



Autumn Newsletter 2016

Welcome to the Autumn newsletter. If you have any comments about this issue of the newsletter or would like to contribute an item to the next issue please email the editor - raga@raga-leeds.org.uk.

Dear Members

I hope you have had a successful allotment summer. The **Summer BBQ** was a great success again despite the rain. A big thank you to Will Jennings and Pat Gillet for their cooking skills and those who helped put up the gazebo and also those who contributed to the lovely food. Autumn is with us so it's time to start all those tidying up jobs and sorting out the compost bins. Once you have cleared the soil I recommend you cover it to prevent weed growth if you're not planting a green manure. A **skip** will be on site for a week from Thursday 27 October for any non-compostable material.

The **Plot Inspection** took place on Saturday 10 September. Sadly we had to leave notes on 15 plots (12.5%). The Management Committee is concerned that despite offering starter beds to new allotment gardeners we still have people taking on quarter plots who it appears, after the first couple of visits and perhaps some early planting neglect their plots for weeks on end. Therefore we have decided to introduce a probationary period of 8 weeks for new plot holders after which if they want to continue and we are happy with the progress on the plot they will be offered a tenancy. As well as the Probationary Agreement which sets out what they are required to do they will also get a copy of the LDAGF recently published booklet "The little Allotment Book" which is full of useful and helpful advice for new and not so

new plot holders. If you would like a copy they will be available in the sales hut in October.

Grass paths; during the plot inspection it was noted that there were many plots where the pathways were uncut and uneven. It is the plot holders responsibility to keep them cut and in good order. We know it is more difficult at this time of the year but please take the opportunity when the grass is dry to get it cut and the edges trimmed. Perhaps talk to your allotment neighbours and make an arrangement to share the task. Can I also remind plot holder about the **60/40 rule**. Yes 60% of your plot is to be edible crops both annual and permanent planting. The other 40% which includes your internal paths can be ornamental planting but does not include trees. Oak, ash, sycamore and others, as you know often self-seed on plots. Do not let them continue to grow on your plot. Please pot them up and leave them at the hut so the volunteers can plant them in the hedgerows. If you have an oak or ash tree on your plot it needs to be removed. If you are not able to do it yourself please contact me and I will arrange for it to be done (07915 792 829).

Fruit tree pruning; a lot of members have apple, pear and plum trees on their plots and have neglected to prune them. Summer pruning of apple and pears should be done between July and September. You could still do it but you may prefer to wait until the tree is dormant, after leaf fall to do it. Plums should be pruned in April or July. All fruit trees need to be of a pickable height without the use of a ladder. A lot of fruit trees on plots are well beyond that height. If you are uncertain how to prune or want more information I recommend the RHS web site.

Wasps and red ants; a number of plots have had wasp nests on them this season. The wasps do such a good job in removing other garden pests we are reluctant to have them removed. Once you have identified where the nest is it is a good idea to mark the entrance with a stick or cane so that you don't inadvertently disturb them because that is when you are likely to be stung. Red ants have become much more prevalent in recent years and again vigilance and wearing gloves when hand weeding is the best solution.

Illness and other difficulties; many of us have experienced illness, accidents or family problems that have prevented or limited our ability to get down to our plots. Usually we have family members or friends that can help out. Please let a member of the committee know so we are aware that someone else may be visiting the site and your plot or that you need some temporary help. Much better to do that than to wait until your plot has got totally overgrown.

Incinerators; the committee has provided two incinerators for members to use if you need to burn dry plant material on your plot. They are at the side of the hut near the wheel barrows. If you use them please make sure that you extinguish the fire with water and remove the ash before returning the incinerator to the side of the hut. Remember only burn dry material and make sure the smoke from the fire does not affect other plot holders particularly in windy weather.

Hope you continue to enjoy your gardening

Paul Lattimer (Chair)

The seed catalogues from Kings are now available from the sales hut. Next year, 2017, will be the year of the bean and the zinnia. Try a new variety and be surprised. 25% discount can be deducted from your total order which must be only for seeds - vegetable, flower or herbs. All orders must be handed in to the sales hut by **4th December**. Please do not leave in the letter box.

Thursday Volunteer Group

We have had a busy summer with an average of five volunteers working each week. Our main tasks recently have been re-roofing and painting the Eco-loo and installing guttering connected to a water butt. Useful for when we are working on the nearby beds. The sunny perennial bed has looked lovely from the sweet rocket late spring display until now. The most recent job has been to dig out the really persistent weeds like dock and creeping buttercup. We have also removed seed heads from the scabious, knapweed etc., to help the plants better establish themselves. The huge job of hedge trimming has already begun on the South side; can plot holders on those allotments please help by trimming any shoots that come through the fence? The hedge on the East side will be cut after leaf fall. We hope to be able to pay a firm to shred the trimmings on site because the disposal is a lot for us to deal with.

Another task we have willingly undertaken is to clear neglected recently vacated plots. However, it is very dispiriting to see weeks later that the same plots, after they have been let have been allowed to become as weedy and neglected looking as they were before they were cleared. The Committee has decided therefore to introduce a probationary period for new plot holders.

The cook at the residential care home in Park View Crescent has been the happy recipient of a lot of produce from the starter demonstration bed. Can plot holders on the Starter Beds please only plant annual crops, either by sowing seeds or putting in plants that will be used or removed at the end of the growing season? Trees and soft fruit must not be planted. The Starter Beds are only intended to be used by a plot holder for at the most 2 seasons before they move on to a quarter-plot.

We meet on Thursday mornings between 9am and 12 and would welcome new volunteers, there is always lots to do!

Margaret Lattimer