. Let us save the Plant Sale together!



# Summer flowers (and blight alert)

*by Shoko Higashitsuji*

## Hydrangeas

Hydrangeas are shrubs that produce beautiful flowers in the summer. In East Asia where they are very popular, they bloom in the rainy season in June and stop blooming after that as they cannot handle the summer heat. In the UK, however, they tend to bloom from mid to late summer.

White-coloured hydrangeas do not change colour, but it is possible to control the colour of hydrangeas with pink or blue flowers. The colour of the flowers is determined by the pH level of the soil. Acidic soil (low pH) will result in blue-ish shades, whilst alkaline soil (high pH) will bloom pink-ish flowers. Purple flowers will bloom at a pH level inbetween the pink and blue. To make the soil more acidic, aluminium sulfate is often added, and to increase the pH level, you add ground limestone.

In June, I visited Mimuroto-ji Temple in Uji City in Kyoto, Japan, which is known for its Hydrangea Garden. The garden is composed of a total of 10,000 shrubs, with over fifty hydrangea species.

If you would like to grow hydrangeas in your garden, the best time to plant them is spring or autumn when the soil is moist. Plant them in a place which is not too sunny or shady, and water regularly during dry periods.



### Lotus flowers in the Tenryuji Temple

The lotus flower is often seen as a symbol of enlightenment and strength because it is considered a metaphor for our lives. The lotus flower sprouts from the mud and carries beautiful flowers above the muddy water. The muddy water symbolises the struggles we face, however, these could be important experiences for the future, just as the nutrients inside the mud help the lotus to bloom.



### *Summer tips*

#### Blight

Tomatoes and potatoes are often susceptible to blight, that is a fungal infection which will ruin the crop. It can be identified by dark spots on the fruit, the stem and the leaves. If blight is present on the crop, the affected parts - or the whole plants - should be removed immediately to prevent it from spreading to other plants. They should be taken away from the allotments and safely disposed of, by burning or putting in the green bins collected by the Council.



# Summer jobs from the RHS

## Summer pruning

All decorative and formally shaped fruit trees, such as espaliers, need summer pruning to regulate new growth and encourage the formation of the stubby 'spurs' that bear fruit.

In general [pears](#) can be pruned from mid-July, and [apples](#) several weeks later, up to about the end of August. This year's shoots are ready to prune when the lower third has [turned](#) woody and firm.

Summer is the only time to prune [plums](#), [cherries](#), gages and [damsons](#), because of their susceptibility to silverleaf disease. Fungal spores can enter through pruning cuts, but from fruiting until the end of August the spores are least active and wounds heal fastest. Make sure you use the [best tools for pruning](#) – for clean cuts that heal quickly. Avoid loppers, as they can bruise the stems.

## Fruit thinning

### Suitable for...

Many healthy fruit trees drop fruit naturally in early summer in what is known as the 'June drop'. Where a heavy crop has set, too many fruitlets may remain on the branches, resulting in a final crop of disappointingly small fruits. Deliberate thinning of the fruitlets produces better-sized, ripe and healthy fruits, albeit in smaller numbers. Fruit thinning may be necessary on a range of tree fruit including apples, pears, plums, peaches and nectarines for the following reasons:



- The main purpose of thinning is to improve fruit size and quality
- When a tree is carrying a very heavy crop, the fruits are often small and of poor quality
- Thinning allows sunlight and air to penetrate the branches, so improving evenness of ripening
- There is a risk of branches breaking if trees overcrop
- Thinning lessens the demand on the tree's resources so it is able to make good growth and develop fruit buds for the following year so avoiding the risk of [biennial bearing](#)
- Young trees allowed to crop too heavily will be set back
- Fruit thinning may reduce the spread of pests and diseases, such as [brown rot](#)

### When to thin fruit

Experienced growers tend to thin in early summer, as this results in the greatest increase in size of those fruits remaining. But for inexperienced gardener, it is best to wait until after the June drop, other than removing malformed fruit. Finish thinning by mid-July.

### How to thin fruit

[Apples](#): Cooking apples are thinned harder than dessert apples to obtain larger fruits; aim for one fruit every 15-23cm (6-9in). Dessert apples can be thinned less severely, with one or two fruits every 10-15cm (4-6in). Leave just one fruit per cluster. Thinning can be done using secateurs, long scissors or with a firm tug between thumb and forefinger. Remove misshapen, blemished fruit or poorly positioned fruit and the 'king' fruit at the centre of the cluster which is sometimes abnormally shaped. Aim to leave the strongest and best shaped.



[Pears](#): Can be prone to over-bearing but usually need less thinning; thin clusters to two fruits (one for a small cordon), 10-15 cm (4-6in) apart.

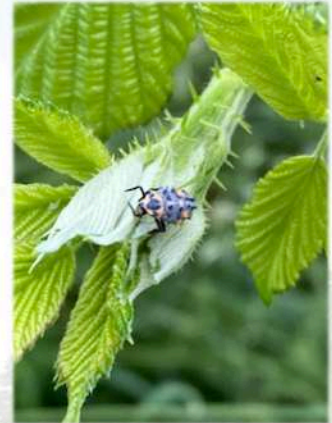
[Peaches and nectarines](#): Thin peaches to one every 10cm (4in) when the size of a hazelnut, then again to one every 20-25cm (8-10in) when the size of a walnut. Thin nectarines to 15cm (6in) at walnut size.

