Coronavirus outbreak update

Dear All,

Just a quick note of (I hope) reassurance. As transportation becomes increasingly limited, I am aware many of you will be unable to travel easily to your plot. Please continue to follow all Government advice regarding travel and sanitisation (especially after entering and exiting allotment gates). I will obviously be adjusting the inspection regime across this spring and summer to take account of the developing situation. Currently, due to the wet spring, I was not intending to start inspection until after Easter in any case.
For many of you I hope your allotment will be a place you can continue to visit and enjoy, so you can benefit from growing food supplies and find a way to be outside in nature whilst following social distancing advice. I hope to continue to keep you updated over the coming weeks once I am in a position to finalise dates for inspections (or not as the case may be). Please see the guidance below for how to use the allotments during this period.

For further Coronavirus updates please visit:
www.wandsworth.gov.uk/coronavirus

Best wishes,

Valerie Selby
Parks Development & Biodiversity Manager

Hello and once again welcome to the Allotment Updates for Spring 2020. After an exceptionally wet start to the year, hopefully you have had the chance to spend some time on your allotments and enjoy the recent spate of sunshine.

Anna Costello sadly left Enable Leisure and Culture (ELC) at the end of February. She worked as the Allotment Administrator for four years. We wish her the best of luck with her new ventures. A new allotment administrator is yet to be employed. Until then, responses to queries may be slightly slower. We apologise for any inconvenience and thank you for your patience.

The aim of the updates is to keep you all informed with what's going on with regards to the allotments and to better connect you with the wider allotment community. The updates are released biannually, once in the spring and once in the autumn.

This issue provides guidance on how the allotments should be used during the coronavirus outbreak, some information on the upcoming inspections and guidance on recycling green waste on your plots, including composting, leaf mould and dead hedges. There is also advice from one plot holder on how to manage raspberries.

We would love to hear what you think of the Allotment Updates and any recommendations you have. Email your thoughts to drothero@enablelc.org.
As always, a very big thank you to everyone who has contributed to this issue!

Roehampton Garden Society held their first “Seed Swap” on 5 January and, following its success, they plan to repeat it next year.

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**Allotment News**

**Allotments guidance during the coronavirus outbreak**

Dear Plot holders:

Firstly, if you are feeling unwell please do not visit your plot or enter the allotment site, adjustments are being made to the annual inspection process to accommodate this unprecedented time.

You are advised to do the following when you visit your plot:

- Use hand sanitiser before opening and closing any gates and locks
- Observe “social distancing” with each other – keep 2-3 metres apart
- Minimise the contact with each other (e.g. no handshakes)
- Keep hand sanitiser with you and wash your hands with it regularly
- Do not share tools
- Do not wash your hands in the water tanks

We will be reviewing the situation position daily.
All communal facilities should be closed and should not be used during this period.

Follow advice available by visiting NHS.UK/coronavirus or GOV.UK/coronavirus.

Inspections

When we are in a position to return to “business as usual” we will contact you all to give you a revised inspection “timetable” giving you a few weeks’ notice of our intention to inspect. At the time of inspection, we will then be assessing the plot for the same suite of issues that we looked at last year. These give us a clear way to assess whether your plot is being maintained in accordance with section 3 of the Rules and your tenancy agreement. Areas we will be paying attention to are (numbers in brackets refer to the rule which applies):

- Excessive growth of grass/weeds (14)
- Inadequate cultivation (14)
- Inappropriate proportion of food growing vs ornamental (non-food) planting (section 22 Allotments Act)
- Fruit trees/soft fruit that requires improved pruning / maintenance / removal (17)
- Accumulation of rubbish/debris (26)
- Accumulation of non-horticultural items (27)
- Other (Including obstructed pathways / ditches/ 3m riverside strip) (11,12,13,16,19,23)

Please remember to let the office know at any time by emailing allotments@enablelc.org if you have trouble cultivating your plot due to illness or injury. The sooner we know there is an issue the sooner we can work with you to make any appropriate adjustments. It is easier for us and less stressful for you if we can deal with this outside of the inspection process.
Green Waste

It was a pity we had to remove so much green waste as part of the annul rubbish collection last autumn. This is not the purpose of the collections; it adds to the cost and is unsustainable. Please make every effort to reuse your green waste arising from your allotment on your plot. Below are some suggestions including composting, leaf mould and dead hedging.

