



# Green Fingers

Newsletter of the South Dublin Allotments Association

Vol. 1, Issue 10

Winter/Spring 2009

## From the Chair

The start of 2009 sees our Association eagerly looking forward to the work and harvest we hope the year ahead will bring.

We have focused our attention on expanding our range of benefits to members.

One of our aspirations (not our only one by any means) is to attract in more members to strengthen the Association.

We are trying out a new seed scheme for members which is very good value compared to shop or catalogue prices.

We hope to have bark mulch delivered in the near future and plans are in motion for manure in the autumn.

On the campaigning front we continue to give support to the groups up and down the country who are trying to get local sites started. Quite a number of towns have groups now campaigning and negotiating with their local authority to set up allotments sites. We hope that 2009 will see an increase in allotments sites in Dublin and around the country. We understand that some local authorities are planning sites with standard plots only 40-50 m<sup>2</sup> in size. While more plots means more people off the waiting list, there is an optimum size of plot to supply a family with a substantial amount of fresh produce. Unfortunately, the swing from the traditional 400 m<sup>2</sup> plots to 40 m<sup>2</sup> plots has gone from one extreme to another and in my own view has gone too far.

We are continuing our networking activities towards the development of a national strategy

for the development of allotments and community gardens.

Another trend we are seeing is that farmers are renting out plots in various parts of the country. Our only concern about this is that it could take the onus off local authorities to provide allotments sites in cities and towns, at affordable rates and available to anyone, of whatever background, who would like to have one. This is what allotments are primarily about and remains one of the key goals of our Association.

Our educational role continues will involve our Annual Open Day on Saturday 25th July - a date for your diary

We will be reminding members that membership renewal is due in advance of the AGM annually - this is the only way you can keep your voting rights and have your say in the running and direction of the association.

So for the meanwhile, wishing you happy, productive gardening.

*Michael Fox, Chairperson*

## The Association's A.G.M.

The Fifth Annual General Meeting of the South Dublin Allotments Association took place on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008 at 7.30 pm in St. Aengus' Community Centre, Castletymon Road, Tallaght.

The AGM was well attended and provided an opportunity to look back over the activities of the last year while setting out the priorities for the year ahead.

The new Committee for 2008/2009 is as follows: Michael Fox, Chairperson; Joe Brooks, Secretary; Annemarie Durcan, Membership Secretary; Jennifer Wann, Treasurer; David Cotter, Martin Galvin, Anne Pilkington and Hester Scott, Committee Members.

Sincere thanks go to our outgoing secretary, Hester Scott, for her four years of diligent service in promoting the development of the Association. Also thanks to Max Berber who has served on the Committee for two years - we have valued his research, networking, helpful suggestions, and practical help at our events. We wish Max well in whatever direction his interest in growing food will take him.

The Committee would like to extend a warm welcome to our newest member Martin Galvin, who has recently come on board. Martin is an allotment holder in Friarstown and a talented artist, as can be seen from the illustrations in this and future editions of the newsletter.

#### *The Committee*



## Allotment Updates

### Friarstown

Since the New Year Friarstown Allotment Site has been surprisingly quiet with the exception of a few hardy chestnuts who have ventured out to make an early start for the 2009 season. With rain, snow, ice and a strong prevailing southerly breeze it is understandable as to why most well intentioned allotmenters made their visit briefer than intended. For those willing to stick at it any progress made to date

will pay dividends later in the season. Some of the plots have been completed cleaned out and the soil turned in anticipation of an early spring when sowing can begin.

South Dublin Parks Department have assured us that several lorry loads of bark mulch will be delivered to all allotment sites in early February. This mulch is very useful for paths but should not be used to mulch around fruit bushes as it is too fresh and could result in damage. It appears some allotment holders have dumped composting material in plastic bags near the weighbridge. If this persists it will result in the area becoming unsightly and detract from what is a very attractive allotment facility.

