



Bath & North East Somerset ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

Independent association supporting allotment tenants

www.banes-allotments.org.uk

Welcome To Our Summer Newsletter 2020

Summer always feels like the best time to be at the allotment. We are starting to reap the rewards from all that hard work and preparation achieved in the spring. At the moment I am bringing home lots of courgettes, spinach, lettuce, peas and mange-tout and it hopefully won't be too long before the beans are ready to pick and the potatoes ready to dig.

What to do in your plots in July and August

- July can be one of the hottest and driest months so watering may be needed. To try and reduce water loss, mulch with a layer of organic matter- I use grass cuttings. A top tip is to hoe as it stops the water being drawn to the surface.
- Check courgettes regularly and harvest when they are 10-12.5cms /4-5 inches long. Picking courgettes when they are small gives a longer cropping period.
- Start lifting garlic, shallots, and onions when their foliage turns yellow. Place them in a sunny spot to dry out.
- Continue to feed tomatoes, peppers and chillies with high potassium liquid food.
- If you have dug your early potatoes, eat them as soon as possible because they don't store well.
- Start thinking about planting for autumn/winter crops – now is a good time to sow spring cabbage, turnips and winter salad crops.
- Now is a good time to sow Spinach and chinese leaves such as pak choi as they are less lightly to bolt.



Anna from Lower Garden East suggests

I had success last year with my sweetcorn by the following method. I have heard several people have been having rats and badgers pull their sweetcorn down, or climb up and eat it. Last year I barricade the bottom three feet with hard wire mesh above which I had ordinary bird netting. Each corn inside the cage was snapped into a plastic bottle when very young. Recycle a plastic bottle by decapitating it below the cap, keeping some of the curve, also taking off the bottom, split from top to bottom so it can be spread open to place around the corncob, it will expand with the corn. I won the battle last year, I harvested all of my corn.

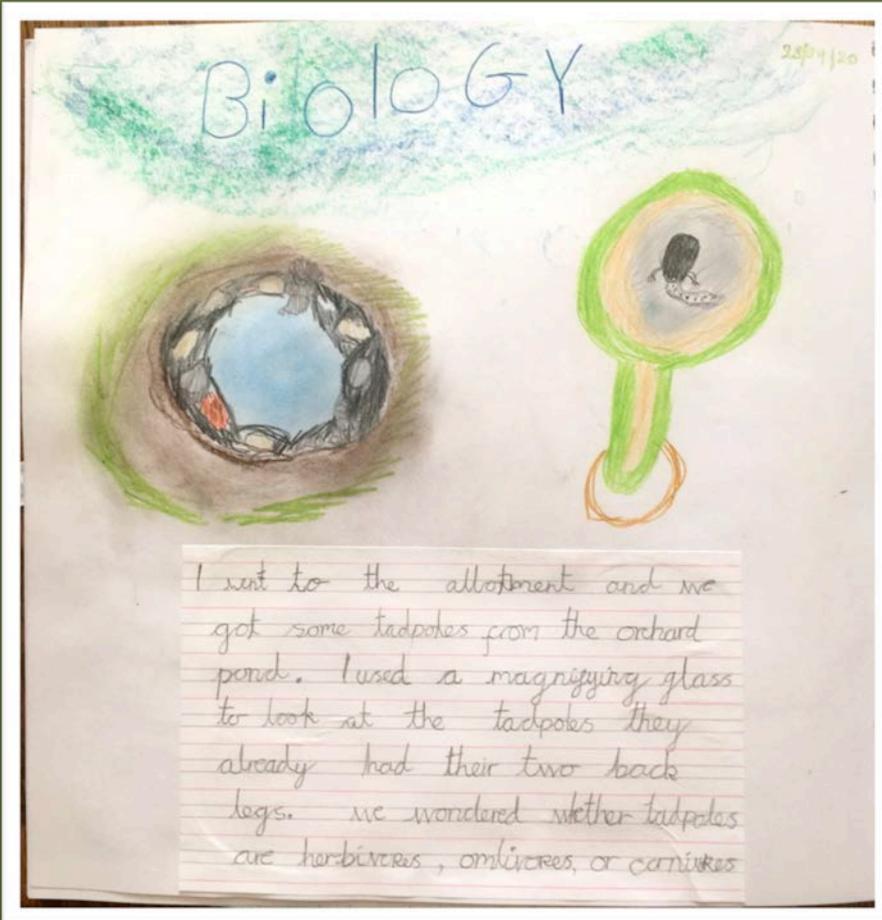
Maths, maps and mud pies- by Jess Macintosh

