

# Allotment News

## Hope Springs Eternal

By Phil Murphy

THE signs of Spring are everywhere and, at long last, it looks as though we might emerge from the fug of Covid and begin to resume some kind of normal life.

We've been fortunate as WAHGA members to be able to access our plots throughout the pandemic but the Churchfields' community spirit we were building through working parties has inevitably been checked—though some have managed to continue to carry out sterling work solo and in socially distanced pairs.

Once we can all re-engage, the aspiration of the WAHGA Committee is to encourage plot-holders to take Churchfields to a level that will make it one of the most attractive and the most productive allotment-sites in Surrey, as well as a site rich in biodiversity.

We will be looking to manage the site actively but we will need the support of every WAHGA member to help us keep it looking at its best. We would also like to tap into the skills of our members and call on the expertise of those of you who can help us keep our management costs down (*see page 5*).

However, our principal ambition is that you all continue to enjoy your plots and cultivate successfully and abundantly. With so many new plot-holders, there is a real opportunity for knowledge-sharing. Those of us who have been around for a while but still feel we are cultivational novices know only too well how much experience is out there among our plot-holders. New arrivals will soon find out just how insightful many of our plot-holders are and how eager they are to help with tips and advice.

So let's go at this next growing season with real enthusiasm—and pull together as WAHGA to make our site the very best.

## Best-kept allotment competition returns

ONE of the downsides of lockdown was the need to cancel a staple event in our calendar: the annual best-kept allotment competition.

In the past, we have managed to secure the services of the man known as *The People's Gardener*, Jim Buttress (*right*), and we are pleased to say that Jim has already been in touch, offering his services for Summer 2021.

There are a range of prize categories, including best allotment, commended runners-up, most improved allotment and best allotment worked by a new plot-holder.

Our approach is to keep the timing of Jim's visit secret until near the time so that plot-holders don't seek to peak at a target-date. However, it will be during July. If you want to take part, you need to nominate your plot for the competition, as Jim doesn't have the capacity to look at every plot. More details to follow.

[Click for Jim's Website](#)



### Inside this issue:

Site clean-up	2
Odds & Sods	2
All you need to know about mulching	3
What the Allotments mean to me	4
Toxic chemical barred from allotments	5
Share your skills	5
AGM	6

### CONTACT US

If you have something you would like to share in the next newsletter or want to give us feedback, please [e-mail](#) us:

**WAHGA Website**  
[click here](#)



## Now you see it, now you don't...

*Sterling work by WAHGA volunteers*

ALTHOUGH we haven't been able to organise working parties due to lockdown restrictions, that hasn't stopped individuals from volunteering.

### BOUNDARY LITTER

In recent days, 14 large sacks have been filled with rubbish collected from the site boundary. This litter was picked up from the allotment side of the boundary, and from the fencing between the site and the cycle path next to the park. Much of this comprised of bottles, cans and food wrapping. However, there was also quite a lot of gardening rubbish such as manure sacks and plastic pots: a good reminder for us all to take our allotment rubbish off site for disposal. We have also asked the council to replace the rubbish bins on the cycle path as they were removed when the path



work was done a few weeks ago. One of these has now been replaced—near the entrance to the park. We will be pushing for a second bin that was removed to be replaced as well.



**Before...**

**...and after**



### OPEN AREA NEXT TO THE WOOD CHIP PILE

A large amount of rubbish had found its way onto this common area. The wood and organic waste has been burned and the rest was collected up into quite a large pile and has now been removed from the site.



**ODDS & SODS**

The **SHARING TABLE** by the shop is another area which has been tidied up. A larger table is now in place. Please do make use of this area to share produce, seedlings and plants (strawberry runners are always popular!). If you have items which could be reused or recycled by other members please also leave these on the table. A great way to ensure plastic and other non recyclable items are turned to good use rather than ending up in landfill.

**WEYBRIDGE ALLOTMENTS FACEBOOK GROUP.** A reminder that we recently transitioned to a new facebook group. We now have 60 members who are sharing hints and tips as well as glorious allotment photos. If you are a facebook user and would like to join us, [click here](#) for the link to our site.



# All you need to know about mulch

By **WAHGA** plot-holder, *Diane Ewart*

MULCH is simply a protective layer on the soil and can be organic or inorganic.