Credit: uacescomm [https://www.flickr.com/photos/uacescomm/9687356412](https://www.flickr.com/photos/uacescomm/9687356412)

Composting

There is an increasing awareness around sustainable growing and healthy soils. One of the most useful things you can do on your plot to contribute is to compost your vegetative waste. Compost can replenish nutrients saving you money you might otherwise need to spend on fertilizers, improves the structure of your soil and recycles green waste. It is your individual responsibility as a plot tenant to deal with all waste arising from your plot in accordance with the rules and we would hope you would wish to do this in sustainable manner. As a Wandsworth resident you are entitled to a compost bin at a reduced priced via [https://getcomposting.com/](https://getcomposting.com/). You will need to arrange for it to be delivered to your home address and then make your own arrangements to get it to your
plot. We did investigate getting bulk deliveries to sites but this is unworkable for the supplier.

**Composting Do’s:**

- A compost bin or heap works best if it is subject to constant conditions, e.g. stable temperature and moisture. Make sure it is on level, well drained ground.
- The recommended size for a compost pile is generally no smaller than 1 m high and wide and no larger than 1.5 m. Anything smaller may not heat up efficiently and anything larger may hold too much water and become difficult to turn.
- Try to exclude rain, retain some warmth, allow drainage and let in air – make sure the sides are sturdy enough to prevent the composting material collapsing.
- Creating your bin directly onto the earth without any base will result in worms, invertebrates and microorganisms getting to work quicker to help materials decompose faster for you.
- Be vigilant about ensuring a mixture of materials - aim for one third soft green materials (e.g. grass clippings, annual weeds, vegetable waste, or manure) to feed the micro-organisms. The two-thirds should be woody brown material (e.g. prunings, wood chippings, paper, cardboard, straw or dead leaves). Avoid letting any one material dominate the heap.
- There is no need to add accelerators, activators or lime to a compost heap – if you have the mix right these should not be necessary.
- Turn your heap every month to let air in. In dry weather this lets you assess moisture; you may wish to sprinkle it with water if it gets too dry; if the pile gets too wet, you can turn it more frequently to dry it, or add more brown materials to soak up excess moisture.
- The single biggest failure of compost heaps is the lack of air caused by a lack of turning.
- Be patient – compost can take between 6 months and 2 years to reach maturity. Mature compost will be dark brown, with a crumbly soil-like texture and a smell resembling damp woodland.
- Not everything will fully compost at the same rate - any remaining un-rotted material can be added to the next batch of composting materials.

**Composting Don’ts:**

- Do not add meat, bones, fish scraps or other kitchen waste. This will attract pests such as rats.
- Do not bring in pet waste from home (e.g. from a rabbit hutch).
• Banana and orange peels take a long time to compost in our weather and are best not placed into your allotment compost heap.
• Please do not urinate onto your allotment compost heap – this is anti-social behaviour under the allotment rules.
• Do not add diseased plant material or perennial weeds – your allotment compost heap will not reach sufficiently high temperatures to kill off the diseases. Take any such material free of charge to the Smugglers Way Household Waste and Recycling Centre, Smugglers Way, Wandsworth SW18 1EG (020 8871 2788 or info@wrwa.gov.uk) from where it will be transported to a facility to be composted at a much higher temperature.