I must first confess that I am an allotment novice. We have had our plot for 3.5yrs, and that time has been mostly spent in a game of trial and error, trying to beat the weeds whilst growing something vaguely edible. However, our allotment has come into its own during this crisis. With lockdown restricting and turning our daily routines upside down, our patch has served as a bolt-hole. We could legitimately escape the confines of the house when cabin fever raised its head to tend to our fledging plants. Frustration could be channelled into digging, and achievements could be tangibly measured: one path or trench at a time. Nature showed us how to be patient- she can't and won't be hurried: seedlings grow when they are ready; fruit sweetening when ripe.

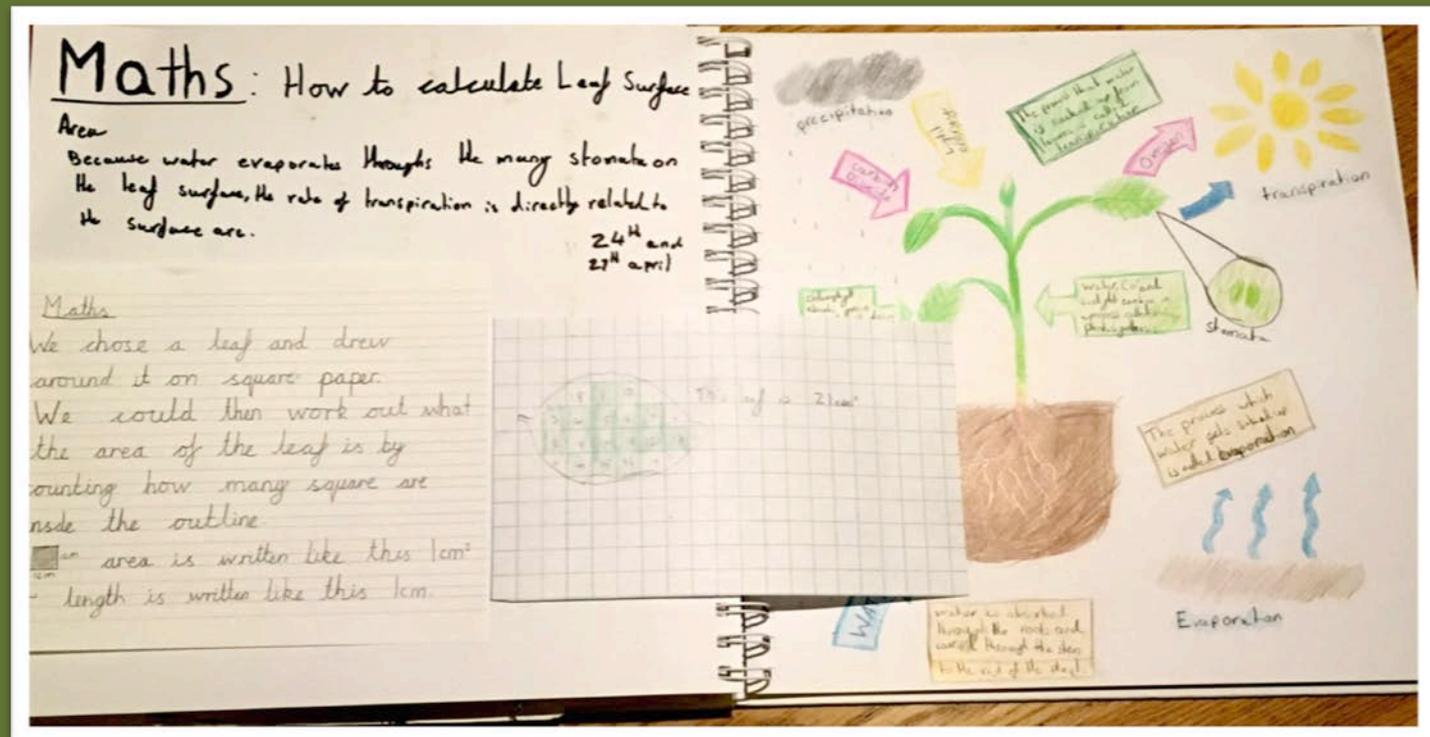
Not only has the plot provided us with our first ever crop of home grown artichokes (success!), our allotment has been my sanity saviour. As schools closed- it turned into our outdoor classroom- providing fresh air and hands on learning for my small tribe of four kids. From learning about measuring: using a tape measure to establish the length and width of raised beds; to measuring the area of leaves and learning about transpiration- the learning has been collective and hands on whilst being productive and purposeful. We have covered Chemistry, Botany, Geography, Art and Music. After surveying the pH levels of our plot with a soil meter, my eldest two now have an understanding of alkalinity and acidity and how it relates to growing; whilst the younger two have baked and cooked a range of delicious "meals" ranging from lasagne to chocolate truffles in their mud kitchen using leaves, water and earth.

