

The GROWER

August 2016

www.cheshamallotments.org.uk

Email your articles, ideas or news to thegrowernewsletter@gmail.com

In Praise of the Pulse

2016 is The International Year of the Pulse. Technically a pulse is a dried bean or pea, and is probably responsible for the development of the human race as we know it....

The lentil was one of the first plants to be domesticated. The nomads of the fertile crescent (modern day Turkey/Syria) found that leaving a few tiny lentils behind next to their camp meant that on their return a few months later they had an easy harvest they didn't have to forage for. And it was a good choice. Lentils provide more calories than cattle do, they enrich the soil, and the rest of the plant can be fed to the animals which produce more fertilizer. Better fed populations produce more children. Gradually, settling down to tend crops rather than wandering became a more practical way to feed a growing tribe. Both the plants and the people became domesticated. By 5500BCE lentils had made their way as far as Britain, Ethiopia and India.



At the same time broad beans, chick peas and peas (a pea is just a bean that managed to get its own billing), were also being domesticated. Mostly they would have been dried for storage, which may be why the pea became distinct because, unlike beans, it doesn't hold its form when rehydrated and cooked: think dhal or pease pudding.

As civilisation took over and money and class systems were developed, pulses became the food of the poor. If you could afford it: you ate meat. If you couldn't, it was puls (Roman word for porridge) for you. However the protein rich bean contributed to the growing population of Europe. Around 1000 CE the weather warmed up. The land became more productive but caused the population to grow exponentially. In 300 years the population of Europe more than doubled. People had to develop less fertile areas. Many areas of trees and forests were cut down and put to agriculture. Beans provided a very useful function of being able to crop and fertilise an arable field that would otherwise have to have been left fallow. Crop rotation was invented and pulses became the mainstay of the medieval peasants' diet.cont'd on page 2....

Lots of Roman families were named after legumes: Julius Caesar's wife Calpurnia Piso (pea), Cicero (chick pea) and Fabius Maximus who fought Hannibal (broad bean).

Open Day 13th August 10am - 2pm

The annual Open Day at the Cameron Road Allotments is on 13th August 10am—2pm. There will be lots of cakes, a raffle and a produce stall. A great chance to bring your family and friends to explore the allotments and maybe encourage them to get a plot themselves! If you have a plot on the Cameron Road site, please be aware there may be unaccompanied visitors wandering around the site.

If you would like to donate your surplus produce to the stall please bring to the Focal Point around 6pm on Friday 12th or before 10am on Saturday 13th.

All donations received for the produce go into allotment funds.



CHESHAM ALLOTMENTS GROUP CALENDAR

EVENT	DATE & TIME	LOCATION
Coffee mornings	Saturday mornings 10am—12pm until 15th October (20th August at Asheridge Road.)	Focal Point Hut, Cameron Road and Asheridge Road Allotments
Open Day	Saturday 13th August 10am –2pm	Cameron Road Allotments
AGM	Thursday 8th September 7.30pm	Chesham Town Hall
Rents are due	1st October 2016	Pay at Town Hall

CHESHAM HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

EVENT	DATE & TIME	LOCATION
Late Summer Show	Saturday September 3rd 2.45pm—5.00pm	Trinity Baptist Church, Red Lion Street
AGM	Wednesday 16th November 7.30pm	Trinity Baptist Church, Red Lion Street

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In the Near and Middle East and Egypt dried beans and chick peas are still everyday foods, but for Western Europe the discovery of the Americas by the old World led to new introductions of beans. Wheat, beef and pork were previously all unknown in America: the staples were beans, corn and squashes with game supplementing the diet. Giovanni da Verrazzano, exploring the Native American diet in the 1520's wrote '*On the whole they live on pulses, which are abundant and different from ours in colour and size, but are excellent and have a delicious taste.*' The phaseolus vulgaris beans from America were taken to Europe where they became what most British people think of now when you say bean: runner beans, French beans, flageolet, haricot (the baked beans bean), the still slightly exotic red kidney bean. The rich discovered the pleasures of eating the pods fresh and green, but the dried were still for the poor; '*fagioli offer a great deal of nourishment, but nonetheless are a meal for country folk, and not the delicate or students.*' These New World beans gradually replaced the traditional dried broad beans in recipes (the growing use from the 18th century of broad beans as cattle fodder, whilst good for the cows, also rather put people off them).

