



# Bath Allotments Association Spring Newsletter

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## To Do List

**Get going on your plot !**

**This is a busy time of year for all growers. Here are some of the jobs to be getting on with:**

- From mid-February onwards, chit seed potatoes in a light, cool, frost-free place to get them off to a good start when you plant out. Rub off all but four or five shoots.
- Complete any unfinished pruning of raspberry canes or fruit bushes.
- Buy asparagus plants for delivery and planting in April. They take a while to get going but once established, crop for years.
- Sow seeds in a warm place to get ahead – tomatoes, chilies, peppers etc. all need the warmth and light of a windowsill or greenhouse.
- Prepare beds for planting seeds in open ground. Early types of beetroot, carrots, spring onions and broad beans can go in if the weather permits.

## Seed germination and testing for viability

Handy hint  
from Anne Love  
at LCE



It's really annoying to fill pots and trays full of compost and then wait 3 weeks and nothing comes up. A waste of time, effort and compost. An easy method to check viability is to take a few seeds and germinate them in the kitchen. Use a plastic container and line it with moistened kitchen roll. Sprinkle in the seeds, then cover with a large transparent fruit or vegetable container. The reason you need this is, if you leave the container entirely open the kitchen roll dries out too fast, overnight it becomes totally dry by morning. Entirely covered, the seeds frequently rot, especially home saved seeds which are not either clean or treated with mould inhibiting fungicide.

This method also works very well for seeds that are tricky to germinate, sweet peas and parsnips for instance. Fill a container with soil but sow the seeds on kitchen roll, as they germinate sow them in the soil.

## Growing Luffas

Fancy trying something new?



Photo from Chiltern Seeds  
[chilternseeds.co.uk](http://chilternseeds.co.uk)  
 For more information follow Amy Shore on Instagram @chicksandveg

Luffas are those things which many people think are sea sponges but are actually, long green fruits, like cucumbers and when dried and peeled are full of a mesh of tough fibres. If you don't like using those green nylon scourers, luffas are the perfect washing up aid, tough enough to get scrambled egg off a pan and yet don't damage the pan coating. They last several months and at the end you can compost them.

The other benefit of luffas is they love the heat and climb so you can use them as natural shading for a green house roof to stop it getting too hot.

Start the luffas off indoors in March, they germinate quickly in somewhere really warm, 25C is ideal, on top of the boiler or turn your propagator up to 25C. In cooler conditions they can be slow, about three weeks be patient. Some people recommend nicking the seed coat with a knife to aid germination. Once they germinate grow on at a minimum temperature of 15C so unless there is heat in the greenhouse, they will need to be grown as unruly house plants on a sunny windowsill until probably May.

Once it is warm enough plant them out in large pots or grow bags 2 plants per bag in the greenhouse. They are weak climbers so tie them to a stick and then across the greenhouse roof. The plant produces male and female flowers which need to be pollinated by insects or by hand using a small soft brush. Let 2 or 3 fruits set per plant and remove the rest. Luffas grow vigorously feed alternatively with tomato fertiliser and any all-purpose fertiliser.

Once the fruits have set leave them on the plant for as long as it is warm to ripen. Green fruits can be brought indoors to ripen. When they are ripe the fruit dries out and goes a pale brown colour. Peel off the hard outer skin, to reveal the sponge inside. The fruit is full of seeds, shake them out and save them for next year. The fruits are pale brown, you can bleach them with dilute bleach or just use them and after a few uses they become white.

If you are lucky to have enough, they make fun gifts.

## Threat to Combe Down Allotments

Update on what is happening at Combe Down Allotments



**Sunset at Combe Down Allotments . Photo taken by Sue Burt - thanks Sue!**

By an accident of history, the large allotment site at Combe Down has been held in leasehold since 1895. The site extends from Church Road in the west to Shaft Road in the east, although the eastern area (known as the paddock) has been laid to grass since the 1990s. The site, along with the adjacent quarry and Monkton School playing fields, is owned by a distant relative of the original landowner, who is not a resident of Bath. Unfortunately the owner of the land has recently given advanced notice of his intention to end the lease in 2025. Our Association has been working hard to try and protect this allotment site. We have organised public meetings and a petition, which has so far attracted more than 5,000 signatures and our officers have arranged meetings with local Councillors, our MP Wera Hobhouse as well as the landowners' legal team. The action group formed by some of the potholders on the site have been very successful in raising public awareness with spots on local radio and in local newspapers and magazines. Do contact us if you can help mobilise community support for the retention of the 64 plots on this site. You can find out more on our **“Save Combe Down Allotments”** webpage or our latest **bulletin**.