Credit: Far Closer
https://www.flickr.com/photos/farcloser/4022031843/in/photostream/

Leaf mould

Leaf mould is formed from decaying leaves and produces an invaluable soil conditioner. Good quality, well-rotted leaf mould (more than two years old) can be used as seed-sowing compost, or mixed equally with sharp sand, garden compost and good quality soil for use as potting compost. Poor quality leaf mould, or leaf mould that is less than two years old can be used as mulch, soil improver, or winter covering for bare soil:
• Make a square or round frame from chicken wire or similar, supported at the corners or at intervals around the circle with stakes or bamboo canes.
• Ideally this should be in a sheltered part of the plot to ensure that the leaves are not blown away.
• Keep the heap to a similar size as a compost heap generally no smaller than 1m high and wide and no larger than 1.5m.
• Moisten it periodically if it becomes dry.
• Most leaves take about two years to break down.
• If your leaf mould pile is slow to break down into leaf mould, try turning it regularly to aerate the leaves and speed up the breakdown process.
• Some articles recommend making leaf mould in plastic bags, but we would ask you to think carefully about your use of plastics on your plot and would prefer you not to do it this way.

Dead Hedges

Dead Hedges were originally used as a stock proof barrier while a live or quick hedge was growing up, but they can be a really useful way of disposing of awkward woody garden rubbish if you have too much for your compost heap. Large branches that will take many years to rot down, prickly gooseberry, or currant stems which are painful to handle, large gnarly root balls of dead plants which compost very slowly, hops and stringy plants which wind round the
blades of a shredder. All of these can be accommodated within a small dead hedge on your plot. You can make it any size and shape that suits you (within reason) but make sure it won’t cast shade on neighbouring plots or block / fall onto pathways.

- Knock poles or posts into the ground, with 0.5m between each pole.
- Put in a parallel row 0.5m apart width ways.
- Place the prickly prunings over large branches etc., in the gap in between, filling it up as the materials come to hand.
- The upright poles will stop the problem material falling around and you can make a more elaborate dead hedge by weaving the stringy stems between the upright posts to make an attractive windbreak or barrier to conceal any untidiness. This will keep all the material together, last longer and the nasties will be hidden between the woven walls.
- For the upright poles you can use small branches or you can buy fence posts.

As the material gradually rots down over the years, it will also provide a habitat for beetles and all the creatures that need soft, rotting wood for a home. Because you never empty a dead hedge it is undisturbed, giving a good refuge for your wild visitors.

Below is an example of a woody dead hedge on Wandsworth Common (photos by Annabel Osborn).
Of raspberries and other matters

One often encounters raspberries left to their own devices in untidy clumps, possibly in ignorance that they are herbaceous perennials, unlike true shrubs such as currants and gooseberries.

By following the simple routine of ruthlessly cutting out all weak and overcrowded canes to soil level (new canes will grow from rootstock buds) the beds will be easier to weed, feed, water and mulch, and therefore more likely to yield a satisfactory crop of healthy fruit.

The majority of plant roots relish a stable environment of moist but well drained soil. Reliable statistics are that a good mulch of compost or leaf mould over wet soil in warm and windy weather reduces water loss by the equivalent of half an inch of rainfall over a period of about 6 weeks. Without such a mulch, the same amount of water loss occurs in only 5 or 6 days, which digging reduces even further.

Be that as it may, one cannot go far wrong by keeping one’s eyes open to information supplied by the natural environment, even if detailed knowledge is
in short supply.

Whatever goes on in a bumblebee's tiny brain when it decides to make a nest in the most inconvenient location (a compost heap ready for use, or a stack of old timber that needs sorting) is likely to remain a mystery. But those of us who can shed a tear for the destruction of the natural world are likely to refrain from disturbing the nests until probably late summer, when the worker bees have finished carrying their load of pollen and nectar to feed the new batch of grubs.

The most casual glance at a cluster of raspberry flowers in season will find those same worker bees tirelessly engaged in the business of pollination, without which there would be no fruit to collect, which would make raspberry cultivation rather pointless.

*Chris Cooke, Putney Vale Allotments*

An example of well-maintained bed in March, ready for feeding and mulching.
Contact Details
For any enquiries about allotments please contact us by email on allotments@enablelc.org or leave us a voice message on 020 3959 0063.

If you have any questions or comments about the updates or you would like to make a contribution to the autumn issue, please email Ella Rothero, Participation and Communications Officer, at drothero@enablelc.org.