



Green Fingers

Newsletter of the South Dublin Allotments Association

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From the Chair

It is often the smaller things in life that work together to make up the much bigger picture. So it is with allotment life.

One of the allotment holders was telling me at the Friarstown Open Day you might hear from time to time, while out working on the plot, the voice of an allotment holder would ring out from the hill: "Anyone like a few cabbage or cauliflower plants"? -word gets around quickly like this, the plants get used by someone who needs them and they don't go to waste. This also is a way through which people get introduced to the great variety of vegetables and varieties of each vegetable which can be grown on allotments. Through that process people find out for themselves what new vegetables they might like to try and also what grows well on each allotment site.

We see this sort of thing happening regularly on allotments with seed potatoes,

packeted seed and excess produce - an informal exchange economy which seems to be backed by a spirit of companionship and shared commitment.

The social side of allotment life also seems to buffer us from the inevitable crop failures which happen -practically every one of the allotment holders at Friarstown said their carrots were ruined this year by carrot root fly. There is consolation in knowing that you're not the only one!

The Open Day also showed us (as if we needed reminding!) that it all starts with the soil. Because the soil quality in Friarstown is good agricultural land to begin with, and has been improved from four years of active cultivation since it was made into allotments, the produce from it is of the highest order. It both looks and tastes terrific.

The plot themselves looked really well – with almost all

plots in active cultivation with very few neglected plots. This is a standard which can and should be maintained - a combination of the rigorous inspection regime by the county council and our own encouragement to each other as allotment holders should serve this aim. Complacency cannot creep in – our allotments in all four of the South Dublin County Council sites have become the standard bearers for the rest of Ireland.

We are hoping that Open Days such as the one we had on 24th July in Friarstown help to keep up a good standard of allotment keeping and leads to a good clean up of the communal areas in and around the sites.

By now many new allotment holders have seen the work of the association and have chosen to sign up for membership - swelling our numbers to over 100, which is the highest level of membership we have had.

We would like to encourage enthusiastic people who could make a valuable contribution to our efforts to come to our AGM on 20th September and make their voices heard. There are so many new developments happening with allotments in our county, in our country and internationally it is a very exciting time to get involved and maybe even serve on the committee. You could have a say in planning our activities for the year ahead, help to rally support for allotments and represent the allotment holders you meet on your site.

Happy harvesting!

Michael Fox



(l to r) Allotment Association Secretary Joe Brooks, Mayor Eamon Maloney of South Dublin County Council and Association Chairperson Michael Fox.

Allotment Updates

Tymon

The plots in Tymon Park are looking at their best about now - all plots are in use and the beds are filled with lovely vegetables, soft fruit and herbs.

We are lucky in Tymon that the site is boundaried, on one side, by a 12ft high south - west facing wall. A number of us have got permission to grow fruit trees trained against this wall. (fruit trees and trees generally are not normally allowed on allotment plots because, as "permanent" plantings, they can cast shade onto neighbouring plots. This is not a problem when they are wall trained).

Apple, pear, plum and cherry, as expected, do very well on this wall.

It is also proving to be a suitable aspect for the more tender fruits: peach, apricot and grapevines. These trees, provided the blossoms and fruitlets survive the late frosts, benefit from an almost Mediterranean microclimate and crop well.

The biggest problem is keeping the trees well watered at the roots - being so near the wall the summer rains rarely reach them.

It is lovely to see new faces on the site this year - virtually the first new allotment holders we have had since the site was opened.

Michael Fox

New from around the Country

Dublin City

St. Anne's Park Walled Garden Allotments are now well up and running and the plotters have their own website too -



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

www.stannesallotments.com/. Back in June 2010 90 names were drawn out of a total of 559 to be allocated plots. These cost €60 for 30m² or €120 for 64m², for an eleven month lease.

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.

