

Eynsham Allotments News Spring 2024 Issue 7

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Welcome from Peter...

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2024, and the first with a new committee.

I am not going to try to 'upstage' the content of this newsletter, so I want to cover just one very basic thing which should help all of us. Many people say that our modern society is losing much of its sense of 'community', of people pulling together, looking out for one another. I have only been an Eynsham resident for six years, but I think this village has a lot going for it, covering all the age groups and many, varied interests. Over the winter, we have managed to bring all the allotment plots into use, and the waiting list is down to 11 (from 35 or so during Covid). We have projects on the go - looking after our site, beating the rabbits (and possibly deer), increasing biodiversity, installing a composting toilet, running social events and working parties, and eventually maybe having a borehole rather than mains water. But what we do need above all is that feeling that we are all pulling together, creating that sense of community, of helping one another, that we all want to feel and experience.

Recently some ploholders on 'South' field stepped up to maintain the plot for someone who is very ill - in the end, they decided to give up their plot, but there was a great willingness to come out and work together in support of someone in need. For me, that's the spirit of working together on the allotments - sharing plants, seeds, advice, helping to maintain shared fences and gates, maybe watering your neighbour's plot when they are on holiday. These are all expressions of that 'community-thing' that many would say is missing a lot from modern society. So, looking forward to sunshine, rain and a good growing year, let's all pull together to make our two fields into a place where our 'neighbourhood community' thrives.

Peter Taylor

SPRING WORKING PARTY

Saturday 27 April 10.30am–

Come and help with all sorts of jobs for all ages! There'll be cake, biscuits and soup to keep you going and a great community spirit– Don't be a wallflower– come and get stuck in!

Also the PLANT, SEED



and TOOL SWAP DAY!



The Plot thickens...cooking your produce!

A Book review and recipe.

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Plot Profile



Weeds-Be careful what you wish for! Rosanne Gunn-Russell Page 3.



Chris and Peter Baker's Adventure. Page 5

WEED CONTROL



Are you following?

Find out how- Page 4

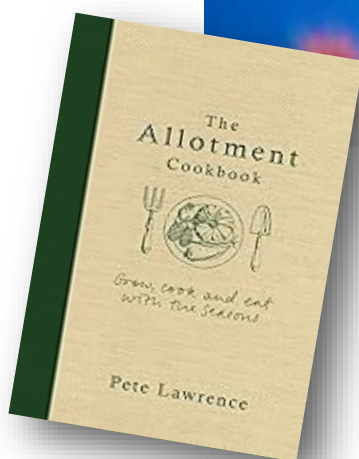
A bit late for Valentine's Day! But the popularity of both rural and urban allotments at the end of the 19th century inspired many postcards on this theme too. ("Allotments" Twigs Way, Shire Publishing 2008)

And-
just for fun...



eynshamallotments@gmail.com.

Pete Lawrence works as a TV Producer making cooking programmes. But it is his beloved allotment and how he cooks the veg grown on it that have resulted in this unusual and enjoyable book. The book works through the calendar year starting with Spring. For each season there's a piece about Pete's allotment, and those are great to read. The author's sense of humour and his love of veg-growing shine out. He's a fine writer. There's the odd nugget of gardening advice, and lists of things to plant, and short sections about individual vegetables. But the book doesn't really belong with the many volumes that tell you how to grow stuff. Pete Lawrence is mostly concerned with what to do with the veg when you have grown them. Describing a problem that is probably familiar to many of us he says "If ever a person needs a 'positive relationship' with vegetables, it's when they have eaten the same crop every day for a fortnight. The inconvenient truth is that unless the grower finds a new way to cook the mountain of whatever veg they see before them, it will end up on the compost.



When you have known each individual plant since it was a seed, that's not an easy thought. Culinary creativity is the saviour".

Some of the recipes are very simple, and some a bit more complicated. But none seem to assume you have a cupboard full of unusual ingredients, or loads of chef-y equipment, time, or skills. Some ideas were familiar; but I expect most readers would find some new and interesting ideas, as we did.

A (still just about) seasonal example of Pete Lawrence's recipes is this winter salad. It is technically pickled, but don't be put off if that makes you think of very strongly vinegary flavours or funky fermented food – it's just sat in salad dressing a while. The balance of flavours, textures and colours in this is great, with every ingredient adding something.

Here's Pete's recipe, unchanged but re-written to add some commentary by me.

