

ROEHAMPTON GARDEN SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1873

MONTHLY BULLETIN

April 2020

www.roehamptonallotments.co.uk

Chair's Report



Looking at my report last month much of the activity we had planned has been held up due to you know what! But there has been some progress.

The area for the communal shed on site 3 has been cleared. We are currently seeing how we can progress the project keeping a safe social /working distance and whether it will be possible to push ahead with it.

The doors on the store have been replaced but still need painting and some fixtures added. They are very nice and it is possible to keep the door shut when inside, something we never could do properly with the old doors! Many thanks to Jackie for organising this project. Unfortunately, the company who were going to do the soak away that would take the wastewater from the store kitchen are unable to do the work at the moment due to staff shortages.

Great shame about the hold up on upgrading the water system on site 3. There is a hitch with Thames Water. We were to have more water points as well as having a more robust system. It is unlikely anything will happen now until our world becomes normal. Throughout Wandsworth, allotments have not had their water turned back on after the winter shutdown, so we are lucky to have any water. The tanks on site 3 are being filled daily by volunteers using safe practices.

Aren't we all fortunate having an allotment? Even if you are dependent on public transport to visit your plot, it is there waiting for you. Once the pandemic is no longer a threat and all restrictions lifted, we will all have to have lots of happy working parties to help those whose plots have become out of control through no fault of their own.

Helen Finch

Staying Safe and well on the allotments:

Stay within your **own** plot and only use your **own** gardening equipment.

Any surface that is **communal** is likely to be **contaminated** so **avoid touching**:

- **The gate**: it is possible to open and close the gate **without touching** it with your hands.
- **Taps**: the virus will survive on metal surfaces, so taps are likely to be contaminated. Safer to use your **own watering can** filled with water from the **dipping tanks**. If you have to use the taps, cover your hand or glove with a **plastic bag** which you then **turn inside out** and **discard**. The bag is easier to remove from your hand than disposable gloves without contaminating your hand.
- Keep some **hand sanitizer** with you or in your shed.

Gloves do not protect you or stop the spread of Covid-19. Keep gloves away from your face. Take care, when removing them, you do not contaminate your hand with the outside of the glove.

At best a Covid-19 infection is nasty, at its worst, catastrophic. We must **all stay well**.

Store Report

April is the month when the growing season really gets going. However, giving access to products in the store is challenging. It is essential that the wellbeing of our helpers and of our members is protected. We will try to give access to a restricted list of items where possible. The use of cash is highly problematic given its ability to harbour the Coronavirus and we are looking to find alternatives such as selling seeds on line and posting out to members. You will receive an email update as soon as possible.

We only try to stock products in the store that are environmentally friendly and are not harmful to wildlife. The use of peat has increasingly come under pressure over recent years. Indeed, the previous Labour government had planned to ban the use of peat for home gardeners this year. The peat-based compost, Clover, that we sell at the store is harvested from its producers' own carefully managed peat reserves which are not designated sites of scientific or scenic interest.

However, this still raises the issue that it takes 10,000 years to replace. There is not only the issue of sustainability but also of climate change as peat stores more carbon than any forest.

The question is: should we still be selling peat-based compost at the store? We are not planning to stop selling it yet. Clover is much cheaper than the excellent New Horizon peat free compost that we sell (£4.50 vs £6.50) and we are conscious of our members' pockets. However, it is something that we should consider in the future.

Brenna Lattimore, who covered this topic in her master's thesis, has written an excellent article (below) on this subject. I urge you to read it.

Gill Tamsett, Trading Secretary

For peat's sake, it's time to make the switch!

With ever-increasing awareness of the difficulties, the planet is facing and our individual roles and responsibilities to protect

and care for this beautiful place we call home, it is no surprise that gardeners are switching to more eco-friendly growing options at a faster rate than ever. The move away from metaldehyde slug pellets (known to be toxic to wildlife) is one example of such a change, and these pellets are no longer sold in the RGS store.

However, there is still one eco-villain lurking in many of the horticultural mixes found on shelves in garden centres across the UK, one that many people may not even know is a problem.

Peat.

Peat is dead, partially decomposed vegetation present in waterlogged, oxygen poor environments. The environments where peat grows are known as peatlands, and have been used for food (e.g., cranberries, lingonberries), medicines, burial grounds and fuel for thousands of years. They are also treasure troves of ancient relics, including bodies of people who died thousands of years ago but to this day are hauled out of bogs complete with skin and hair, because decomposition in peatlands is so slow!