#### *Friarstown plot holder*

### Corkagh

Despite the bad summer that everybody experienced in 2008 the allotments were a hive of activity. Some of the plots got flooded again last summer and rescuing crops was the order of the days and weeks on site. Despite that everybody was delighted with the return on their crops. There were several different types of potatoes grown as well as cabbage, broccoli, white turnips, swede, beetroot and soft fruits.

We have some new plot holders who got their plots in mid season and were digging, hoeing, weeding etc. like little beavers and even managed to get a small amount of late crops in. So by summer of this year the whole site should be looking great and all the plots will be in use. The rabbits are starting to get back in to the site and we have had a few grey squirrels visit the site too. They can get in from the trees which surround the site.

There have been a couple of issues regarding the pieces of land between the back of the plots and the fencing and thanks to the Development Department and Parks Department in South Dublin County Council a solution has been formulated on a trial run for 2009. If this is a success hopefully it will become a permanent solution. It will take a team effort from all the plot holders on site to make this work.

Here's hoping we have better weather this year and that everybody has a bumper crop of vegetables and fruit in 2009.

*Clondalkin Gardener*

## **Tymon**

There have been few changes in Tymon in recent months, but there is still an amount of vegetables being picked over the winter, those that the rabbits are leaving for the moment. Surprisingly, they have left the kale and are concentrating on the leeks and chard and are digging down for the Jerusalem artichokes. It is noticeable that any chicken wire defence seems to be paying off with the creatures moving on to easier pickings so it appears these internal structures are the way to go next season.

We are looking forward to this year specially seeing the familiar faces filled with resolve and expectation. There were two plots (a large proportion of our total of thirteen) which were unused last year and it would be good to see them cultivated, both being previously in good order. One of the principal changes is the transfer of David and Jennifer to Friarstown and the coming of Hilary to take over their plot in Tymon. We wish all three well in their new situation.

There is a plant which peculiar to the plots in Tymon, and it is interesting to speculate as to how it comes to be there. It is an herbaceous annual called *Nicandra* and is really a very nice plant indeed. It is very strong and healthy with quite large mauve and white flowers each of which lasts only one day, but there are plenty of them. The leaves are dark green and attractive also and the whole plant would make a great addition to the herbaceous border being a good filler at about three feet tall. It flowers from July to September and then has round fruits enclosed in calyxes like little lanterns which can be dried for decoration. I dug one up and put it in a pot in the porch where it was absolutely delighted with itself and I collected seed to try them in March. It seeds itself very readily from year to year in one end of the site, being very noticeable in one of the disused plots and will of course disappear with intensive vegetable cultivation. Another name for it is Shoo-fly but I don't

know anything about that property. If anyone would like some seed ring me at 087-2048582 as I took some recently.

*By Hester Scott*

## **Mount Anville, Goatstown**

The good news is that the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Allotments Association has now been formed and a new committee established at the first AGM held on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

The Committee is liaising with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council to progress areas of concern of allotment holders.

One particular problem is rubbish dumping so a Spring Clean has been organised for March.

*Monika Halwax-Sherry, Chairperson, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Allotment Association*

## **Greenhills Community Garden Project**

Congratulations to the Greenhills Community Garden Project for winning an award under the Community Environment Initiative category in South Dublin County Council's Beautiful South Dublin County Competition 2008.

They received their award from the Mayor of South Dublin County, Cllr. Marie Corr, on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008 in the Tower Hotel, Tallaght.

More details and pictures of the project can be seen at [http://greenhillsresidentsassociation.org/html/gcgp\\_page01.htm](http://greenhillsresidentsassociation.org/html/gcgp_page01.htm)

## **News from around the Country**

### **County Fingal**

The latest news is that there are due to be 240 allotment plots coming on stream in Powerstown, Dublin 15, hopefully by March if all goes according to plan. Fingal County Council will go a long way to clearing its massive waiting list for allotments across the Fingal area.

At Turvey there are 225 new allotment plots being established, which is about double the

existing number. The current site is being phased out of use.

There are currently some 375 people in Fingal waiting for an allotment, Fingal County Council have stated, according to the Fingal Independent of 24/12/2008. The new plots coming on stream should cater for nearly all that demand.