Fingal

New allotments in Skerries are being put together through the hard work of the Sustainable Skerries Transition Town group and Fingal County Council on land owned by the latter. They have 50m² plots for €50 and 100m² plots for €100. Check out sustainableskerries.wordpress.com/ to get the latest updates.

Good News for Allotments

There was good news for our allotments campaign recently in the 2009 Planning and Development Bill which was signed into law just this week (Late July 2010).

Allotments can now be included in the planning stage as specific local objectives by local authorities as part of more sustainable development.

The definition of an allotment in the Bill is:

"an area of land comprising not more than 1,000 sq m let or available for letting to and cultivated by one or more than one person who is a member of the local community and lives adjacent or near to the allotment for the production of vegetables or fruit mainly for consumption by the person or a member of his or her family".

By Michael Fox

Visit to Wales

A Green Communities seminar was held in the National Botanic Gardens of Wales in May 2010. The Irish partner of this project is An Taisce and they kindly sponsored two members of the South Dublin Allotments Association to attend.

The Association has received funding under the Green Communities grant scheme for the last two years for the



Hedgehog house and lacewing home

Open Day. There were people from all over Wales and Ireland representing various community and gardening organisations involved in making their locality more wildlife-friendly.

The seminar included talks on bumblebees, reptiles and amphibians, community conservation planning and community gardening. Workshops were held outdoors in the Botanic Gardens, learning about natural woodlands, making wildlife houses of various kinds and seeing examples in the Gardens of recreated wildlife habitats such as wetlands.

From a vegetable growing point of view, one of the most interesting features in the Gardens is a double-walled garden, a rare feature



PET bottle green house, National Botanic Gardens, Wales

mostly found in Scotland. It was used to create a microclimate to extend the growing season.

Check out these websites for more information on the seminar topics: www.gardenofwales.org.uk, www.bumblebeeconservation.org.uk, <http://www.swwarg.co.uk/>, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/desireland/> (or google Sitric Road Kaethe Burt-O'Dea).

What to be doing now

Harvest all the fruits, and vegetables, of your labour. Lift all onions and allow to dry out before storing. Tie together with string and hang up, or put in hessian sacks. Store away from walls of wooden or metal sheds to avoid last year's frost damage.

Sow outdoors in September: Spring lettuce and salad leaves, winter/perpetual spinach, oriental leaves and pak choi, turnips, hardy green manure. Plant out spring cabbage and autumn onion sets such as 'Radar', 'Electric' (red), 'Senshu Yellow' and 'Buffalo'.

Planting onion sets in September gets them well established before the cold of winter, so that an earlier harvest can be got the following June or so. However,

if the soil is very heavy and wet in the winter, as can be found at Corkagh Park allotments, the sets can be planted in seed trays and kept in an unheated greenhouse over winter, and planted out in early spring when the ground is dryer. Another overwintering crop is broad bean, usually Aqua Dulce.

Potatoes and root crops can be lifted and stored over winter in hessian or paper sacks in a cool shed. Make sure that there are no damaged vegetables amongst them as these can spread rot as they spoil. Such vegetables can also be stored in a clamp, a pile of vegetables on the ground covered in straw and soil, if animals aren't a problem, or in crates layered with damp sand.

Another method is to leave

root crops in the ground and harvest as when needed. Potatoes can experience slug damage though, and all crops probably need to be earthed up to prevent frost damage. This plotter dug up perfectly good Sarpo Mira spuds after the big freeze in February this year. However, there wasn't much digging done in the rains of the previous December!

September/October is the time to start preparing the ground for the new year. Compost or well-matured manure can be dug in or even applied as a thick mulch and let the worms and bugs do the hard work over winter. Another option is to plant green manure which then gets dug in in the spring. Check out www.fruithillfarm.com for mostly organic seed in 1kg quantities - good for sharing with neighbours.