**Organic** - anything that used to be alive. It will breakdown into the soil, and includes leaves, bark, homemade garden/allotment compost, cardboard, manure

**Inorganic** - a more permanent covering, generally for decorative purposes such as gravel, pea shingle. It also includes non-decorative mulches such as weed suppressing membrane.



A mulch seals rainwater and moisture (e.g. dew, manual watering) into the soil and slows down evaporation. It keeps in the warmth of the soil, so improving the growing conditions for the plants in the spring. The soil is protected from erosion, such as from being blown away by the wind or washed downhill by rain. Another benefit from mulching is that it reduces the growth of weed seeds by cutting out the light needed for germination.

Mulching specifically with organic matter has significant additional benefits and can be one of the greenest recycling methods possible. It is also one of the best things you can do for the growing conditions of the soil as it not only adds nutrients, it also improves soil structure. That means your soil will simultaneously drain and hold moisture better, your plants will be healthier and grow and perform better. Our allotments have a sandy loam soil and anything that helps retain moisture is a bonus! Even if you do have a clay patch, adding organic matter over many years develops a more open structure to the soil.

Leaf mulch is something I have experimented with. In the autumn just collect the

leaves, place them under cardboard and the worms will very quickly work them into the soil. You end up with some amazing worm cast material as well. Alternatively a pile of leaves covered with cardboard will, over a year, rot down to a rich leaf mould ideal for mulching.

Another free mulch resource is cardboard. I apply a layer of allotment made compost or composted manure on the soil in late autumn and cover this with cardboard. This protects the soil, adds nutrients, and the cardboard breaks down over the winter and can be dug into the soil in the spring.

A living mulch - green manure - is another option ideally suited to the allotment. Green manure protects the soil, reduces weeds, adds organic matter and provides nutrients. It's also cheap! Green manure seeds are sold in the allotment shop and there's a wide variety of seeds split into summer and autumn manures.

Summer manure is sown in the spring and summer and dug into the soil 3 - 9 weeks later. Autumn manure is sown in vacant ground after the harvest. The green material is cut back and dug into

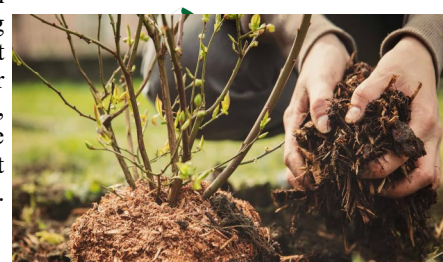
the ground in the early spring.

One further handy tip: any paths that you create on your allotment don't need a layer of weed suppressing membrane covered with bark and wood chip. The bark will break down and create an ideal environment for weeds to grow, the roots will grow through the membrane and be practically impossible to remove. Rather, simply lay the bark on bare soil and just keep adding to it regularly. In the spring your now well-rotted bark can be used as a mulch on your raspberries or around any fruit trees and you just replenish the path with new bark.

The soil on the allotment is a vital resource. We are just the custodians for the next generation. We need to ensure that we leave our soil in a better state than we took it on. Mulching with organic matter is key to doing just that.

Next month, look out for an article on tips for making your own compost. Just think, by composting your green waste on the allotment, and then returning it to the soil, there are no transport miles involved and it's free. What's not to like?

**"Our allotments have a sandy loam soil and anything that helps retain moisture is a bonus!"**



## What Churchfields Allotments mean to me...

*In the latest in our series, our Chief Reporter catches up with 4-year-old Rupert Cholmondeley and learns why he loves carrying on a family tradition, by helping his Mum on their plot on 'The Triangle'*



AS dynasty's go on our allotments, there aren't many to match Rupert Cholmondeley's family line. Many of you will know his serial prize-winning Mum, Wendy Anthony-Hoole. Wendy's father, John, first took on an allotment onsite 51 years ago before moving 49 years ago to the same Triangle plot that Wendy tills to this day!

Despite his tender years — he turns five next month — Rupert has also been well and truly bitten by the allotment bug. We asked him what he liked about being out there.

"Helping Mummy and seeing (neighbours) Pat and David because they give me wheelbarrow rides. I like helping Mummy dig and water things and I love collecting lots of worms for the birds, as they're always so hungry. Sometimes we have a picnic under the apple tree when my friends come with us."