## County Sligo

The community garden project at The Benwiskin Centre, Ballintrillick in north County Sligo, is now in its third year. The project is a joint venture between the Benwiskin Centre and The Organic Centre in Rossinver, Co. Leitrim.



Image from [www.benwiskincentre.com](http://www.benwiskincentre.com)

Participants attend weekly classes and learn how to reap the benefits of growing their own food.

## County Cork

Zwena McCullough runs the Hydro Allotments at Hydro Farm, Blarney, Co. Cork. She has had the allotments for nine years now, based in a walled garden. Zwena had the garden ploughed, areas sectioned off and a water line with taps run from the well the length of the garden. The area is fenced against rabbits and paths are mowed regularly. Zwena can be contacted at: [happyzwena@hotmail.com](mailto:happyzwena@hotmail.com)

Peggy Murray shares an allotment there with her daughter. Peggy's allotmenting can be viewed on: [organicgrowingpains.blogspot.com](http://organicgrowingpains.blogspot.com)

## County Tipperary

Good news from Clonmel Sowers & Growers. The first sod has been turned on their new pilot allotment site in conjunction with Clonmel Borough Council.

## County Meath

Congratulations to Dave Robinson and his team at Rathbeggan Lakes Family Park & Angling Centre for winning two awards in the 2008 Meath Marketing Awards - Best Marketing Incentive for a Country Pursuits Venue and Best Marketing Incentive Visitor Attraction on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2008.



In our last edition of the newsletter we mentioned that Dave Robinson established an allotment segment to his operation in March 2008, the Rathbeggan Lakes Allotments, and which we have been informed is going from strength to strength.

For further information, contact Dave Robinson, Rathbeggan Lakes Allotments – [01-8240197/allotments@rathbegganlakes.com](mailto:01-8240197/allotments@rathbegganlakes.com) [www.rathbegganlakes.com](http://www.rathbegganlakes.com).

## Association Activities

### Seed Scheme

This year we are trying out a seed purchasing scheme for the first time. We are buying bulk quantities of certain varieties from Unichem and Kings Seeds, based on orders placed by members, and it is working out at exceptionally good value (most seeds are €1.00 per packet). By buying about five or six packets a person's membership fee is covered by the savings made (€10.00 individual per year), and any purchase above that is a bonus.

On the subject of manure we have lined up a supplier who could deliver a 20 ton load of organic mushroom compost to Friarstown. We have opted to try to arrange this for this coming autumn (probable around the time of our AGM in September).

The only stipulation from SDCC's point of view is that the manure be wheelbarrowed up to the plots (for safety reasons) and the load to be moved to plots as soon as possible (so as not to attract rodents). Plot holders from sites other than Friarstown would have to come and collect it in Friarstown. As with the seed scheme we would need members to pre-order the compost. It would probably work out at



around €30.00 per ton. Please let the committee know if you are interested in being part of the bulk compost scheme - we can arrange to collect the monies later in the season.

Joe Brooks has negotiated, on behalf of allotment sites, a delivery of shredded wood for pathways, which should be delivered in the next few weeks. This material is freshly shredded trees - fine for pathways but should not be used near plants.

## Forthcoming Events/Notices

Joe Brooks, Secretary of our Association will be giving a talk entitled 'Grow Your Own' in the Public Library in Lucan, Dublin (beside Superquinn) on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2009 at 8pm.

Max Berber, member, wishes to know if another individual would be interested in sharing a front garden/plot to grow vegetables. For further details contact Max at maxber2ie@yahoo.co.uk.

## On the Web



New Irish web and blog sites concerned with growing your own, allotments and community gardening are appearing all the time. Some that have

caught our eye are as follows:

Grow Ireland (<http://growireland.net>) provide free blogs for allotments, community gardens, transition towns, etc. and also has links to other blogs, news items and so forth.

Irish Allotments ([www.irishallotments.net](http://www.irishallotments.net)) On this website you will find pictures, articles, reviews, comments and much more about Allotments. Quite a good list of allotments and community garden projects around the country outside of Dublin. Interesting list of links too.