Guerrilla Gardening

Most people have heard of the movement "guerrilla gardening" which has been in existence for some years now in one form or another and continues actively around the world. The activists surreptitiously repopulate barren and neglected areas of usually public space but sometimes private property with seeds, plants and trees to bring life to what is waste or underused land. They wage war on the practice of trees being planted badly by local authorities into rubble and sand, trying to replace the rubbish with topsoil, and they also drive around with their cars loaded with water for distressed plants.

Most of this is carried out at night with meticulous planning and much of it is at the interface of what is legal and illegal, with sometimes police intervening, in which case there has to be a withdrawal by the gardeners. Some areas, such as roundabouts, are impossible to access so the guerrillas will hurl seed bombs, specially prepared packages of seeds, which are willing and ready to grow in difficult conditions, while circumnavigating the roundabout on the inside lane. These seed bombs are available for purchase on the net.

Often these germinated seedlings or planted flowers, herbs, whatever will be vandalised or removed by ultra proper councils, but often they are allowed to remain because no one in authority notices, or they tolerate or admire the results - a victory for all sides.

There have been interesting variations or outbreaks of insurgency in many countries. Again, many people will know of the commandeering of waste land in New York city. This movement started in the



Poster pocket planting on a street pole.

Bowery area in the nineteen seventies where the district was so run-down and neglected that large ware-houses and whole tenement buildings were literally abandoned with the owners closing doors and walking away. Liz Christy, an artist and student, decided to do something about it and got a group together to clear tons and tons of rubbish, and gradually the area was cleaned and top-soil imported and plants donated and a public garden was initiated. The people living nearby slowly came forward, contributed their time and effort and utilised the area, and a beautiful garden was created. There was a noticeable reduction in crime and social welfare costs, nature reasserted itself and birds and insects found it and the whole fabric was changed and enriched. To this day anybody can volunteer their services to work there and a record is kept

of their hours and they achieve rights to use it.

Liz Christy was consulted on the establishment of other community gardens in New York and other cities, as waste land was identified, but sometimes their very success was their downfall, as once the neighbourhood was improved and the values of the properties increased, and the city fathers realised there was money to be made, they often tried to take over the entire enterprise. From the height of about eight hundred green areas, they were reduced, particularly during Mayor Guillianni's tenure, to about six hundred. The actress, Bette Midler, has been a strong supporter and advocate for the movement and some tourists come to New York with the sole purpose of visiting the gardens.

By Hester Scott

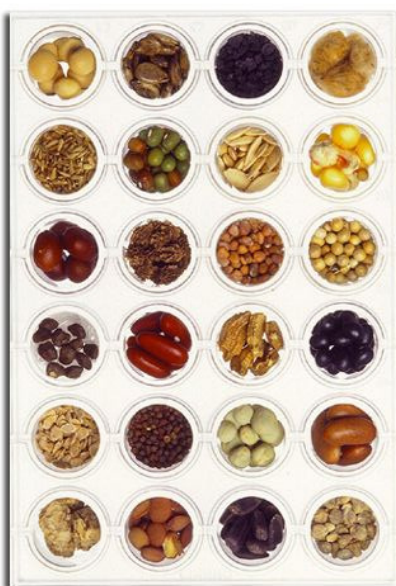
World's first seed bank faces wrecker's ball

As many will be aware, 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. How ironic, and sickening, to discover that Russia is intent on destroying the world's first seed bank in the name of development, i.e. house building.

The Pavlovsk agricultural station outside St. Petersburg was established in 1926 by Nikolai Vavilov. He came up with the whole idea of creating seed banks as reservoirs of genetic diversity to guard against disease and other problems. The station forms part of the N.I. Vavilov Institute of Plant Industry.

During the 900 day siege of Leningrad in the Second World War, twelve Russian scientists died of starvation protecting the seed bank, rather than eat the precious seed they were surrounded by. Vavilov later died in prison in 1943 of malnutrition.

