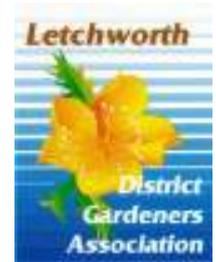


# GLEANINGS FROM THE COMPOST HEAP

SUMMER 2017



**WELCOME** to the summer edition of the **COMPOST HEAP**.

According to Met Office figures rainfall this spring was only about three quarters of the seasonal average, with April being particularly dry. With this in mind I thought it would be a good idea to dust off the information we put together last year about 'Saving Water in the Garden'.

## SAVING WATER IN THE GARDEN

Here are a couple of reasons why we gardeners should save water.

**To conserve supplies.** Particularly in hot dry years, watering gardens puts a great strain on water resources which in turn has an adverse effect on the environment.

**To save money.** Within the next year or so every house in Letchworth will have its water supplied and charged for via a meter, so if you use less water, you also spend less money.

**What can we do to help?** Techniques for saving water in the garden can be divided into several different areas: plant selection, container selection, mulching, water collection, watering techniques, and smarter gardening. Let's have a look at each in more detail.



**Plant Selection** - What are the best plants for dry conditions? Some drought-tolerant or drought-resistant plants have small grey or silver leaves covered in tiny hairs; this helps to reflect sunlight and reduce transpiration (water loss through leaves). Plants such as lavender and rosemary fall into this category.



Others such as succulents and cacti have fleshy stems or leaves that can store a reserve of water.

Vegetables such as carrot and parsnip have deep roots which can also be useful.

Here are some other plants good in dry conditions: Thyme, Miscanthus Grasses, Osteospermum, Geraniums, Euphorbia, Aloe Vera, and Verbena.

**Pots & Containers** - Which pots and containers should I use? Plastic or glazed pots are best as water does not evaporate through the sides like it does with terracotta pots or wooden planters. If you like the look of terracotta or wood, then use a plastic pot inside or line with a piece of compost bag perforated for drainage.

Another good idea when growing in pots is to use water-retaining gel; when added to the pot's growing medium it swells up as it absorbs water during rain or irrigation. Biochar, a charcoal-based soil improver, does a similar water retaining job but also aids soil fertility.

Using a few large pots with several plants in is better than a number of small ones with one plant each. This is simply because the larger volume of growing medium in a large pot won't dry out so quickly. Group the pots together so the plants can shade each other, better still move the pots into the shade if it gets really hot.

**Mulching? What is mulching?** - This is a technique where the area around plants, both in the ground and in pots, is covered by something that shades the soil, prevents water evaporating from the surface and helps to suppress weed growth. Mulching may be done with or without fabric.

**Mulching with fabric** – in this case the mulch is placed on a woven landscape fabric (also known as semi-permeable membranes or geotextiles) to a depth of 2.5cm (1"). Mulches used in this way are usually decorative. Some examples of decorative mulches are: gravel, horticultural grit, shingle, slate and other aggregates.



**Mulching without fabric** – in this case the mulch is placed directly on the soil to a minimum depth of 5cm (2") ideally 7.5cm (3"). Mulches used in this way are usually biodegradable and will also add nutrients to the soil. Examples of biodegradable mulches are: bark chips, garden compost, mushroom compost, rotted manure, leaf mould and grass cuttings.

**Water Collection** - How can I get free water? Rainwater harvesting from sheds and greenhouses into purpose-made butts or other recycled vessels is a fairly easy way to collect free water. You'll be surprised how much you can collect in one year from even the most modest of greenhouses. You can also collect water from your house roof using a downpipe diverter kit.



Greywater is water, usually from your house, that has already been used for something else. This includes water from washing up and vegetable preparation. Water from cooking your vegetables may also be used – let it cool first, this will have added nutrients that have been lost during boiling. Although you can get detergents that can be used in greywater it's probably best to use them just on your flowers and not your fruit & veg patch. Greywater should be used straight away and not stored.

When running the shower or hot tap waiting for the hot water to come through why not catch that water in a saucepan or bucket and use it on your plants.

Always use clean tap water for seeds and young seedlings as any impurities in stored rainwater or in greywater could cause problems.

**Watering Techniques** - What are good watering techniques? The timing of your watering is important: never water in the middle of the day when the temperature is hottest unless the plant is visibly in distress then water immediately. Some say first thing in the morning is best, some say last thing at night. All in all morning is probably best because leaving plants and the ground wet over night when they are using less water could encourage slugs and snails and also allow fungal disease to form.



Another good idea is localised watering: use a can without a rose or a hose with a trigger nozzle to water the ground around the plant rather than the plant itself. For larger plants, sink a perforated plastic bottle with the end cut

off in to the ground next to the plant and use it as a watering funnel. You could also try it the other way up as well.

To promote deep root systems a good soak every 7-10 days is better than small amounts every day.