## Castlefarm Organic Allotments

Castlefarm Organic Allotments are located at Narraghmore, Athy, Co. Kildare. They are

opening in January 2009 and will have 6 x 5 metre plots available for €250 per year (larger areas available). There is also a special one-off offer of €350 which includes a 10 class course in organic growing run by organic trainers Grace Maher and Paula Pender. This will involve a monthly Saturday morning talk, followed by a walk around the allotments and Castlefarm garden to give hands on advice on what growers need to do. More experienced organic growing courses are also available.

Castlefarm organic allotments will provide people with the tools to grow their own organic vegetables. Organic plots will be ploughed and rotovated and will be serviced with organic farmyard manure and water.

Castlefarm's website is [www.castlefarmshop.ie/](http://www.castlefarmshop.ie/) For more information call Jenny on 087-6785269/059 8636948 or email her at [jenny@castlefarmshop.ie](mailto:jenny@castlefarmshop.ie).

## The Future is Feathered

It really is a sign of the times when farm animals are making their way back into the urban environment. Spotted recently in a major pet retail outlet in Dublin city was a pair of hens, complete with hut, run, straw etc., happily clucking away amidst the designer dog carriers and hamster wheels. The good life meets the chi-chi set!

## Take a Bite out of the Credit Crunch



Experienced growers have probably copped on to this years ago. You can save money by growing your own food. In these times of recession and belt-tightening those of us who already grow our own appreciate it even more.

Wouldn't it be good to encourage our family, friends and colleagues to grow food too? As well as saving money they would be eating fresher food and getting some healthy

exercise, especially important in these gloomy times.

It needn't be about taking on a whole allotment or digging up the entire back garden. The thing to do at first would be to focus on the simplest and most financially rewarding foods. Think of how expensive courgettes are, even at the height of the season. Yet when a plant gets going, it can produce a courgette every few days. Broccoli is very expensive as well, and sprouting broccoli is non-existent in the shops. It is so nutritious it is well worth growing. Spinach and kale are even more nutritious and very easy to grow.

Broad beans are easy too, and never seen in the shops. French/green beans only seem to come from Kenya, where large amounts of valuable water are used to grow them. They can be squeezed into a tight space on a trellis or mixed in to existing flowerbeds as colourful yet useful tall plants. As for lettuce, it's a complete waste of money buying a head which will only keep for a few days when a few plants of the 'cut and come again' variety in pots outside the back door could last all summer. Lastly, what can compare to the flavour of a homegrown freshly picked tomato. Choose, say, a cherry variety in a hanging basket or a bush plant in a handy pot.

Herbs are very straightforward for the most part, and can be kept in pots on windowsills or patios. One plant can be bought for €4.00 or less and last for several years. A one meal portion of fresh herbs in a supermarket can range from €1.15 to €2.00.

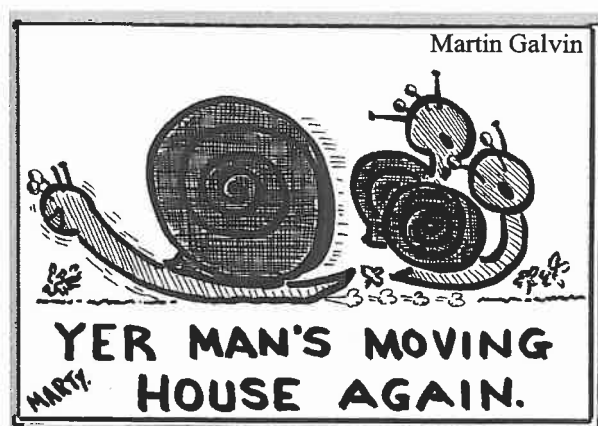
An ordinary packet of courgette seeds such as 'All Green' costs €2.69 and contains about 25 seeds. That's 10.76c per seed. If 6 seeds are planted and 3 successfully grow to produce fruit that's 21.52c per plant. Add one bag of multipurpose peat-free compost at €5.99 and that's €6.64 for three plants, at 16 courgettes per plant ([www.garden-centre.org](http://www.garden-centre.org)) giving a total yield of 48 courgettes. That works out at 14c each, compared to 61c each on the website of one of the major supermarkets. There's a good chance that the homegrown courgette will be organic too.