In the Americas, the black-eyed peas of Africa, which were taken with enslaved people to America, became a staple dish in the South, part of what is now fondly referred to as Soul Food. (These were eaten by rich and poor alike because everyone's place in society was very clear: they didn't need food distinctions). At the same time, beans were adopted by the pioneers travelling across America as they could be carried easily dried and then cooked overnight in a Dutch oven in the embers of the fire, and became known as 'whistle berries' (you can guess why). Beans were also a great food to feed sailors as sea-going travel increased: in 1799 a sailor in the US Navy got one and a half pints of beans or peas as part of his weekly rations (though he may have enjoyed his daily half pint of rum more). There is still a tradition that the dining rooms of the Capitol building in Washington D.C., serve bean soup every day.

In India, the influence of Bhudda meant that much of the population embraced vegetarianism, even the higher castes, so that pulses have never carried the social stigma they did in Western Europe, being an absolutely vital source of protein and calories. Arguably, no country has done more with pulses being a feature of every meal from breakfast pancakes made from ground beans to burfi, a fudge-like sweet meat made with gram (chick pea) flour. In China, where it was first cultivated around 1100BCE, the soya bean was regarded as one of five sacred grains and an essential crop, reliable even when others failed. In the last century soya went global: forecast world production in 2016 is 324 million tonnes, 85% of which will be made into oil, for cooking and processed foods, and bean meal, for feeding livestock.

So pulses have made an incredible contribution to the human diet over millennia: and for that I thank them!



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Thursday 8th September

All allotment holders are invited to the AGM and Prize Giving on 8th Sept 7.30pm at Chesham Town Hall.

Please come if you can so that a full committee can be constitutionally elected, and to have your say on current and relevant allotment matters. The winners of Best Kept Allotment Large/Small and Best New Tenant will also be announced. Please refer to the AGM agenda enclosed.

Coffee Mornings

Coffee mornings continue each Saturday at the Cameron Road Allotments Focal Point until 15th October except **Saturday 20th August** which will be at **Asheridge Road Allotments**.

If you can help out by making cakes or serving at any of the coffee mornings please contact Beverly Mackay at beverlymackay@virginmedia.com

New plot-holders especially welcome — reward your hard labour with a bargain coffee and cake and meet your fellow plot-holders!

Top of the Shots?

Any keen photographers out there? Chesham Allotments Group (and therefore all us plot-holders) are members of the National Allotments Society. Their annual photo competition is open for entries until 26th August.

There are three categories: Growing Together - communal activities from joint maintenance to Open Days; Wildlife; and Scarecrows. The overall winner is voted for by members and receives £250!

All details can be found on the NAS website www.nsalg.org.uk under the events tab, then Shield Total Insurance Allotment Fund

Squished on your small plot?

Due to the success of the Town Council and the Chair of CAG in improving the standard of allotment maintenance and moving on tenants who were no longer caring for their plots, the waiting list has been greatly reduced. Therefore tenants of small plots who have been maintaining a satisfactory standard on their current plot can now apply for a second plot. Please get in touch with the Town Hall if you wish to expand your horticultural reach—but don't take on more than you can dig!

RATS!

Rats were sighted on the Cameron Road allotments a number of times in the Spring, both under the hedge by the road on the south side and more or less in the middle of the site, above the Focal Point, on the north side.

We are said never to be far from a rat, of course. The 'informal' nature of a large collection of allotments gives them lots of potential for finding a corner to hide and nest in, so plot holders need to be particularly vigilant. We need to be on our guard and not leave untidy corners or piles of unused or old sticks or pots, or similar, to offer them cover.

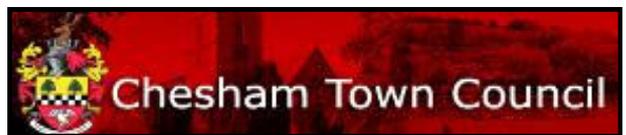
In particular, rats seem to like compost heaps: they are warm and easy to tunnel into. But we can do a lot to deter them:

- Never put meat or any cooked food on a compost heap;
- Don't compost things that are obviously a good food source, like potato peelings;
- Turn your compost heap regularly, even if you only stick a fork into it from the top and the side and prod vigorously around. This is more difficult with preformed plastic compost bins but it is worth doing. Rats don't like to be disturbed.

The allotment group committee is expecting further advice from the environmental officer, and we will pass it on through the Grower if we get any more guidance. *Tim Andrew*

Put those green fingers to the keyboard!