# The Importance of Allotments in Britain

Article and photo  
by Verona Bass,  
Combe Down  
resident



The campaign to raise awareness of the Combe Down allotment site's threatened loss is an issue with nationwide significance. The statistics about waiting lists for allotments bear witness to the fact that being able to cultivate a small piece of ground has become something highly prized. The testimony of people who have told their tales about being involved in growing are mounting into an archive that illustrates just how valuable a commodity it is. I believe that the awareness about food security, the health benefits of being outdoors, and the camaraderie in such places underpins the urgent appeals to preserve such open spaces. But the appeal to the BNES Council to list it as a Green Space illustrates that the acreage it represents means far more to a local community than the fact that it's demarcated into smaller plots for individuals to work. The loss would be felt about an open space that we all value, for the habitat that it represents, and about a tranquil oasis at the heart of where we live. Those plots are a local amenity for those who work them, for those who pass by them, enjoying the views and the greetings, and for those who benefit because of food donations. Those are direct losses, but it's bigger than that. It's symbolic of identity, of industry, of community.

Verona Bass

Combe Down resident

## Local Green Space Designation

### Update re a new local green space

Canal Gardens allotments have been added to the Local Green Space designation following a submission by Jacky Wilkinson on discovering it had been left out.

The picture is of plot 37 at Canal Gardens, in a pretty glade right next to railway line.



## The Carbon Footprint of Homegrown and Conventionally Grown Foods

**John Ingham , member based on the Claremont site questions the assertion on the BBC Radio 4 programme ‘More or Less’ that homegrown food has a higher carbon footprint than conventionally grown food.**

Recently an article in the Daily Telegraph (January 22nd) was headlined - “Carbon Footprint of homegrown food five times greater than those grown conventionally”. This article was used as the basis of a feature in the BBC Radio 4 programme “More or Less” released on Feb 7th so it has had very wide coverage. Both items were based on research conducted in the University of Michigan. Jake Hawes, who conducted this research, claimed on the BBC that the carbon footprint of a fruit or vegetable grown at home or on an allotment is generally many times greater than one bought in a shop. His suggestion was that economies of scale made mass produced fruit and vegetables generally far less carbon intensive than those produced on allotments. He stated that the carbon embedded in our tools, sheds, raised beds and paths made our fruit and veg much more carbon intensive. This argument however, and his research, missed at least one key point – a huge percentage of the massive new burden of carbon dioxide born by the atmosphere is there because of modern agricultural methods.

Conventional farming and growing techniques, especially since the 1940s, have relied on several significant techniques which move carbon from the soil, where it has been for millions of years, to the air, where it is present in carbon dioxide. Ploughing, tilling or, for allotmenters and home growers, simply digging contributes greatly to this process of turning carbon in the ground into a component of carbon dioxide in the air. This happens when the fungal filaments in the soil and the other living soil components are destroyed and the carbon which they contain is released. The exposure of the soil to the air after tilling dries the soil out and allows the carbon to oxidise to carbon dioxide. In addition the use of artificial fertilisers reduces the use of fungal threads as partners of the growing plants. In general growing plants pass starches and sugars to their fungal partners in the soil and the fungi pass up water and nutrients to the plants. This partnership is ancient, is mutually beneficial and was first established when plants first left the seas some 400 million years ago. This was long before plants evolved roots but also long after fungi had learned to live on the bare rock surfaces. Upsetting these relationships by the massive investment of farming and growing in machinery to plough and fertilisers to increase plant growth has helped to bring us to the present dangerous state of the atmosphere. This was not taken into account by the research or the articles about the research.



“ Approximately two-thirds of the total increase in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> since pre-industrial levels is a result of the burning of fossil fuels, with the remainder coming from soil organic carbon loss due to land use change, such as the clearing of forests and the cultivation of land for food production. A further article in the same journal ( see <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-020-0491-z>) makes the point that

“Soil carbon comprises 9% of the mitigation potential of forests, 72% for wetlands and 47% for agriculture and grasslands. Soil carbon is important to land-based efforts to prevent carbon emissions, remove atmospheric carbon dioxide and deliver ecosystem services in addition to climate mitigation.”

As growers and allotmenters we can adjust our growing techniques to regenerative methods as described at [www.regengrowing.org](http://www.regengrowing.org). These techniques are rapidly spreading around the world. Not only do they improve our soils and take carbon dioxide out of the air but they drastically cut farmer's costs and improve biodiversity. Farmers can often see that the soils which they inherited were much better than the soils which they will hand on. Decades of ploughing and applying chemicals in vast quantities have caused this. As growers we might also sense the same thing. We can improve the fertility of our soils, reduce the loss of carbon to carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and improve biodiversity by adopting regenerative methods.