If you are willing to spend some money on your garden irrigation then soaker hoses are very useful for rows or larger areas of planting. Soaker hoses are permeable and allow water to flow through their walls at a controlled rate; they are connected to the water source with normal hose and may be laid on the surface and covered with mulch or, preferably, buried in the soil. For more localised application, drippers may be used; these also deliver water at a controlled rate. A watering system can be made automatic by using a small computerised timer on the tap or water butt.

**Smarter Gardening** - What is smarter gardening? All the techniques mentioned so far may be considered smarter gardening; here a few more.

Keep your soil in good condition; incorporating plenty of compost or manure helps with moisture retention and encourages deep root formation. Check the weather forecast, there is no point watering if it's going to rain.



If you are not mulching, keep up to date with your weeding. Weeds use up water and nutrients that should be for your plants.

If you are growing runner beans, another good idea is to dig a 'bean trench'. This is a trench dug well in advance and filled with kitchen scraps, newspaper, cardboard etc. and then back-filled. This gives a great reservoir for the beans' roots to grow into.

At our Trading Store we stock some of products mentioned, including mulching fabrics, bark chips, grit and water saving gel. Check out the Trading List or visit the store to find out more.



## COMING SOON

### ***Saturday 15th July***

Summer Show (see 'Produce Shows', p6)

### ***Thursday 20th July***

'Toil, Sweat & Tears' by Brian Carline

Brian, author, comedian & former teacher gives some humorous and engaging advice for reluctant gardeners and encourages those with an irrational fear of gardening.

### ***Wednesday 2nd August***

Today and every first Wednesday of the month - Coffee Morning 10am at Tapps

### ***Thursday 17th August at 7:00pm***

Evening visit to Pioneer Nurseries, Willian



As well as supplying conventional plants, Pioneer Nurseries is the UK's leading air plant specialist. Entry is £3 each including refreshments and a talk on the history of the nursery.

(This is a change from the previously advertised evening visit)

### ***Saturday 9th September***

Autumn Show (see 'Produce Shows', p6)

### ***Thursday 21st September***

'Pruning & Cuttings' by George Lockwood

### ***One Sunday Morning in October***

'Daffodil Bulb Day' at the Trading Store. More details in the next edition.

For more information, please contact our Meetings Organiser on 01462 621961 or email [meetings@ldga.org.uk](mailto:meetings@ldga.org.uk)

## FLOWER OF THE MONTH

This is our fun competition which is held at our meetings on the third Thursday of the month. Here's how it works.

Members bring along to the monthly meeting one flower, bloom, stem, spike or spray (but not arrangement) from their garden or allotment and place it anonymously on the Flower of the Month table.

Everyone at the meeting is allowed to vote once by placing a single coin next to the flower they like most.

At the end of the evening the number of votes for each flower (not the value of coins) will be counted and the one with the most votes will be awarded 3 points, second 2 points and third 1 point.

Points won will be added up throughout the year and the person with most points at the end of the year will receive an award.

In the event of a tie the total number of votes for the year will also be taken into account. All the money collected will be donated to the Green Shoots project at Tapps.

## COACH OUTINGS

Tickets are still available for the coach outing to RHS Hyde Hall Flower Show on ***Saturday 5th August***. Here are the details: Leave Letchworth at 8:45am and arrive back approx. 4:30pm. Members £12, non-members £14. There will be a wide range of specialist nurseries and trade stands as well as a floral art marquee, an artists' pavilion, a food village, live music and plenty of shopping!

For more information or to book a seat, please contact Myra on 01462 621961 or email [outings@ldga.org.uk](mailto:outings@ldga.org.uk)

## COMMITTEE NEWS

In the last three months three former committee members have died. In the last edition we told you that **Laurie Cook** – seen here around his 90th birthday – had died on 11th March aged 99.



Since then we have heard that:



**Jack Collins** - editor of over 30 editions of the Compost Heap newsletter from 1997 to 2004 - passed away on the 26th April aged 89.



**Ken Spriggs** - Secretary from 1957 to 1969 - passed away on the 28th May aged 88. This is how Ken, former GPO health and safety officer, came to join the committee.

“That loss [from the annual show] loomed like a thundercloud over the annual general meeting on 19 November. There had been "set-back after set-back throughout the year", said the secretary, Mr E.A.Castle. Because members would not buy them, nearly £100 worth of seed potatoes had had to be sold off to a pig farmer. Only about half a dozen of the sixty or more Grange area allotments were being cultivated, and there had been more looting throughout the town and £20 worth of damage to their best shed. He did not wish to stand for re-

election, and Mr R.K. (Ken) Spriggs rather reluctantly agreed to take over as secretary for the next four months, unaware that his term of office would last for twelve years.”[1]

In today’s money that’s over £2200 worth of potatoes, I don’t know what the pig farmer gave for them? Well, at least we sold them all this year!

## RECIPE – NO-CHURN ICE CREAM

Wimbledon is on so we must be at the height of the strawberry season. If you are looking for something different to do with your harvest then why not try this simple no-churn ice cream.

### Ingredients

- 100g – 200g strawberries (vary according to taste)
- ½ a 397g can sweetened condensed milk
- 600ml double cream
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 2 drops red food colouring (optional)

### Method

Wash, dry, hull (remove stalks) and chop strawberries.

