



Highgate Allotments Association Spring newsletter

A warm welcome to our new tenants - this newsletter is from the HAA Committee, who were elected at our AGM in March. You can find past editions (as well as lots of other useful docs) on our [website](#).

Loads of seasonal tips and advice in this edition but, first of all, some dates for your diary:

- **Plant sale Saturday 13 May, 2-5 pm:** bring your surplus plants (profits to be split between HAA and Harington scheme) and stock up with some new ones.
 - **Open organic plot: also Saturday 13 May:** Dee and Rita invite you to plot Q1A for a conversation on allotment sustainability. They will share their experiences of aiming to produce maximum vegetables and fruit, whilst reducing plastic waste and carbon footprint. This includes their failures and mission to fail better next time...
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- **Equipment hire dates** - strimmers (battery and petrol), woodchoppers and mowers (manual and petrol) area available for hire from our equipment store. You can email in advance on HAAequipment@outlook.com to book for the following hire sessions:

Sunday 7 May 11am-1pm

Monday 15 May 2-4pm

Sunday 4 June 11am-1pm

Monday 19 June 2-4pm

Sunday 30 July 11am-1pm

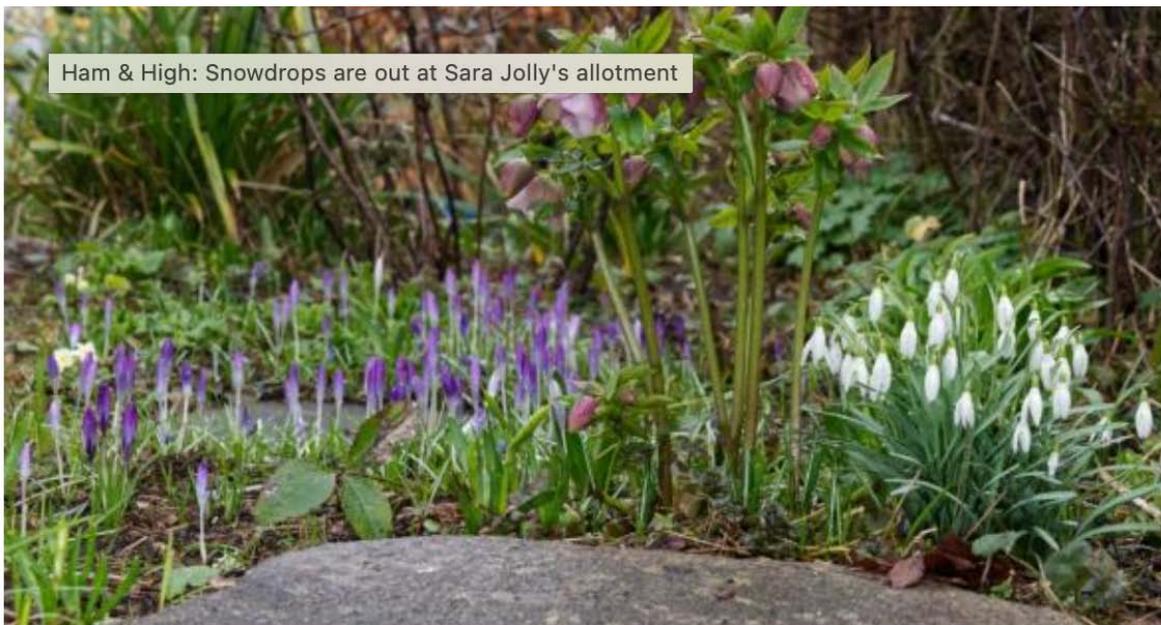
Shop News



The Shed Shop will continue to open on Sundays between 12 noon and 2pm. You can pay for goods with cash or by bank transfer on your phone - sorry no credit! It would be helpful if you could pre-enter the HAA account details in your banking app: Account name: Highgate Allotment Association; Sort code: 203616, Account no: 80928860.

And please note that we still have plenty of shallots in stock!

Highgate Allotments in the Ham&High



Ham & High: Snowdrops are out at Sara Jolly's allotment

Snowdrops are out at Sara Jolly's allotment (Image: Nigel Sutton)

Our very own Shop Manager Sara Jolly is the star of the latest article in the Ham&High by fellow allotmenteer Ruth Pavey. Check it out [here](#).

And a note on fertilisers from Dan



Recently the committee have been questioning our organic aims on the

allotment. This has led to discussions on what we should stock in the shop. You will be aware of horse manure in sacks, chicken manure pellets, blood, fish and bone (which comes as powder) as well as Growmore. No pesticides, except slug pellets, are stocked.

We do also currently stock “chemical” fertilisers: sulphate of ammonia, (high in Nitrogen) potassium sulphate (a source of Potassium, and triple Superphosphate (a source of Phosphate). You may well be aware that NPK are the basic macronutrients for plant growth and health. All available from Growmore and various tailored ratios for say onions or potatoes you may be offered from the seed companies, alongside their planting tubers or sets

Nevertheless some nutrients will be available from the soil, organic sources such as manure, your own compost, blood fish and bone meal, plus chicken manure pellets. The idea is to feed the soil and that will feed your plants. However building soil “in good heart” might take years, even decades. So relatively quick results from a bag - “artificially” pure - are resorted to, (by many farmers and non- organic gardeners), probably too often in the long run.

