



Green Fingers

Newsletter of the South Dublin Allotments Association

Vol. 1, Issue 12

Winter/Spring 2010

From the Chair

After what seems like one of the hardest winters we have had in many years with snow, ice and flooding it is great to have that February feeling of wanting to get growing things.

Our committee had its first meeting of 2010 in January. We decided to keep the issue of plot fees at the top of our agenda for the year ahead.

Despite the problems many of our members have with 150 % increase in plot fees in one go, we congratulate South Dublin County Council for winning the Chambers Ireland Award for Excellence in Local Government, for its allotments scheme.

The enthusiasm of the allotment holders themselves, who take great pride in their plots, must also have helped.

We will continue to work to find ways to liaise with our Council to develop and improve allotments, and to

create a positive public perception of them. There is no better way than this to create a bright future for allotments.

We were also encouraged to hear from the council that the planned expansion of Friarstown is scheduled to go ahead this year.

Countrywide it appears that local authorities remain generally slow to commit resources to allotments especially in these economically depleted times. This reluctance however, apart from a few notable exceptions, was there even in the celtic tiger years so one wonders what fears some local authorities have about the rise in interest in allotments.

The only progress we see in other local authority areas is where local community groups or associations are prepared to take on the administrative responsibility for allotments.

We were pleased to hear

that we will be receiving €1,000 in funding from the Environmental Partnership Fund which we hope to put to good use in educational activities around sustainable allotment gardening and also biodiversity on the allotments. The Council has given us permission to erect notice boards at some of the sites. We are appealing to association members to help us to locate someone with good metalwork/woodwork skills who could do the work of making up the notice boards on a strict budget.

We also are hoping for a response to our idea for a community orchard in Friarstown.

Our Seed Scheme is again fully in swing and suppliers (Kings Seeds) have been prompt in despatching our order to us. We hope our seed distribution days will be an opportunity, not just to distribute orders, but also to swap seeds, discuss varieties and celebrate the diversity of crops we can grow on our allotments. (see details about seed distribution days elsewhere in newsletter)

Michael Fox, Chairman

Seed distribution day

Reminder: Our third seed distribution day takes place on Saturday 13th March at Friarstown Allotments, Bohernabreena, 11am -

12.30pm. If you have pre-ordered, this is your last chance to collect your order. Extra seed stock will be available for members too.

Allotment Updates

Tymon

Work has started in Tymon with about half of the plots showing freshly turned soil, manure on beds and even onion sets looking optimistic. The walkways are extremely slippery with wet rotting leaves from the overhanging trees and it does seem that some of the plots, especially those that haven't gone over to the raised bed system, look rather too wet to work just yet.

The principle news is the two previously unused plots have been given over to new renters so that is encouraging, and we hope that there will be more buzz about and fewer hiding places for rabbits etc. Plot number five has been fenced with chicken wire but not effectively, as at the moment the evidence on the ground points to it being Bunny Central. The thought of rabbits being locked into one's plot and unable to escape is the stuff of restless nights.

Friarstown

Friarstown is not looking bad at all considering the winter it was and the damage done.

The past few weeks has seen activity pick up as people begin planning and preparing for the 2010 growing season.

The stretch in the evenings is encouraging people to come up and do a bit and a walk around the allotments show a good number of ploholders have digging well underway. Some diggers are reporting that there are patches still quite waterlogged.

A few plots are showing some



Collecting seeds and potatoes at Corkagh Park Allotments, 27th February.

nice over wintered veg, particularly kale which stands in places beautifully dark and blousy.

Evidence of badgers is about with holes and bulbs being dug up.

Mulch has been delivered and the load is depleting quickly as people use it to create paths soft underfoot with the scent of pine or the discovery of a little piece of glitter, evoking a memory of Christmas past.

There have been several loads of horse manure left by a local stables and while there is some controversy about this, lots of plot holders are more than happy to use it. It is usually very fresh when deposited but a few barrow loads added to your compost bin will rot down nicely in time.

It's good to see people standing chatting over their shovels again as community friendship begins its growing season too.

So when you first step out of your car up in Friarstown don't

let that bone-chilling breeze deter you. Once you've started work and built up a sweat you'll welcome its cool freshness on your face.