A really good day for Rupert involves wildlife, though: "Sometimes I see a frog or a hedgehog which is super-exciting and I know that we have made God happy because we are looking after what he has made."

He's not so hot on bugs, though: "I don't like slugs and snails because they are gross and slimy and eat our plants, but I love hedgehogs, as I'm in hedgehog class at school. Frogs are funny and I love ladybirds because they tickle me when they are walking on me. Worms are tickly too and I like seeing the bumblebees because they make honey and I love honey."

But does he prefer growing vegetables or flowers ?

"I like growing flowers because they are pretty and smell nice and I can pick them for Granny and Liam's Mummy. I like growing vegetables too because they will make me hunky like my Daddy."

His favourites are broccoli and carrots: "I always have carrots for my snack at school and sometimes they are funny shapes to look at and Mummy gives them googly eyes and hangs them in the kitchen with my drawings. I like squishing my mummy's blueberries and strawberries with lots of maple syrup and cream and I share them with Granny."

We asked Rupert what he was most looking forward to planting this year.

"Mummy has a Mirabelle tree keeping warm in the glasshouse and we are going to plant it soon."

And what about the adults he meets on the allotments? Are they always friendly? It seems they are!

"I love Pat and David. They are my friends and they are always nice to me. Pat always has lovely cookies. We have lots of neighbours who are lovely. Sally lets me help her and shows me things and Cindy is nice. Sometimes we see Sophie in Weybridge and she has a doggy with lovely soft fur. Tony is nice too and makes yummy cakes."

But Rupert's pay-off line just about says it all. We asked him what he would say to someone who was thinking of taking on an allotment.

"It makes me happy and it's super fun."





## Blue slug-pellets - It's the End of the Road

*As the Government finally bans metaldehyde, our Biodiversity, Sustainability and Wildlife Officer, James Higgins, explains why and suggests alternatives*

Pellets that used to be the “go-to” solution for protecting plants and produce from slugs will be illegal as of April next year. We at WAHGA have discouraged their use for some time now.

Not only are such pellets no more than 10% effective against slugs & snails, metaldehyde and a similar product, methiocarb, are extremely harmful to frogs, hedgehogs, birds and small humans! They also pollute water tables.



The RHS study found that organic (ferric phosphate) pellets are still toxic to pets, shouldn't come into contact with foliage, and have a negative effect on the soil and invertebrate balance. Most varieties contain chelates to increase solubility which are toxic to earthworms.

You can stop slug numbers from escalating by timing your sowings correctly, planting strong vigorous plants, frequent harvests, regular weeding, and reducing slug habitat. Brick, stone, weeds and rubbish are good hiding places for them.

Slugs are a fact of life but you can limit their presence on your plot by the use of copper wire, grit, beer-traps, picking them off by hand, encouraging natural predators and applying suitable biological pest control worms, known as nematodes. Do [contact me](#) for more advice

## Share your skills, volunteer your time

**WAHGA looking to build skills-pool and working group volunteers**

AS WE outline on our front page, we at WAHGA are looking to step up our efforts to make Churchfields an exemplary site both in terms of appearance and cultivational efficiency. We are also keen to keep costs to a minimum so that any funds we do raise can be used to improve facilities for our plot-holders.

Recently we had a serious leak on one of our water-tanks. A plot-holder with plumbing skills stepped in and volunteered to carry out the repairs, saving us the costs of an expensive call-out.

If you have practical, organisational or other skills that could help us out, we would love to add you to a data-base of plot-holders we can call on, when need arises. It is not just plumbing and other practical expertise we need. Marketing, design and other soft skills would be most welcome.

Also look out for the resumption of our work-parties, once Covid restrictions are lifted. We will be looking for volunteers to help us with a range of tasks designed to improve the site. These work-parties are great fun and really help build the community spirit for which Churchfields Allotments are renowned.

**If you can help, please contact our Secretary, [Leila Brown](#)**

### AGM

Under our constitution, WAHGA should hold an AGM before the end of April. As this would not be feasible in our usual format, we will be contacting you shortly to ask for your support for a temporary amendment to the constitution to allow us to delay this until we can all meet again in person

Phil Murphy—Acting Chair