Chris Baker

Pickled red cabbage, walnut and goat's cheese salad.

To serve 4:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 red cabbage, stalk removed and discarded, cabbage shredded into ribbons | |
| 1 large cucumber, diced. | 100ml white wine vinegar |
| 2 teaspoons Dijon Mustard | 100ml sunflower oil |
| 50g capers | 50 g walnuts, chopped (we toast ours briefly, for stronger flavour) |
| 250g crumbly goat's cheese, cut up into cubes (Don't like goat's cheese? Can't find any crumbly goats to get cheese from?) | |

Don't eat dairy? Pete says you can substitute avocado if you prefer. We think small cubes of tofu would also work really well, but we haven't actually tried these alternatives. Pretty sure Feta cheese would work, if cheese is OK for you, but you're not sure about crumbly goats.)

Eynsham Allotments meet your committee

Peter Taylor– Chair.



Peter's plot-
before and after.

My wife, Denise, and I moved in Eynsham from Oxford in 2018, after I retired. We moved into a nicely renovated house, but the garden was slabs and astro-turf! So I decided to apply for an allotment. A few months later I got a reply and went to view...I had a choice from five plots, which now, post-Covid, seems very strange. As a not-very-experienced gardener I took a half plot, which in retrospect was very wise! My half plot needed rescuing and the first winter was spent taking out those huge 'clumpy' bits of grass that take over so easily.

And then Andy Swarbrick asked for some help letting plots...and that's how I began helping with the behind-the-scenes work of keeping Eynsham Allotments running well. When Martin Groves became Chairman, I joined 'the committee' and continued doing letting, then maintenance, and now I am beginning to see what a great community resource the allotments are...while not losing sight of beating the mare's tail on my own plot!

Composting toilet and site improvements update.



The Allotments Committee are beginning to apply for grants to fund improvements to the site to make your time on the plots more comfortable and enjoyable. Alongside installing a composting toilet, we imagine some clearing to allow replanting mixed species in the copse between the fields, improving and sustaining habitats, putting up more bird boxes, picnic tables and a space to look, learn and reflect for all to enjoy and share. We'd like to hear from you what you'd like the site to offer– what would you value and use? We'll send all plot-holders more details of our proposal in the next week; please respond with ideas for us to incorporate– after all, we can all grow well in our shared spaces too!

Contact us on:

Eynshamallotments@gmail.com



What's this? A QR code. Never used one?

Simply put the camera on your smartphone to it and it will give you a link to events at Trinity College Oxford and tickets for Gardeners Question Time 23rd April 2024. Or book tickets through Tickets Oxford.
<https://www.ticketsoxford.com/>

Weed Control?

I wonder how many of us have taken on a new, overgrown allotment and discovered that beneath the overgrowth and first six inches of soil, there are several layers of plastic or carpet?

When I took over my plot I found a variety of materials had been used to suppress weeds including the woven heavy duty weed control sheeting designed for under paths, carpet, and thick black plastic-type sheets. The non-woven weed membrane does not seem to be a problem as it breaks down, but as I removed the woven sheeting, the carpet and the plastic sheeting I found dense rooting systems, deep puddles of water, and corridors that Mr Rat and Mrs Mouse had constructed! After a couple of years weeds such as nettles find a way through the layers, but the weed suppressant material itself make it impossible to dig up the weeds which return with increased vigour each year.

The raspberry section of my plot consists of a shallow layer of weedy soil, a layer of firmly fixed rotting carpet and a bottom level of broken bricks. The holes between the bricks may have been a play area for Peter Rabbit in the past... I have been developing new muscles trying to clearing this area. So think carefully about that weed suppressing material as a long term strategy.

Weed control– think of the future of your plot!



Consider the cover you may be providing for unwanted wildlife both flora and fauna, and think about the poor person who may inherit your allotment in years to come!

Some people swear by a “no dig” scheme of covering the beds with cardboard and then piling organic material on top. My own system currently is to use sheets of the woven suppressant sheeting spread over the beds through the winter, having oversown the sedges and ends of the sheets. (The bricks have come in useful in holding these down!) In the spring I will rinse the sheets in a bucket of water so I can use them again at the end of the season.

I will have to see how this works.

Rosanne Gunn– Russell



Your Membership Card—Don't forget!