Yet Growmore et al, even Miracle gro, have their place. Yellowing, slow growing plants might need a boost of nitrogen. Unproductive tomatoes and courgettes will benefit from Tomorite, another source of potash. Phosphate helps root growth - it could come from bone meal, or manure or Superphosphate. But beware of overdosing with any of the concentrated products.

Micronutrients are another subject. The most concentrated source would be seaweed meal or extract. They will promote plant health and help your own bodily micronutrient balance. And the taste of your crops, hopefully.

Do read the labels! Contact me on danielhackett53@gmail.com if you don't get what they are indicating! Good gardening!

Spring inspection

We are told there may be an inspection by the Haringey Allotments Officer in late Spring. If you have any concerns that your plot might not pass muster or if you have a 10 pole plot that is now too big for you and you would like to give up half of it, please contact the Committee on highgateallotments@outlook.com.

April sowing: planting seeds indoors



April is the month for starting seeds off indoors. Seeds need water, oxygen and warmth to germinate.

Larger seeds like beans, peas and cucurbits can be placed on damp kitchen towel or toilet paper in a food tub, to check they are indeed still viable if you have stored them for more than one year. The first sign will be that the radicle or first root will emerge. At this stage, warmth and water are needed, rather than light, and seedling compost which is needed when the seed leaves open up from inside the shell. You can bypass the germination test stage if the seed is trusted, but make sure you plant the seed the right way up - that is point down, for cucurbits!

Peppers, tomatoes and aubergines are ok directly sown into potting compost (any way up!).

A warm windowsill, propagator, or heat pad are helpful or actually necessary to provide the required temperature - at least into mid teens degrees C. If the seed or compost tend to go mouldy, a drop of Dettol in the water could be tried. If the seeds haven't shown any sign of progress in a week, they are probably dead, but it would depend on the temperature and the right amount of water. I am suggesting the germination test in case of waiting in vain and the wastage of potting compost.

Many seeds - generally the smaller ones - just plant in the soil in a good tilth drill. Over the last few years we have had success, by hoeing a drill and sprinkling potting compost in for carrots and parsnips. It seems to help them get

their small roots into something good before the soil gets crusty in dry weather. An alternative explanation is that the soil contains pathogens, seedlings succumb to. If it doesn't rain, water has to be added, but don't overdo it. Good luck! **Dan Hackett**

Organic gardening tips

What does "organic gardening" mean? The Royal Horticultural Society explains on their website: "Organic gardening is commonly used to describe cultivation systems which make minimal use of manufactured chemical substances. These are practical elements of a broader philosophy which takes a holistic view of gardening, emphasizing the interdependence of life forms."

At the AGM, tenants raised climate change and the case for organic gardening. Taking this up, **here are some planet-friendly gardening tips for the season from Rita Drobner:**

- **Going Peat-free**

Peat forms an important part of moor and bog habitats. Peat layers where they are occurring naturally are important for capturing and retaining carbon. We can help preserve peat bogs by not buying compost that contains peat or plants that come in peat-containing soil. Instead one can mix local sand and clay and home-made compost.

- **Reducing Plastic**

Conventional gardening can use a lot of plastic, most of it is single use and not recyclable (because of soiling and mixed materials). We can help reduce plastic waste by reusing and recycling plastic pots and containers, not buying compost and manures in single use plastic bags and not buying plants in plastic pots. Instead one can seed and propagate and swap plants, reusing plastic plant pots. You can also make plant labels from natural materials and up-cycle plastic. Paper pots are easy to make. Or make your own compost and manures, for example comfrey and nettle teas.

- **More Local and Lower Carbon Plant Production**

Bought plants may have been imported or transported from far away and nurseries use plastic, peat and mineral fertilisers and pesticides + greenhouses are heated with fossil fuels. Instead plants can be propagated from rhizome cuttings or bulbs and runners and by division. Raising plants at home makes better use of room heating and improves the air quality.

Future Organic Allotment Tours

If you are cultivating using organic methods, would you be interested in participating in an organic plot tour? This could be an informal event, limited to our Highgate Allotments site. The exchange between people already cultivating organically and with plot holders considering to change their cultivation methods could be followed by a picnic opposite the shed shop. If you are interested, leave a message on Q1A (Dee and Rita) or contact the Committee on highgateallotments@outlook.com.

No Dig gardening



If you would like regular inspiration and tips on organic 'no dig' gardening, check out [Charles Dowding's website](#) where you can also subscribe to his newsletter.

Biodiversity on our site



The waterholes in the community orchard behind the Shed Shop have already acquired a range of resident plants, tadpoles and small beasties like water fleas and insect larvae. A big thank-you to all who have donated containers and water plants.

Spare dip tank and water barrels wanted

Whilst it is normal for wildlife ponds to have fluctuating water levels, our mini ponds on the communal orchard are so small that it will help to keep them topped up with rainwater. Part of the shop roof already collects rainwater for the communal orchard. But more rainwater could be saved from the large roof. Instead of heading into the storm drains on Yeatman Road, it could be used for the orchard and the school plots. If you have a spare dip tank or water barrel, please contact the Committee on highgateallotments@outlook.com.

Our Facebook page

If you have been trying to join our Facebook page or post something on it but received no response, this is because our previous administrator no longer has a plot on our site. Committee member Sally Jones is going to set up a new group so watch this space for further news.