The children have keenly felt the lack of playdates, and we have all missed seeing friends, but through our trips to the allotment site we have been welcomed into another 'community'. Being able to wave and greet familiar faces on neighbouring plots or exchange our woes of frost bitten or slug-severed plants, these (socially distanced of course) interactions have provided really important contact during the lockdown. Together we have laughed at the necessary 2m 'dances' at the water trough: somehow, outdoors in nature things don't seem so bad. I am grateful to be able to have our little slice – 125sqm to be exact- of heaven, and grateful to everyone who has encouraged us along the way in our allotment journey. Whilst schools will resume in September our learning about nature together will hopefully continue for many more years to come.





SIMON, AGED 6



DANIEL, Aged 10

THE UNEXPECTED BENEFITS OF FURLOUGH by David Pole

v



By now, most of us will have had the pleasure of harvesting some of the best tasting vegetables we've ever had, and for allotmenting newcomers that will be all the justification needed for the hard work of breaking a new plot. We've had a huge influx of newcomers to Lower Common East and it's been marvellous to see the untilled plots coming back to life. Covid 19 has had the unexpected effect of bringing allotments to the centre of community life once again and there's been a subtle change of emphasis. While the social distancing rules have, by and large, been observed carefully, many of us have perfected the art of safe two metre conversations, and an abundance of new and exciting shed designs have appeared, which rather than just storage for spades, are centrepieces for allotments as leisure spaces. We've seen children getting involved and hopefully beginning a lifelong engagement with nature. Ponds galore have been

dug and the results have been wonderful already. An abundance of water based insects and invertebrates have taken advantage of the pond housing boom and now dragonflies, damselflies, chasers and all-sorts are regular visitors. But so too are badgers and (rumour has it) deer as well, and it's a good idea to guard against having your sweetcorn poached by them. Apparently badgers don't like getting tangled up in loose nets, so that might be one to try. Over the years we've tried pretty well everything and the most successful has been enclosing them completely in a fruit cage. But be prepared to share is the best advice, and don't be too distressed if the wild creatures want to take their share - where else would we get the chance of a close encounter with a sleeping fox as we did last week?

The furlough has given a chance for our site to come back to almost full occupation and it's inspiring to think what a contribution our efforts could make towards the inevitable food shortages down the road. The biggest fear is that "getting back to normal" - whatever that means, will involve a return to the soul-sapping regime of long hours and convenience food.

Allotments could and should become a part of the push-back against industrial farming that damages the environment and makes our allotment sites into emergency shelters for wildlife. Ironically, according to the gardening writer and scientist Ken Thompson, well managed allotments are far more productive than the same amount of land used in conventional farming. What could be better than doing something healthy, absorbing and good for the environment. It's a win-win occupation.