Friarstown plot holder

Corkagh

Well it's good to see the back of that "Winter of discontent"! The two main talking points in Corkagh Park Allotments over the winter months was the attempt by South Dublin Council to hike up the fees by a massive 150%, and the atrocious weather, with severe floods, snow, and ice, adding to the extreme prolonged cold spell. While a delegation from the South Dublin Allotments Association met with South Dublin County Council to negotiate a turnaround on the fees issue, we had no such influence on the weather. However, as it's now officially Spring, thoughts turn to sowing and planting in earnest.

It was good to see the Council beginning their maintenance programme, repairing the

Allotment Update; contd.

damaged water riser, as well as emptying the "compost" bins. However, there are still problems which need to be addressed, such as vandals gaining access to the allotments, continued flooding on the lower plots nearest the container, as well as the perennial rabbit problem, which seems to be compounded by the Council employees leaving the gates open for the full duration while they have been working in the allotments.

The mounds of manures and compost appearing alongside various plots during the winter months, shows the commitment and determination of plot-holders in Corkagh to work some goodness into soil which is generally of a very poor quality with a heavy clay structure. We all know that Rome wasn't

built in a day, and the piece of soil we rent from the Council certainly won't turn into friable loam in one growing season, and requires hard work, patience, and lots of "muck and magic".

Already there are many beds dug over, waiting for the soil to warm up, with signs of growth from autumn-sown onions and garlic, even some brave broad beans are beginning to show life, with rhubarb shoots also pushing their way through the mulch.

The seed distribution day in Corkagh on 27th February, run by the Association, went very well with plenty of packets of top quality seed being purchased for only €1 per packet to members, excellent value indeed, while several allotment-holders took out membership for the first time. There was great value

particularly for the potatoes at €7 per 5kg bag, (€6 if you pre-paid with your order).

The lengthening days tend to lift the spirits and motivates us to shake off the cobwebs and start digging, sowing and planting in earnest. Over the next week or two, I expect more ground will be cleared and dug over and prepared for the traditional St. Patrick's Day sowing of first early potatoes, as well as other ground being manured for the heavy feeders, such as brassicas and légumes (that's cabbage family and bean and pea family to the rest of us.) While there are still very frosty nights forecast, early seed sowings can be dependant on whether the ground is still frozen at night...we await rising temperatures... Roll on the Spring!

Clondalkin Gardener

New; from around the Country

Dublin City

According to a spokesperson for Dublin City Council work continues at their new allotment site at St. Anne's Park, Raheny. It is due to open as soon as possible. It is hoped that plots will be in the region of 80m² and there will be about of 50 – 60 plots. The charges have yet to be decided upon. There are over 400 people on the waiting list for allotments.

New private allotments have opened in Crumlin, in the grounds of the former Curriculum Development Unit on Sundrive Road. There are about 100 plots of 80m² each. Paths and containers have been put in and a committee

has been established to help manage the site.

South Dublin

Planning permission has been given for private allotments at Boherboy beside Saggart Village. There will be 66 plots, 13 x 8 m (104m²) in size. No details are available yet on charges but strangely it was proposed and then written into the planning conditions that the site would be closed from October to January inclusive. So you can forget about winter roots and Brussels sprouts for Christmas if you take on one of these plots.

Fingal

New private allotments are now open at Corduff, near

Lusk. They are €255 for 160m² or €145 for 80m² which is quite good value. They are being run by local farmers John and Susan Maxwell. Phone John at 087 957 2181 or Susan at 087 263 7341 for further details.

Louth

The possibility of allotment provision is being investigated by Drogheda Borough Council. One potential site being mentioned is beside the graveyard on the Termonfeekin Road. Also suggested is an annual fee of €200, at which Cllr. Frank Gallagher has registered his protest for being far too high. He points out that such a price could put off some people from taking on a plot. (Drogheda Independent, 09/12/09 and 17/02/10)

More on Compost

For those of us whose compost heaps are as absorbing as our gardening efforts it is a source of conjecture when we are emptying kitchen waste buckets as to what we are actually adding and what in particular will benefit. According to some advice, citrus peel and onion skins are too acidic to use but I have never noticed any ill effects, and bulk is important with everything wilting down to practically nothing, like spinach in a saucepan.