# News from the Wildlife Plot

by Helen Skelton



As you may have notice, the wildlife plot vegetation is growing a pace and is teeming with life! These are some of the bugs I photographed on one visit: (Ladybird Larvae, Ladybird (proper one not a Harlequin), Drone fly?, Bombus Lucorum or Terrestris??, Lily Beetle? ) We have been trying to develop a small flower bed to plant flowers for birds, bees and butterflies, but are having an uphill struggle with the dreaded Horseradish!



Ekta Shah and myself have been busy fixing the leaky big pond. It required us to remove the old liner, excavate the old bath and then reline this before replacing it. The development of this pond is still vey much a work in progress. Hopefully it will attract more frogs which have been spotted in the small pond. Ekta photographed this amazing slow worm when she was working on the pond



I've bought myself a pond dipping kit so if anyone wishes to join me trying it out, I'll be down at the wildlife plot on 25<sup>th</sup> July at 11 am! I'll also bring insect identification books and equipment.



PS I recently completed a 20 hour Field Studies Course on field identification of bumble bees..





# Maiden flight

*A piece by one of Gordon Road's bee-keepers Mei Delmonte*

The sun rose high as the hour went past noon in the midsummer sky. Birdsong paused in the heating air and a buzz of excitement could be heard growing louder in a small clearing at the edge of the woods.

The young queen clambered over the mass of almost identical hairy bodies, each one intent on her own business though serving a collective aim - keeping the colony alive, well-fed and healthy. Her big day has arrived. The others seemed to have sensed this as well and excitement spread with an oscillating dance begun by one, gradually shared by another and another until it reached critical point. They began pushing this young virgin queen towards the light. In the familiar darkness she had thrived and matured - her slim body now strengthened and made ready for the rigours ahead of her. As she approached the airier atmosphere at the edge of the hive she flexed her wings in preparation. Her antennae quivered as she picked up the new sensations from the outside world.

Cautiously she edged outside and her eyes adjusted to the light. She began calculating and measuring light and shadows, getting her bearings as she danced up and down and round what had been her home the last nearly three weeks when she had hatched from a tiny egg and chosen by the collective, nurtured into a queen. When she emerged three or four days ago from her pupating chamber, piping and calling her entrance into the bee world, there had been no rivalling response. She was the only one of her kind. Normally, there might have been another or two like her and they would have had to battle for supremacy. For some unknown reason, perhaps interference from a benign force a week ago (the beekeeper), she had been selected and all the hopes of this being and the future survival of her colony now rested on her.



She returned inside and took a long deep drink from a honey cell. She needed all the energy she could muster for her first flight. Her sisters clustered around her as she went out again; this time she flew straight up and as far away from her colony as she could. Drones from afar picked up her scent and came after her. Their larger eyes lock in and follow her. Higher she flew towards the sun and in mid-flight the strongest of the drones in pursuit grasped and straddled her from above with his long legs; within seconds the first mating was over. Even as he ejaculated, he flipped back and away from her to fall dying to the ground. Yet another was already close behind eager to take his place, oblivious

to what fate would befall him should he succeed, since this was all his reason for being. The queen did not wait but swooped further above. If he wished to fulfil his role as nature intended he had to give chase swiftly.

In that afternoon the queen would mate with as many drones as could find her, returning to her hive for sustenance and going back out again, repeating this exercise as long as weather permitted and until she had enough bee semen to last her the next two to five years.

## Advice from Rocket Gardens re caterpillars

Whether you grow your brassicas - broccoli, cabbages, cauliflowers, sprouts and kale - under the netting or not, they need a regular check for caterpillars throughout the summer months. Check turnips and swede too. A small cluster of caterpillars is capable of destroying a single plant in a few hours, and they grow up so fast and will keep on munching until they pupate a few days later, so be aware!

1. **Check the leaves for signs of caterpillar damage – i.e. holes.** Where you see holes, you will probably see caterpillars, either one or two, or a cluster. Check the underside of leaves too. You can pick caterpillars off and pop them into a bucket – we normally take them down to the bottom of the garden and empty them out with lots of hole-filled leaves to nibble on until they find a new home, there are plenty of nasturtiums around for them to eat!
2. **Check for eggs.** These will usually be small dark green (slightly slimy looking) eggs laid on leaves OR hidden in the very centre of the plant (look carefully!) Or they could be tiny white/yellow clusters of eggs laid on the underside of leaves. You may also see individually laid tiny white/yellow eggs. Use dampened kitchen roll to wipe off eggs. You could also try squirting them off, using a hose, from the centre of plants where it is hard to reach. Remove as many as you can.
3. **Cover them with insect proof mesh netting or fleece** – butterflies are still laying, and it's better safe than sorry!

## It is never too late

Plot holders can still extend the harvesting season well into the autumn by planting up a few extras now. Among the vegetable that can be still planted at this stage are:

- **Leafy greens (spinach, chard and kale).** If planted this month they will produce leaves to use from mid/late autumn and all through the vitamin-depleted winter.
- **Roots (beetroot, carrots and sweet turnips)** – if put in the ground next week or so, can still mature by mid-October before the first frosts.
- **Lettuces and salads (summer lettuce, wild rocket, mizuna and frills mustard)** grow very quickly and can be used as cut leaves for the next couple of months.
- **Sugar snap peas and dwarf beans** can grow fast in this warm weather and provide a good crop in September before the colder weather sets in.

And, of course, one can start growing next years harvest – **leeks, parsnips, celeriac and broccoli.** And the cycle goes on...

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Affiliated to the  
Royal Horticultural Society

## Events Diary

Book 2021 Flower Show tickets this autumn:

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](https://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.



### Newsletter

If you received a paper copy of this newsletter  
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inform Christine Williams,  
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