Fenugreek Potato Curry by Anu Anand

Lockdown has meant I have finally been able to make huge progress on our allotment, which we took on a couple of years ago after moving to Bath from New Delhi. One of the things I miss terribly is the abundance of affordable Asian veg. So I was delighted to discover that fenugreek ('methi' in Hindi) is a green manure, fixing nitrogen into the soil and easily grown in the UK. I've grown some for the first time and here is my Methi Aloo (fenugreek leaves and potato curry) recipe. Rich in iron and yummy - and of course can be used with homegrown potatoes (and garlic!) as well:



Ingredients:

4 cups (roughly 2 thick bunches) of fenugreek, leaves separated from stems, washed in salt water and dried

(This can be stored - DRY - in a container lined with paper towel in the fridge for several days)

1.5 cups of boiled potatoes, peeled and cubed

Butter

Salt

1 tsp cumin seeds

1/4 tsp asafoetida

1 split or chopped green chilli (optional)

2 tsp chopped garlic

1 tsp chopped ginger

1 whole dry red chilli (optional)

1/2 tsp turmeric powder

1 tbsp coriander powder

Melt a couple of tbsps of butter on medium heat in a non-stick frying pan

Add salt to taste, cumin seeds, asafoetida and dry red chilli

Once seeds have slightly browned (30 seconds or so), add green chilli, garlic, ginger

Stir and fry this until garlic, ginger are lightly brown, adjusting heat as necessary - it should sauté but not burn

Add the turmeric and coriander powders, mix

Add the potatoes, cook for a few minutes until potatoes begin to brown

Add the fenugreek leaves and cook, stirring (add a few teaspoons water if needed to keep veg from sticking) until the fenugreek leaves are very dark green and dry

Serve with any flatbread and plain yoghurt.

News from Monksdale Allotments Community Orchard

Our trees (funded last year by a grant from Bath and West Community Energy) thriving well this year. We have left some of our grass long to boost wildlife biodiversity, and were delighted to find an orchid on the orchard! The Get Bath Buzzing team were kind enough to install a sign to explain the benefits to pollinators.



The Agony and the Ecstasy or The Tale of the Naive Gardener.



About ten years ago I planted this cherry tree (Stella) in the ambitious pursuit of growing food even in my little south facing garden on the slopes of Camden. I also planted two types of grapes, a thornless blackberry, and two espalier apple trees with a scattering of strawberries at their feet. Everything has done fantastically well and I now know why the Romans chose these slopes for their vineyards. Each year the grapes exceed expectations! I always leave some for the birds too.

Well there lies the tale – the birds. At first I thought I would share my cherries with the birds – simple – they would have the top part of the tree and I would have the bottom. I like birds, mostly. But then a clever pigeon arrived. Pigeons as you probably know, are voracious feeders and he (and several of his mates) began to use the cherry tree as not only a lookout perch, but also a grazing ground. Early in the season they fancy the small green cherries and they sit and happily rip away at the forming bunches and any attached leaves.

Philosophically I say to myself well that's helping thin out the bunches and that's good for the tree. Then there is a lull in feeding by the pigeons, but by this time they have taught a bunch of jackdaws how to do it! The jackdaws come in large bunches – I refuse to grace them with the word flock – and the ground around the base of the tree is littered with perfectly good uneaten cherries! What am I doing about this you say? CDs on strings – no good. Aluminium foil draped through branches – no good. Netting – impossible. Bottle tops on strings – no good. Loud clapping – works but it gets on neighbours' nerves, and ours too.

The cherries ripen. Blackbirds now join the fray and they are bottom feeders, in fact upside feeders too. I like blackbirds but my anger rises when I see that they are just testing out the cherries for ripeness. A bite out of one then they try the next one. I patiently net some individual lower branches reasoning that they can have the rest. Meantime the cherries are ripening but are not quite ready for human consumption.

The long hot spring breaks into a heavy storm. I read somewhere that it's called a mesostorm. It was quite fantastic and I was around at the allotment (Claremont) when it happened and I stood there getting wet just marvelling at the continuous roar of thunder just above the city. At last some rain too. We celebrated. Well for a bit.