It's also a discount card at several local nurseries—Cassington, Yarton and Freeland. Conditions may vary but **PLEASE REMEMBER— Show your card at the checkout BEFORE any transaction begins** to get the discount.

Eynsham Allotments meet your committee **Deb Arrowsmith- Newsletter**

Broad beans were obviously a first love and then I moved on to directing the family in how to lay crazy paving— well that was the 50's style! Gardening from age five, I became a product designer then a professional gardener and garden designer working in London and Norfolk for 25 years. Since moving to Eynsham the allotment has become the 'happy place'. I took on an almost blank canvas, plot N34, in 2020 and have put loads more fruit and vegetables in than I now know what to do with— sharing and making soup is a good way of using it up and helping people out. I am also involved in restoring gardens at Charney Manor which I love- raising plants and funds! When not battling the rabbits I put the newsletter together and rely on your contributions to make it interesting— so please get involved. Next edition in May. I also still do voluntary work for Quakers and, though I have given up playing the broad bean, I now play ukelele in the 'Quakerele' band— invite us for a gig? Oh well, it was worth a try!



Your 2024 allotment committee.

Peter Taylor: Chairman. Peter Feakes: Vice Chairman Christine Cox: Secretary. Michael Green: Treasurer.
Chris Baker. South field coordinator. Rosanne Gunn— Russell North Field coordinator.
Rachel Yuen: Sustainability and Biodiversity IT/ Database. Cllr Sue Osborne: Parish Council rep.
Deb Arrowsmith: Newsletter.

We'd welcome more help on the committee and if you have expertise or interest in a particular area— maintaining the site, researching the borehole project or maybe developing the copse area let us know.

Get in touch via eynshamallotments@gmail.com.



Facebook page—here's how...

Have you found us on Facebook?- Here's the link:-

https://www.facebook.com/groups/eynshamallotments/?ref=share_group_link&exp=8ce3

Our facebook group is a great place to chat with other allotmenters. We post about working parties and share pretty pictures of crops. We also have a swaps thread where you can offer up spare plants, tools, and seeds. You can also request help or advice, or just complain about the rabbits!

If you have any trouble accessing it email eynshamallotments@gmail.com and we can help you out

Chris and Peter Baker's adventure!

In November 2022, we planted some garlic and sowed some broad beans to overwinter right away. (Not all broad bean varieties will work to overwinter, *Aquadulce Claudia* does.) But largely the winter was for groundworks – setting up veg beds, building tool storage, mending the fences and so on.

With the No Dig way of doing things, you can set up a veg bed any day of the year, because there isn't a system of digging the soil to let the winter weather get at it. But it still makes sense to use the winter months when there's not much else to do: in summer we knew we'd be busy sowing, planting watering, weeding and harvesting!

The heavy work comes at the beginning with No Dig – you lay corrugated cardboard on the ground, put a layer of compost on top, and then put woodchip around it in a border about 1 foot (30 cm) wide. The cardboard and woodchip stop the weeds invading the compost. Or at least it stops *most* of them – mare's tail and bindweed *will be back*. So, we had a fair bit of heavy stuff to move around in our first winter. But the pay-off comes once the beds are made – then, you just add a further inch (2-3cm) of compost on top each Autumn, around any overwintering plants. Someone has asked me whether that means we'll eventually need a ladder to get up to the soil surface—I don't think so, but we'll see!

By the time the 2023 season got going we'd got about half the ground ready to plant. And an 'invasion fleet' of those cylindrical plastic 'dalek' composters was in place, as was a big tool storage box as a quick and cheap alternative to building a shed. There were a few reasons why we didn't get more of the ground under cultivation. Aside from the issue of how much compost and woodchip we could handle in a season, there's of course the slow progress of work in winter, with the short days and interruptions for bad weather. But we were also very aware that we hadn't grown stuff on this scale before.

We didn't want to give ourselves more to do in the growing season than we could manage, because that's so frustrating and depressing. I think that was a good decision. Finally, there's the point that you don't necessarily know what you want to do with the land for a while or have a change of plan as you get used to the place. For us, 'not in the original plan' included the idea of having some raspberry beds (and some bunting to go on the posts). This winter (2023/24) we've made beds on much of the rest of the ground. And perhaps now, we can focus on growing stuff... until we decide we need a greenhouse or have some other change of plan! We were fairly pleased with what we managed in our first season. One thing that went well was that the broad beans (overwintered and spring-planted) grew abundantly. But we discovered some recipes that used lots of them, so the kitchen kept up.