John Ingham

Claremont Allotments.

## Project Funding

**Find out what projects we supported this year**

The Allotment Association helps finance small projects which benefit plot-holders on sites in our area. In 22/23 we supported:

Bee projects at Abbey View and Bloomfield sites

Refurbishment of a communal shed at Lower Common East

Improvements to bed retaining structures at Hampton Row

Tree pruning at plots on Claremont

**Why not apply for support if you have a project in mind for your site. Full details on our web-site.**



The table at Larkhall community orchard which was built with funds from the Bath Allotments Association small projects fund.

## Project Success

### Good news on the 'water my plot' project

Last year the Association applied for funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for the Water my Plot Project and the first year funding is approved.. This is really good news, massive thanks to Jacky Wilkinson and everyone that contributed to the application which can be found .

We now need to move quickly into planning and executing the Water my Plot Project alongside other Association and Council objectives. Find out how you can get involved below.

### Water-my-Plot

The endless forms have been filled out, the money is in the bank, and we are ready to GO !

Those site reps who have come up with projects for their sites will be hearing from our Secretary, Maria soon.

We have some sites where there is no rep, but don't let that stop you stepping up with ideas ! Run it past us – (maybe slightly more functional than the bucket-and-strip idea below).

The full bid is posted on the web-site.



## Focus on Monksdale

### News from our sites

5 new starter size plots have been implemented at Monksdale Road allotments on land that was previously used to access a now decommissioned woodchip bay. It is great to see that these plots have all been let and despite the very (!! ) wet conditions the new tenants have all started to transform the grass into allotments.



Every cloud :) Monksdale had a bit of a battering with the recent storms causing a lot of polytunnel damage. However a great example of community spirit and re-use - a poly-tunnel that was already on its second owner was damaged in the storms and although the frame was beyond repair the cover was passed on to another grateful tenant.



Storm damage

But soon recycled and reused

Orchard and Chicken update - January saw the traditional Wassail at the Monksdale Community Orchard with the trees being blessed with toast and cider to the sound of singing, musical instruments and saucepans!! Sadly we also said goodbye to Daisy, one of the original chickens from April 2021 - thanks for all the eggs Daisy ! Keep a lookout for some new arrivals in the spring !

## Recipe idea courtesy of Alice Park Community Garden

### Inspirational recipe idea



Thankyou to Alice Park for allowing us to share this recipe!

See their Facebook page for more inspiration :-

<https://www.facebook.com/aliceparkcommunitygarden>.

Boiled greens sounds so unappetising! However, the Greek version, Horta Vrasta is a rather delicious, incredibly moreish side dish, traditionally made in Spring with dandelion, or other asters, such as chicory.

Ingredients for 2 side servings

Salt, to taste

225g (8oz) fresh wild greens, a majority of dandelions

Extra virgin olive oil for serving

Fresh lemon wedges, for serving

Harvest the leaves before flowering. Like spinach, you need a lot of leaf volume that shrinks down when cooked. Trim any roots off the greens and rinse very well. Put the dandelion shoots into a pan of boiling water, add a little salt and simmer until the stems are soft and tender (10-20 minutes), then drain. Transfer to a serving plate. Drizzle with a good quality olive oil, lemon juice, salt to taste and serve.

Collecting weeds during their Spring growth flush is a natural sustainable way to broaden our diets, benefit from nutrient-dense, wild forbears of our cultivated vegetables, and appreciate (or curse) the fortitude of our wild greens.

Other edible asters include salsify, scorzonera, lettuce, Jerusalem artichoke, globe artichoke, cardoon, endive, escarole, daisy, feverfew, sow thistle, burdock and tarragon. Always use a field guide to identify unfamiliar plants. Only collect from plentiful populations. All wild plants (even dandelions!) are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). It is an offence to uproot any wild plants without the landowner's or occupier's consent.

## Book Review of 'Compost' publication

### Book review



This is a very useful guide to composting in all its forms, and is very well illustrated with lots of photos. It takes the reader through the reasons why everyone should compost, explains the chemistry and “recipes” and gives lots of practical guidance on making different types of bins or enclosures. It then explains how best to use compost and sets out several projects, such as trench composting, container growing and more. Although I have been allotmenting for many years, I have learnt new things. I would highly recommend this book for a newcomer. It’s part of the GROW series.

Toppings £9.99.

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