I went to pick my cherries. They must be ripe I said to myself and grabbed a bowl and a step ladder. What confronted me was a disaster on a monumental scale. Nearly every cherry had split. I spent hours just pulling off the rotting ones in the vague expectation that some could be rescued, but I discovered that even the ones that hadn't split were rotting from the inside rapidly. I was so glad I wasn't growing cherries for a living!! As it turns out we did get enough for some breakfasts. The black birds apparently like half rotten cherries and as I write this my two blackbirds (there must be a nest nearby) are carrying out amazing acrobatics in order to get the last ones.

C'est la vie!

Jacky Wilkinson.

An extract from “God speed the spade”: The History of Combe Down’s Allotments by Jacqueline Burrows

Jacqueline has been researching the history of Combe Down’s allotments since recent planning applications have revealed how little is known about their heritage, exposing the ease with which such cherished village assets can be threatened. She hopes to publish their complete story soon.

Combe Down allotments and the annual rent supper 1852-1876

In 1851, Revd Newnham (1806-1893) developed the field garden allotment system “*for the benefit of the labourers of Combe Down*”, with yearly rents due each Michaelmas quarter day (29 September). Tenants paid their sixpences at an annual allotment supper in the village schoolroom at which, amidst much excitement, they were waited on by the Vicar and his second wife Catherine, together with the schoolmaster and some of the local gentry. This happy event can be traced over the next twenty-five years, until reports cease shortly before Revd Newnham retired in 1877.

By October 1855, the Bath Chronicle tells us there were at least 31 allotments in Combe Down, managed by a committee. Allotmenting soon spread down the hill to Monkton Combe and in 1857, gardeners from both villages joined the annual meeting in the schoolroom. Rents paid and the Committee’s report read, a “comfortable hot supper” was served to the 44 tenants who were again waited on by Revd and Mrs Newnham and some of the local gentlemen. A “small exhibition of large vegetables” took place.

In October 1860, the coldest and wettest year on record, most of the 39 tenants in Combe Down made it to the annual event in the large new schoolroom, although fewer than half of the 17 Monkton Combe tenants ventured up the steep, muddy hill in the dark. The meal was – as always - beef, with allotment vegetables and coffee to follow, with some “fine samples” of produce on show. After paying their sixpences, tenants were each given a penny halfpenny back to make up for the failure of the important potato harvest. Then, as now, everyone went home hoping for better returns in 1861, when the tenth anniversary supper took place.

It didn’t take long to include a prize competition. In 1863, rents were “for the most part, punctually and cheerfully paid” and a prize fund collection raised £8. Half was awarded to growers whose vegetables “would have done credit to Sydney Gardens”. Everyone voted that the balance be spent on providing half-price steel forks for all, then went home at 9pm in “happy harmony. Sadly, 1863 was to be the last joint supper: Monkton Combe’s allotment land was required for a grand new vicarage (now *Westfield*).

In 1865, the show was extended to include entries from private gardens. *‘It is hoped that this wholesome rivalry in honest labour and skill may tend to raise the character of the labourers, while the prizes offered by their richer neighbours proves their interest in the work.’* The supper was a grander affair too, with waiters being sent across from the vicarage. However, Revd Newnham didn’t come; Catherine had died a few months earlier giving birth to their sixteenth child. He missed the 1866 supper too: he was in Weston Super Mare getting married for the third time!

By 1868, the show was taking place in the daytime and included entries from across the Down, including grasses and wildflowers from local schoolchildren, and the rent supper had become a separate evening affair. By 1871 the annual show had become a major event, with the Vicar putting up his own money for larger cash prizes, attracting entries from a wide range of professional growers, gardeners and ‘cottagers’. It was even reported in the Bristol newspapers.

At the rent supper in 1872, the tenants presented Revd Newnham with the traditional inkstand, “in thanks for his kind services to them for twenty-one years”.

October 1875 saw the last report of a Combe Down allotment rent supper, at which the meal was “presided over” by Revd Newnham, now approaching his seventies. In 1877 he left Combe Down after 35 years as its vicar and retired to Corsham. By 1895, responsibility for the village allotments had been taken over by Monkton Combe Parish Council and the annual rent collection had become an administrative task, carried out by a councillor without ceremony.