Thankfully it does not happen very often, but any bird killing itself against a deceptive window is added to my heap and I remember the old saying that there is nothing better for a rose bush than a dead dog. Hard to synchronise there. Apparently, in old monasteries, in Britain anyway, the dead monks were buried in the orchards, presumably to benefit the fruit production.

Green leafy vegetables and young plants putting on growth need a fertilizer rich in

nitrogen with grass cuttings being very valuable here, but perhaps the most astonishing source being feathers. So any old duvets or pillows should definitely be utilized. On a scale of grass cuttings being four, and coffee grounds two, feathers are fifteen. I don't think there is as much coleslaw being slopped automatically onto plates and sandwiches as in former years but there must be colossal amounts of feathers and eggshells from unfortunate hens from the worldwide production of mayonnaise and chicken tikka masala. How much would get recycled into the earth?

When it comes to flowering and fruiting, potash is needed. Sometimes this is most effectively delivered in the previous autumn, when the plant is setting up buds. Wood ash laid around the tree is useful, and it does not seem to matter if it is fresh, as the rain washes it slowly down to the roots. Some scattered onto clumps of bulbs after flowering will build them up for good

flowering the following year. A terrific source of potash is potato skins - twenty seven on the same scale as before. Even better are sweetcorn stems, but a really useful one is the peel of bananas at forty one. In fact, when having a banana I automatically open the front door to fling the skin at Zepherine Drouin and Penny Lane, (roses not people).

By Hester Scott

On the Web

www.youtube.com - It's not just about music videos and the worst bits from people's stag parties! For example, search for 'Claire's Allotment' and find an interesting and practical series of video clips ranging from starting from scratch on a grass-filled plot to planting and harvesting sweet potatoes. There are even money-saving tips along the way too.



What to be doing now

Sow under cover now: spring cabbage, spring onions, onions, lettuce and other salads, tomatoes, spinach, broccoli, calabrese, courgettes, kale, leeks. Plant out most of above in April except tomatoes and courgettes in May. April: runner beans, dwarf beans - to be planted out in May when risk of frost is past.

Sow outdoors: potatoes, onion and shallot sets, broad beans, beetroot, carrots (if conditions warm enough), peas, parsnips (if soil not too wet), radish. April: celery, endive and most of above except May items.

Other tasks:

Chit potatoes - sit them in old egg boxes with the 'eyes' uppermost in a light area so they form small dark green shoots. Chitting is not essential though, especially for main crop varieties, it's more important to get the potatoes into the ground if the conditions are right.

If your ground is not too heavy and clayey then some digging would be a good idea, weather permitting. Wear several thinner layers so that as you warm up you can remove

some. Put layers back on as soon as you stop digging. Only do a small amount of digging at a time till you get used to it.

Compost or well-matured manure can be dug in too. Watch out for that very fresh horse dung that is being dumped at Friarstown - it needs to rot down for a few months or it'll rob your soil of nitrogen.

If you haven't already, prune any fruit bushes before they start to sprout. New fruit bushes can be planted now too - watch out for bargains in Aldi or Lidl.

Growing at Your Fingertips

A new phenomenon has taken armchair gardening to a whole new level and now has a following of over 80 million.

It is facilitated on the internet via the website Facebook, the social networking site, and is a game called FarmVille. It is the largest social game on the internet and its size can be partly explained by how easy it is to get drawn into it.

A given user can invite all their friends on their Facebook page to join in and any person who agrees immediately has their identity copied into the game. Friends can help with each other's farm, sharing seed and compost and watering plants, for example.

The idea is to build up a virtual farm, gradually adding different crops and livestock as productivity increases. One can live the rural idyll without ever leaving the comfort of home. Indeed, it's not the sort of game one imagines appeals to the younger user, and according to a recent survey the average user is 43 and female (Independent, 22/02/10). Groups of friends can work the one farm together.

There are tasks to do and levels to get to be able to get buildings. Different numbers of neighbours are needed to get animals, expand the farm, buy equipment etc. For example, there is a task to build stables for horses. Neighbours have to send each other nails, horse shoes, harnesses, nails, bricks and wood, not all neighbours have all the items to send to others.

It can be very competitive as well, as one can ruthlessly aim to earn as much 'money' as possible. There are many levels



to work one's way up through. Some comments online remark on some 'farmers' very intensive stocking practices, which in the real world would not be permitted, especially under EU regulations.