Calculations have been done that estimate savings of about €300 euro over a year in growing most of one's own vegetables rather than buying them. No doubt this would vary depending on the range of produce and the intensity of cultivation. The bottom line is, with not too much effort some savings can be made and there's nothing healthier nor more rewarding than eating your own produce fresh from the plant.

*By Jennifer Wann*

## Workshop at Glasnevin

On Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March there is a workshop entitled 'Grow your own organic vegetables' at the National Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin, Dublin. It is given by Botanic gardener Peter Meleady. It starts at 11am, meeting at the Education and Visitor Centre, and costs €25. As numbers are limited booking is essential. Proceeds are in aid of the Irish Museums Trust. For further information and booking contact tel. 01-8570909, [www.botanicgardens.ie](http://www.botanicgardens.ie), [botanicgardens@opw.ie](mailto:botanicgardens@opw.ie).



## Gardening with Children

You can create a place of discovery for children by introducing a range of scents, sounds, colour and tastes into your garden and in doing so can you can catch their imagination while getting them interested in gardening and wildlife. It is very easy to create a sensory garden that is not only beautiful to look at but stimulates your children's senses too! Examples include:

### Sight

Children love bright colours and eye-catching flowers and leaves are sure to be popular.

Such flowers also make ideal subjects for drawings and paintings. Plants that are good for visual appeal include Sunflower, Pot marigold, Chameleon plant, Swiss chard 'Bright Lights'; Heuchera 'Chocolate Ruffles'.

### Sound

Encourage your children to listen to the sounds of nature whilst in the garden, like the sound of bees buzzing, the birds singing and the sound of the wind rustling through the leaves of plants and trees. Look at what plants can be used to make percussion sounds, such as hollow stems and dried seed heads. Examples include: Greater quaking grass, Love-in-a-mist, Miscanthus oligostachyus 'Nanus Variegatus', Sweet corn; Bamboo.

### Touch

There are a wide variety of leaf textures amongst plants and it can be fun for children to check out the different types – rough, smooth, furry and spiky. Different surfaces have different functions, from preventing dehydration to stopping animals from eating the leaves. Examples include: Lamb's ears, Holly, Houseleek, African sundew.

### Smell

Fragrances given off by flowers and leaves are one of the main attractions of a garden. The smells often have a purpose too, such as attracting insects to the flowers or deterring pests from eating leaves. Examples include: Curry plant, Lavender, Chocolate cosmos, Sweet pea, Honeysuckle, Gorse.

### Taste

As most gardeners know, our fruits, vegetables and herbs are not only tasty to us - animals and insects love them too! Many plants have great tasting fruits to attract animals to eat them and disperse their seeds for them. Examples include: the mint family – anything from spearmint to pineapple. Rosemary, Nasturtium, Wild strawberry, sorrel, cherry tomato.

*By Max Berber*

## **Why not be veggie-creative!**

On those rainy days when you cannot get out to visit your plot to do some necessary

maintenance, why not consider bringing out your artistic creative side. To start you might be inspired by the works of Chinese artist Ju Duoqi.

Her creations are inspired from the great western masterpieces such as Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss*, Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe* but with only one difference - they are made completely out of vegetables which are then photographed. Once photographed, Ju then takes delight in tasting her creations.

And what is behind Ju's logic for her creations? Just the environmentally friendly message of the pieces. "*I have narrowed my works down to where I only use recycled materials in my surroundings. So it's easy for me to come up with the idea of making artworks with food, which is cheap and environmentally friendly*" states Ju.

Born in Chongqing, China, in 1975, Ju, who is a graduate of the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, designed websites and computer games before working on her vegetable paintings.