Perhaps the allotment supper on the Down with a small show of “fine vegetables” is a village tradition that could be resurrected, once we’ve all emerged from the complications of COVID19!

Jacqueline Burrows, Plot 8A2, Combe Down,

8 July 2020

Photos from Alex and Romilly's plot



Planning News.

Members may recall that in 2018 the Association made submissions to the proposed new B&NES Local Plan. These included proposals to designate some allotments as Local Green Spaces and some changes to the wording of planning policies to strengthen protection for growing spaces. Unhappily the progress of the new B&NES Local Plan was affected by the failure of the West of England Joint Spatial Strategy to progress, caused by the failure of the Local Authorities involved (Bristol, B&NES, South Gloucester) to cooperate properly on the location of strategic housing infrastructure.

Without a timetable for re-starting the Joint Strategy in sight, B&NES decided that it needed to push on by updating the existing B&NES Local Plan. During the month of June this year it consulted on the scope for this Partial Update. Disappointingly, none of the issues raised by the Association in 2018 were included in the scope of the 2020 Update, which is focussed on housing supply and climate change. I have written objecting about these omissions, pointing out that the Council needs stronger “green” policies to deliver its commitment to tackling climate change. This is important to all of us because the only way of progressing the Local Green Spaces designations and changes to the Planning Policies. Is through the Local Plan Update. It could be many years before another chance arises.

This is an extract of what I wrote:

“The Association recognises the difficult position the Council finds itself in with the withdrawal of the Joint Spatial Plan and the New Local Plan 2018. The Association understands that this Partial Update needs to be focussed, but it is very concerned that the review of environmental policies and designations on the policies maps suggested by the Association in 2018 have not been included in this Partial Update. The Association maintains that these proposed new designations and changes to policies are even more urgent than ever in order to deliver the policy changes necessary to tackle the climate emergency and the expectations of the community for a change in lifestyles brought about by Covid 19”.

If anyone has any planning related matters to raise with me or would like to see the whole submission, please contact me on jackywilkinson99@gmail.com.

RUNNER BEANS

Getting the most out of your runner beans

We are getting to that time of year when we start to harvest runner beans. Once your beans have set it is best to keep picking them every two or three days to maximise your yield. Now, believe it or not, is also a good time to think about next year's runner bean crop. In particular;

If birds have been pecking your flowers, the RHS suggests trying cultivars with different coloured flowers next time around – apparently some colours are less attractive than others! You might also consider trying dwarf runner beans that are easier to net.

It is a good idea to prepare the area in which you intend to grow your beans in the autumn. Enriching the soil with well-rotted manure will help to maintain moisture and nutrients around the roots for next year's plants.

Poor pollination by insects is a common cause for having few pods. When planning your planting for next year consider planting some annual flowers nearby.

Consider growing new cultivars like "Moonlight" or "Snowstorm" (white flowers) or "Firestorm" – (red flowers) - which are better able to cope with dry spells in the summer.

Suggestion for your runner bean glut.

Add them to Macaroni Cheese or curries to give them a green twist.

Make runner bean chutney

Runner Bean Chutney Recipe (from Riverford)



Ingredients

1.6kg runner beans, trimmed
1.2kg onions, finely chopped
1litre malt vinegar
6 tbsp cornflour
2 tbsp mustard powder
2 tbsp ground turmeric
2 tbsp mustard seeds
2 tbsp sesame seeds, lightly toasted in a dry frying pan
400g light soft brown sugar
800g demerara sugar

Method

Blanch the runner beans in plenty of boiling salted water for 2 minutes then drain well. Refresh in cold water and then drain again. Chop them finely and set aside)

Put the onions in a large heavy-based pan with half the vinegar and simmer for 20 minutes, then add the beans. Mix the cornflour, mustard powder, turmeric, mustard seeds and sesame seeds with a little of the remaining vinegar and then stir them into the onion and bean mix. Add the rest of the vinegar and simmer gently for 10 minutes. Add both sugars and stir until dissolved. Bring back to the boil, stirring constantly, then reduce the heat and simmer gently for about an hour until slightly thickened, stirring frequently to prevent sticking. Transfer to warm sterilised jars, seal and allow to mature for at least 6 weeks.