Peat is also acidic and absorbent, which makes it a great medium for plant growth when mixed with soil and compost. In fact, it's so useful in horticulture that peatlands (especially raised lowland bogs) are being exploited at an alarming rate for horticultural use. Horticultural peat is currently a £5 billion industry in the UK, which has already lost 94% of its peatlands. Most of the peat we use here now comes from raised bogs in the Republic of Ireland.

These incredibly biodiverse ecosystems are home to many endemic species of plants and animals (found nowhere else), and play a critical role in storing and filtering water, helping to reduce flooding and releasing water back into streams and rivers during dry times. Perhaps even more importantly, peatlands are the largest terrestrial carbon sinks in the world, storing more carbon than all forests and grasslands combined. Losing just 5% of UK's peatlands would be equivalent to the entire greenhouse gas budget of the UK.

So, when we say we must plant more trees to slow down climate change, what we should

really be saying is that we need to plant more peat!

The problem is, while you can technically plant more sphagnum moss (found in the top living layer of peatlands), peat accumulates at a glacial pace of just 0.5 to 1 mm a year. Peat deposits can be as thick as 10 m, so it would take thousands of years for a peatland to be restored to its original state. Therefore, peat is similar to a fossil fuel in that while it is renewable on a geologic timescale, it is not a renewable resource on a human timescale.

Bottom line: no matter what it says on the bag, there is no such thing as a “sustainable” harvest of peat. Once it’s gone, it’s gone (until, let’s say, 10 000 years down the road), along with all of its valuable biodiversity and its critical contribution to water regulation and climate change mitigation. Although peat is technically harvested at a rate lower than that at which it naturally accumulates, these figures represent accumulation across ALL peatlands in a region, not accumulation in the actual bog where the peat was harvested. So, these statistics are very misleading indeed.

For these reasons, the Labour government had previously planned to phase out peat for use by home gardeners by 2020, and for commercial users by 2030. Meanwhile, the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has reduced peat use in all of its major gardens by 97% and says “we believe using peat for soil incorporation and ground mulching is unnecessary and unacceptable”.

Luckily, there are some great alternatives to peat that have been incorporated into commercial mixes, including coir, compost, coconut fibre, pine bark and worm castings. The store on Site 2 sells a very effective peat-free compost alternative, and we would encourage all gardeners to choose this option where possible. With a government phase out of peat on the horizon, there is no better time than now to get ahead of the curve and make the switch to a more sustainable option!

Brenna Lattimore



Peat free compost on sale in the store.

Welcome to New Plot holders

Site 2

Beverley Brodie

Emma Beynon

Nina Laskus

Jeffery and Margarita Buckingham

Rita Fong Man

Vanessa Friend

Site 3

Angela Harvey

Gerrard Ryan

Mark Prince

Maria Sforza

Sharlene Edey

Julie Anderson

Vitalija Rananauskiene

RHS CONTACTS

Committee Chair: Helen Finch.

Site 2 Allotment Secretary: Catherine Maunsell-Bower.

Site 3 Joint Allotment Secretaries: Vivian Fowler & Alison Linton

Site Manager: Charles Gilbe

Comments or questions for Chair and/or Committee via website:

rgs.sw15@gmail.com

All policies and procedures are on our website.

www.roehamptonallotments.co.uk

RGS ADDRESS AND POST BOX

(Fixed to the right of the gate at site 2)

Roehampton Garden Society
The Pleasance Allotments
The Pleasance
London SW15 5HF

BASIC RULES FOR THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL COHESION ON OUR ALLOTMENT SITES

- Respect the rights and belongings of other plot- holders.
- No dogs without leads.
- No unsupervised children.
- Lock the gate behind you.
- Dispose of your own rubbish.
- No structures to be erected or trees to be planted without permission of your Site Secretary.

*If you think someone is breaking the rules contact a committee member or me, Helen Finch, rather than confront another plot holder. Helen.finch2@btinternet.com
07736 422373*

SECURITY

If you see someone trespassing or causing damage on the Sites, or in an emergency phone 999 or text phone 18000.

NEXT BULLETIN

May 2020. Editor Carol Martinez.

Email stories and photos to

carolmartinez@hotmail.co.uk by 11th May 2020.

Recipe suggestions always welcome.