Ju Duoqi's version of Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* which she has called, *Liberty Leading the Vegetables*

Further works can be viewed on [www.parisbeijingphotogallery.com](http://www.parisbeijingphotogallery.com)

*By David Cotter*

## **Fruit Tree Grafting**

Grafting is a form of propagation where a cutting is taken from one woody shrub or tree and attached to another where the cutting will attach to the receiving tree and grow. It is used to form fruit trees where a scion, as the cutting

is called, is taken from a specially-bred variety of fruit and attached to a root stock – a young tree with the trunk cut down to near the ground and still retaining all its roots. This is usually a hardy near-wild version of the fruit, e.g. crab apple, and imparts that hardiness and overall size of growth to the scion. For example, a dwarf stock is one which will grow to a smaller mature size than a standard one, often useful for small gardens and allotments. It is often noticeable on young fruit trees that there is a kink in the trunk near the base of the plant. This is where the grafted join was made.

In preparation for grafting, take some cuttings of healthy, woody shoots from the source tree during winter and heel them in (plant them in the ground) in a cool place until ready to graft. The receiving tree should be a healthy, young tree. The budding method of grafting is where just a bud is taken from a scion and attached to the new tree (stock). In the summer, select a scion about 30cm long and put it into water. Make a T-shaped cut in the bark of the stock. Peel back the flaps of bark formed by the cut. Take the scion and slice a shield-shaped piece of bark from it which contains a bud within a leaf axil, taking a layer underneath the bark with it, known as the cambium. Bringing the cambium of the cutting and the stock together is what encourages them to join together and grow. Slip the cutting into the T-shaped cut of the stock. Remove any surplus sticking up above the top of the T-shaped cut. Wind raffia or gardening tape around the whole lot, except for the actual bud. As the bud grows the surplus stock can be removed above the join.

Another method of grafting is called whip grafting, which is a different way of joining the scion to the stock. The stock is cut clean across and then both it and the scion are cut in an elongated zigzag way and spliced together. It is best to consult a good book on propagation to see exactly how this is done. It is usually carried out in March or April.

*By Max Berber*

## What to be doing now

Plant rhubarb, currently available in Newlands Garden Centre and Homebase. Weather permitting, do some digging, adding in compost, and tidying. Go gently and gradually

with the digging if out of practice, otherwise injuries might occur, especially if cold. Go for a brisk, muscle-warming walk around the allotment site to warm up first. If there are dug areas which didn't get compost in the autumn, then the easiest thing is to apply it as a mulch, if the areas aren't going to be planted for a few months yet. The worms and bugs will do the hard work. Give all your tools a good clean and sharpen as required.

Warm the ground with glass or fleece. After a few weeks plant first early potatoes and broad beans. In February sow spring onions, leeks, carrots, lettuces and radishes on covered ground or in a cold frame. Sow outdoors early peas and some more broad beans. If you have a green house or lots of windowsill space, then cucumber, onion, summer cabbage and tomato seedlings can be started.

In March outdoors sow lettuces, parsnips, Brussels sprouts directly or in seed trays and plant asparagus. Sow spinach, broccoli, leeks, onions, peas, celery, tomatoes and marrows under glass, either directly in a bed or in a greenhouse.

*By Jennifer Wann*

## Quiz Results

As there were no entries for the quiz in the last newsletter (No. 9), the DVD 'Grow Your Own' has been incorporated into the Association's collection of resource materials.

### *Editor's note to the wider membership*

Following our last request for contributions to the newsletter, several members wrote articles. If you wish to contribute an article for the newsletter, new writers are always welcome. Feedback on the content is also welcome. E-mail us at [sdaa@eircom.net](mailto:sdaa@eircom.net).

## Contact Details

The South Dublin Allotments Association can be contacted at [sdaa@eircom.net](mailto:sdaa@eircom.net) or at [www.southdublinallotmentsassociation.ie](http://www.southdublinallotmentsassociation.ie)

The allotment sites are managed by the Development Department of South Dublin County Council, Tel.: 01-4149000.