If you have any recipe suggestions or tips for the allotment, why not post them to our web-site www.banes-allotments.org.uk to share them with our members.

TWO SISTERS METHOD

Having run out of room on the plot for my sweet corn, the third sowings due to failures with the first and second at home. Having planted my squash and courgettes plants a few earlier I thought they would provide good ground cover for the corn. Checking on the internet to see if anyone had done it before I realised it was a few thousand years old with the three sisters method. The third being a bean climbing the corn. Next week Monty was doing the same on Gardeners World! If the two sisters works I'll definitely try it again. I couldn't grow a runner bean up the corn, as the time of planting there were already 3 ft tall!

Thanks
Steve Marshall
Lyncombe Hill Farm



If you would like to know more about 3 sisters planting there is a really good explanation at

<https://www.almanac.com/content/three-sisters-corn-bean-and-squash>

Isle of Wight Garlic Farm



I Really enjoyed the presentation from the IofWGF at the last AGM and learning the history of how it all began during WWII. Very happy with the gadget purchases (garlic peeler and garlic/ginger/chilli press). Photos of resulting harvest from Provence Wight, Iberian Wight and Caulk Wight. All drying in the shed, it smells amazing.

The scapes from the hardnecks were lovely gently fried in butter and oil for 6 mins. They can also be used to make pesto. Can't wait to be able to visit the Farm.

Regards
Tricia





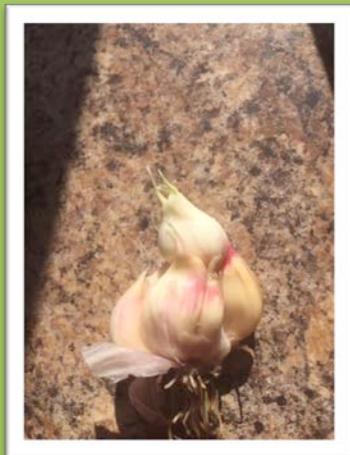
And Finally.....

Some advice needed.....

I have had terrible problems on the allotment over the past two years with allium leaf miner which has ruined all onions, leeks and garlic. I'm not sure how widespread this is in our area. As a last desperate attempt I have grown these under very tight enviromesh covers and have managed to get clean

garlic. However, they are growing in a really peculiar manner. See attached photos. I wondered if anyone else had had this problem.

Diana Groom



Warning re Bitter Tasting courgette's from Fothergills

PRODUCT RECALL: Courgette Zucchini BATCH I

This applies to any packet of this variety with Batch code I on the back of packet. Please see below and note that your packet may have a different 'packed in year ending' and 'sow by date' than the example.

It has come to our attention that a batch of our Courgette Zucchini could contain a small number of seeds that could produce bitter tasting fruits. This could be due to unusually high levels of cucurbitacins, a naturally occurring compound that is present in all courgettes, cucumbers and squash.

The incidence of this problem is extremely rare, but not unknown. It is not an issue listed by the Horticultural Trades Association, whose caution labelling guidelines we voluntarily and rigorously follow. It can come from issues with cross-pollination in the seed production cycle and is untraceable before growing out again for harvest. We have tracked the problem to one particular batch of seed which comes from a grower with the most meticulous growing and husbandry routines.

Normally cucurbitacins exist in very small amounts but genetic issues in the production cycle very occasionally deliver larger amounts into the seed which cause the bitter flavour. It's impossible to test for in the seed itself and we have never had a batch of seed like this in our 40+ year history. We recommend that if you have grown this variety from a packet with the batch code I that you do not ingest the fruits without taste testing for bitterness. A taste-test is a safe thing to do to detect if you have an affected plant which will be extremely bitter. Ingesting the fruits in any quantity could cause stomach cramps, diarrhea or sickness, so please discard the plant.