Above: How it started, November 2022. Grass, weeds, and some sticks to mark out where we thought we'd put the beds.

We were also pleased with our mange tout peas, summer beans, celeriac, chillis, potatoes and leeks. The potatoes and leeks were two crops in succession from the same bed (having grown the leeks in pots until the potatoes were lifted). Getting two or more crops per season is something we hope to do more of in future.

Something that went rather too well is that we grew a row of sunflowers, let them get established and then grew some climbing beans up them. The sunflowers were supposed to grow to six to eight feet (two to three metres) but



March 2023. Several beds and the composters in. Peter is working on a bed that we did dig to level it off, before planting potatoes.

they did about double that. When it was very windy last July we kept wondering whether we'd come back to the plot to find them all toppled over! And, of course, it wasn't easy to reach the highest beans. In the end we chopped some of the sunflowers down ("Timber!") for a harvest of cut flowers and to get those higher beans. So that was all right in the end.

Is it still raining out there? Well, sit down, write the story of your plot for others to be impressed with or inspired by!

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Chris and Peter's adventure continues...

Something that didn't go so well was that we got onto the back foot keeping up with the weeds. Just have to keep going with those and 'hoe them before you see them'! We also had some losses of winter veg to the rabbits. Must check those fences more often for breaks – especially since we've taken a liking to cabbages and cauliflowers, which are Flopsy's favourites too.

New things we plan for the 2024 seasons is more of just about everything, including some flowers. And, out of necessity, we'll have an odd kind of pumpkin patch. This comes about because an earlier plot-holder had planted some mint on the ground. It's nice mint, but 'invasive' isn't a strong enough a word for it. It does seem intent on conquering our entire plot, heading into Eoghan's, then Kate's, before invading North Field and marching onwards into Northamptonshire. So we've kept some in pots, and the rest we will try smothering under a layer of compost covered in weed mat, then slash the weed mat so that we can have a pumpkin patch while the mint (and maybe even the mare's tail) die off.

I'm not sure we'll get rid of the mare's tail. Let's remember that mare's tail survived the meteor strike that did for the dinosaurs. So I expect it just laughs at our attempts to be rid of it. In general we have a feeling of just getting started. But perhaps everyone is just getting started all the time? It wouldn't be a bad thing – boring if every season became just like the last.



February 2024. More beds completed. One is being planted as a flowerbed. The plum tree at the back of the plot has had to come down, because it was infected with silverleaf.

John Yeoman's Sunflowers as beanpoles

I got this idea from a now out-of-print book – The Lazy Kitchen Gardener, by John Yeoman.

April: Sow some sunflowers in pots windowsill or greenhouse. Sowing in toilet roll cores is good because you can plant the seedling, loo roll core and all, and just leave the cardboard to rot.

Plant out the sunflowers in May, when the risk of frost has passed. Put an empty tin can by the base of each. This is so you can pull the can out when you're ready to plant the beans, and put the bean in the hole. That way you don't damage the sunflower's roots. You can allow two bean plants per sunflower and nearly double your harvest.

In early June, sow some climbing beans (runners, French beans borlottis etc.) John Yeoman suggests doing this in pots indoors to get seedlings off to a quick start. Then into the holes by the base of the sunflowers they go. I tied my beans in so that they got the idea of which sunflower was theirs. But after that, they raced away up the flower stalk.

Yeoman's original idea is not to do this as a row (as I did) but to grow the sunflowers in a closely-spaced block (1 foot, / 30 cm, spacing). The beans scramble up every sunflower on the outside of the block, and the inner, sunflower-only block makes a magic forest playground for children (put a woodchip mulch down before the sunflowers get too big so that kids don't get too messy). Meanwhile, you've grown a huge mass of sunflower roots, which you leave to rot when you cut the sunflowers down, to add organic matter to the soil and lift nutrients that were making their way down to the Thames. The idea is originally intended for the first year gardening on some horror of compacted clay subsoil the builders left behind. Once sunflowers get started, John says, they will grow through *anything*. A related "beans+ small children" idea is to grow runner beans up the familiar conical teepee of bamboo canes, but to make the teepee with a gap in the North side – just miss out one of the poles. This allows small children to get inside and make a den of it. They may also be persuaded to pick any beans hanging down inside the teepee, which you'd miss otherwise. My wife Catherine has happy childhood memories of this system.