Pavlovsk Station holds about 5,000 varieties of plants, including over 100 varieties of gooseberries and raspberries and more than 1000 varieties of strawberries. Over 90% of the fruit and berry collection can be



Seeds (teamsuperforest.org)



Pavlovsk Station seed bank (www.huffingtonpost.com)

found nowhere else in the world. The collection cannot be readily moved - it would take years. This is because it is primarily growing in fields, suited to the particular climate and soil of the location.

An example of how important this collection is can be demonstrated by a situation which arose in 1997. The American soybean crop was being destroyed by a parasitic worm, a cyst nematode. A domestic bean could not be found which was resistant to the nematode. Russian scientists were able to supply America with such a resistant bean from the Pavlovsk collection.

Closer to home, Irish growers can be grateful for Russian tomatoes which are well suited to cooler, less sunny climates which grow very well here.

The current situation is that a Moscow court granted permission to the government's federal fund of residential real estate development, legitimizing the transfer of the Pavlovsk Station land for the use of housing construction.

The government body had argued that as the seed collection had never been registered, it did not officially exist. The property developers interested in the land had also argued that as the collection was 'priceless' no monetary value could be put on it.

The court ruling was immediately appealed, giving one month for a further decision. The judgement could be revoked by a direct order from the Prime Minister or the President.

What can the public do?

There are several organisations running campaigns to save the seed bank. One of them is the Global Crop Diversity Trust (www.change.org/croptrust). This has an online petition, plus contact details and form letters for sending emails and tweets to the President and Prime Minister of Russia.

(Sources: rastaseed.wordpress.com, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/aug/08/pavlovsk-seed-bank-russia>, www.change.org/croptrust, Sunday Times Home, Plot 34, 29/08/10, Wikipedia.org)

Time to Plot Action Again

Fellow plot holders, last December success was achieved in stopping the proposed introduction of substantial increases in allotment fees after a successful campaign thanks to representations made by many plot holders to Councillors and for the lobbying work undertaken by the South Dublin Allotments Association. Many of us thought at the time that South Dublin County Council would after reflecting on the many arguments presented to it at the time, would abandoned the notion of any further increases for the foreseeable future. Alas, that was not to be, as I noticed the other day on the Council's website that *'the fee structure of one euro per square metre will be introduced on the 1st January, 2011'*.

The Council's Economic Development Department last year argued that maintenance and management costs have increased to such an extent in that it must roll out such substantial fee increases in order to provide for the ongoing maintenance and

future expansion of allotment provision across the County. The question which was asked then and must be asked once again surely there are other means and ways to source monies from within the Council to cover such associated costs without having to resort to very substantial fees increases in these harsh economic times?

Maybe we should ask in what way precisely have costs increased? From what I can see the Council has not invested any more resources than it has in previous years. Allotment provision is one of many services that the Council provides, and like all other services the full cost of those services is not normally sought from the recipient. This is because we all pay taxes, either through our wages or through the purchase of goods and services with VAT, or both, and this money eventually to some degree pays for public service provision. National government policy is to reduce the cost of doing business in Ireland, to help regenerate the economy. How can this be achieved when local



government, among others, insists on putting up the price of service charges and fees?

If you feel strongly about this issue as I do, then the time has come again for us all to let both the Council and our local representatives know how we feel. The Councillors will be meeting again in September and the 2011 budget will very likely be under discussion from then on. Now is the time to act.

Friarstown Plot Holder

Forthcoming Events/Notices

National Organic Week, 13th-19th September. Check out www.bordbia.ie for a list of events nationwide.

GIY 2010 Conference, Saturday 18th September, Guinness Storehouse, Dublin 8. Price €40 including lunch and tour of Storehouse (with pint of Guinness!). President Mary McAleese is to launch the event, and guest speakers include Duncan Stewart, Diarmuid Gavin, Klaus

Laitenberger, Fionnuala Fallon and our own Michael Fox. To book check out the 'Shop online' section of Grow It Yourself's website, www.giyireland.com.

Contact Details

The South Dublin Allotments Association can be contacted at sdaa@eircom.net or at www.southdublinallotmentsassociation.ie

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:
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