Mash or puree the strawberries with a food processor or hand blender.

Put all the ingredients into a large bowl. Use an electric whisk to beat until thick and quite stiff, similar to clotted cream.

Transfer to 0.5l plastic tubs and freeze until solid.

Leave to thaw a bit before serving. If you are worried about diet use low fat and low sugar versions of the ingredients.



[1] an extract from ‘Gardeners’ City’ by Kenneth Johnson

## PRODUCE SHOWS

Come and see our displays of flowers, fruit and veg – better still why not put in an exhibit or two yourself; you don't have to be an expert to join in and there is a trophy for best newcomer.

### **SUMMER SHOW – Sat 15th July**



Everyone who entered the 'Fuchsia Challenge', we would love to see how your plants have been getting on. There are also new classes for up-cycling old materials and for painting and drawing. Remember, everyone is allowed two exhibits per class at the summer show. There will again be seasonal cookery demos and a plant sale.

### **AUTUMN SHOW - Sat 9th September**



Everyone who entered the 'Chilli Challenge' or the 'Mystery Seed

Challenge', we would love to see how you have been getting on. Does anyone know what the seeds are yet? There is no North Herts Dahlia Championship this year; instead for the dahlia growers, we have our own more relaxed championship. There is also a new class for woodworking. Remember, only one exhibit per class at the autumn show. There will again be floristry demos and a produce sale.

As with last year, to keep our shows fresh, we are stating that exhibits must not have been shown previously at LDGA shows.

Admission to both shows is free and refreshments with home-made cakes will be available throughout the afternoon. If you are able to make a cake for the refreshments please let us know by emailing [myrasmith@ntlworld.com](mailto:myrasmith@ntlworld.com)

If you need more information about the shows, please contact Paul on 01438 727422 or email [shows@ldga.org.uk](mailto:shows@ldga.org.uk)

## JOBS FOR SUMMER

Here are half a dozen jobs you can tackle during the summer (courtesy of the RHS).

### **July**

- Deadhead bedding plants & repeat-flowering perennials, to ensure continuous flowering
- Pick courgettes before they become marrows

### **August**

- Lift and pot up rooted strawberry runners
- Sow green manure seeds on soil left bare after crop harvesting

### **September**

- Divide herbaceous perennials
- Net ponds before leaf fall gets underway

## HORTICULTURAL HISTORIES

**The Watering Can** - The term "watering can" did not appear until the 1690s. Before that containers used to water plants were known as "watering pots".



In use from medieval times, these conical earthenware pots with a narrow neck at the top and holes in the bottom were filled by immersion in water. When raised from the water, the thumb was pressed tightly over the top and taken to the area to be watered. The thumb was then removed, air rushed in and the water flowed out through the holes in the bottom. In later watering pots the idea of a spout and rose was introduced.



Early watering cans were in what is known as the 'French style', which has one long sweeping handle going from front to back. These were mainly made of copper then later brass and tinfoil.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century these materials were largely replaced by zinc plated or galvanised steel.



1886 was an important year in watering can history when the "Haws" watering can was patented by John Haws. Intended as an improvement to the 'French style' cans it had a canister body with breast to prevent spillages while pouring and two handles, one for carrying, one for tipping. Whether full or half empty the can would be in perfect balance. The original design remains virtually unaltered and is still manufactured to this day.



During the last century plastic became the material of choice for watering cans with many of the old metal ones being reused as planters.

## LDGA AT TAPPS

Just a quick reminder that LDGA members can enjoy 10% discount off all items from the Tapps Garden Centre and Tea Room at any time on production of their current membership card.

## SUMMER WORD SEARCH



- BARBECUE
- GOOSEBERRY
- ROSE
- COURGETTE
- HOSEPIPE
- STRAWBERRY
- DAHLIA
- MARIGOLD
- SUNFLOWER
- FUCHSIA
- PEA
- SUNSHINE
- GERANIUM
- PIMMS
- ZINNIA

Find these summer-related words hidden in the grid: they can be backwards, forwards, up, down or diagonal.

## QUIZ TIME

See if you can work out which garden plants are suggested by these clues.

- a) Two girls stuck together
- b) Make money
- c) Several groups of sheep
- d) Greeting to a girl
- e) Got up
- f) Ilex wine
- g) Top and bottom
- h) Sweeps clean
- i) USA for instance
- j) Confuse hand ware
- k) Old punishment
- l) A wise man

a) Rosemary; b) Mint; c) Phlox; d) Hyacinth; e) A rose; f) Hollyhock; g) Tulips; h) Broom; i) A Carnation; j) Foxglove; k) Stocks; l) A Sage

## AND FINALLY...

I'll leave you with a few gardening definitions from member Geoff Watts.

**Knee** – A device for finding stones.

**Green fingers** – Something everyone else has.

**Perennial** – This year, possibly next year, unlikely the year after.

**Seed catalogue** – A work of fiction with fantasy photos.

**Spade** – A highly efficient back pain generator and leaning post.

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