FarmVille is, for the most part, free. However, the user can be drawn into paying real money, via credit card etc., to boost productivity by buying extra virtual fertilizer, feed etc.

The actual imagery of the game is somewhat cutesy, with childish cartoon renditions of animals, plants and people. The user can choose the appearance of the farmer, such as hair and eye colour. There are also some rather unusual farm animals, including elephants. Apparently they produce circus peanuts, whatever they are!

Whether the game has any practical educational function applicable to real life growing is very debatable. There is no particular climate zoning so any crop or fruit tree can be grown. Crops are not grown in real time either, e.g. 2 days for squash. Fine for the social network addicts maybe.

By Sinéad Ní Bháin

Allot some time for a waxing lyrical moment

Trevor Moss & Hannah-Lou, formerly of the country folk band Indigo Moss have just released their self-titled debut album 'Trevor Moss & Hannah-Lou'.

Both Trevor Moss and Hannah-Lou have become pivotal figures in the modern acoustic folk resurgence in the UK.

Their debut single is entitled 'Allotment Song' which lyrics such as ... "he sows his seeds in rows, cause that's the way his father's father showed him" truly sings the praises of the joys of growing vegetables. Other songs on the album incorporate mentions of various vegetables and country themes.

Tucked inside the CD sleeve for the Album is a packet of 'Tommy Seeds' which allows the listener the opportunity to grow some tomatoes. Nice surprise and a lovely gesture.

You can catch Trevor Moss and Hannah-Lou on their upcoming tour in the Academy 2 venue, Dublin on the 30th April.

By Daithí MacOitir

From one White House lawn to another

It's been all over the news. First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, is growing a vegetable garden on the White House Lawn, helped by local school children from the Bancroft Elementary School (not in Tallaght!).

Mrs. Obama had the children's help in gathering their first harvest on 16th June 2009. The produce feeds the Obama family and others in the White House but much of it also goes to local soup kitchens, benefitting poorer people who cannot afford good fresh food.

As explained by the First Lady, for those Americans who live in areas where healthy food is out of reach, a healthy future is also out of reach. This is why community gardens are so exciting. They provide the opportunity to make healthy, affordable food readily available while bringing

communities together (www.whitehouse.gov/blog/A-Healthy-Harvest/).

What perhaps is less well known, on this side of the world anyway, is that the idea was brought about by Roger Doiron of Kitchen Gardeners International (www.kitchengarden.org). He proposed the idea on a website set up to gather ideas together from the public on what the new president should focus on his/her first day in office (www.ondayone.org). This is a project of the Better World Fund, which is an organization 'dedicated to a strong US - UN relationship' (www.betterworldcampaign.org). Roger went on to establish a major campaign called Eat the View (www.eattheview.org) which gathered over 100,000 signatures. These combined efforts resulted in the



(Photo: Samantha Appleton, www.whitehouse.gov)

vegetable garden project being undertaken by Michelle Obama.

This example seems to be being followed by another well-known female figurehead—the Queen of England. Queen Elizabeth II has started growing vegetables at Buckingham Palace, for the first time since World War II. Perhaps our own President, Mary MacAleese, could follow their example and get stuck in with spade and fork at Áras an Uachtaráin.

By Sinéad Ní Bháin

Forthcoming Events/Notices

We are planning to send out regular news updates to our members on all aspects of allotment gardening. Let us know if you do not want to receive these by E mailing us at sdaa@eircom.net

Eco Week 2010

Watch out for South Dublin County Council's Eco Week, 19th - 24th April. There are due to be some events/exhibitions of interest to allotmenters and gardeners. A notice or link will go on our website nearer the time.

Workshop – 'Grow your own Organic Vegetables'
Saturday 17th April

National Botanic Gardens

Learn about growing vegetables the organic way from the professional gardening staff of the National Botanic Gardens. Our gardeners will have lots of practical tips on growing your own vegetables, providing practical advice on being an environmentally friendly gardener and how to get the best results from your garden regardless of how small it is.

Time: 11.00am

Meet at the Visitor Centre

Cost: €30. Please note, numbers are limited so advance booking is essential. Ph:01 804 0300. Proceeds in aid of the Irish Museums Trust.

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.

Contact Details

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