A favourite recipe? Something you wish you'd known when you started? Any tips you can pass on? Please drop me a line so I can share your wisdom (or tales of disasters) with the rest of the readership of The Grower. *Kate*
thegrowernewsletter@gmail.com



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*Bean Feast—Borlotti beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*)*

Is there anything more beautiful from an allotment than a fresh borlotti bean with its cream flesh and red speckles? The answer is no, in case you were wondering. Borlotti beans (also known as Cranberry beans) are one of the many variations of *Phaseolus vulgaris*, (others being red kidney beans, pinto, black bean, green flageolet, haricot and French beans), which arrived on our shores after the discovery of the New World. Unlike tomatoes and potatoes, other new world crops that were treated with suspicion at first, the beans seem to have been readily accepted, possibly because people just thought they were versions of the same beans they had always eaten: it took a few years before they were recognised as a separate species.

Because the borlotti shares its heritage with the other New World beans, it is an easy substitute for those beans we cannot grow here in Tex-Mex, Mexican and South American recipes.

Eaten fresh the beans need cooking for about 20 mins in simmering water, but the drier they get the longer they need, and fully dried they require a soaking in cold water for half a day or a shorter soak in hot water before boiling for an hour or so. (Alas they will have lost their beautiful markings and turned brown at this point.) Either way, check to see they are soft before continuing. All the recipes assume you have done this first.

Peruvian Ensalada

This would originally been made with lima beans as you might expect.

Finely chop 1 **mild green chilli** and one **red onion**. Soak in juice of 1 **lime** and 1/4 tsp **salt** for 15 mins. Add 250g **cooked beans**, 2 finely chopped **tomatoes** and some **olive oil**. Stir gently together, then leave for an hour to marinate.

Fresh Borlotti with lemon and marjoram

When 400g **beans** have finished boiling, drain and add 4tbsps **olive oil**, 1 minced **garlic clove**, zest and juice of 1 **lemon**, 2 tbsps chopped fresh **marjoram** and **salt** and **pepper**. Marinate for 30 mins off the heat. Serve at room temperature or gently reheat.

ReFried Beans—serves two

Refried beans should really be yesterday's leftover beans fried up so by all means make twice as much and eat beans one day and refried beans the next.

Gently fry an **onion** in a little **oil** until soft. Add 1 **clove minced garlic**, 1/4 tsp finely chopped **red chilli** or **chilli** in a jar, pinch dried **oregano** or tsp of fresh. Cook for a minute, then add 250g cooked **beans**, **salt**, **pepper**, 1/4tsp **paprika** (hot or sweet, your choice) plus a drop of **water** if needed, and heat through. (Eat at this point if you just want beans). Mash with the back of a spoon to make a coarse puree. Cool, then fry spoonfuls in **vegetable oil** and serve in warm **tortillas** with fried peppers, guacamole, grated

Chilean Porotos granados—serves four

This pre-Columbian recipe uses the traditional three sisters planting combo of squash, beans and corn. Porotos means bean and granados to split.

Gently fry 2 **onions** in 3tbsps **oil** until soft. Add 2 **minced garlic cloves**, 1 tsp **sweet paprika**, 2 tbsps chopped **oregano or marjoram**, 400g cooked **beans**, 600g peeled cubes of **winter squash**, 1 litre **vegetable stock**. Simmer for 10-15mins until squash is cooked. Add a couple of handfuls of sweetcorn kernels (fresh or frozen) and cook for another 5 mins. Even better eaten the next day reheated.

If you are brave try topping it with this: gently cook 4 **chopped cloves of garlic** in 4 tbsps **olive oil** until soft but not brown. Add 2tsp **paprika** (hot or sweet, your choice) and cook for another minute. Spoon on top of the stew.

CHESHAM ALLOTMENTS GROUP REPRESENTATIVES

ALLEN TILBURY (Chairman) Plot 104 CR	TIM ANDREW (Vice Chair) Plot 48A CR	RAY WILLIAMS (Treasurer) Plots 215/216 CR	TONY MUIR (Representative) Plot 28 AR
ANDREW SINCLAIR (Correspondence Secretary) Plot 45B CR	JIM ABBOTT (Representative) Plot 31/32 CR	VINCE CROMPTON (Representative) Plot 36 CR	BEVERLY MACKAY (Representative) Plot 3B AR
VINCENT LUCAS (Representative) Plot 227D CR	KATE HUTCHINSON (Editor—The Grower) Plot 58D CR	DAVE HALL (Representative) Plot 12CR	
JANE MACBEAN Town Council Representative	CR = CAMERON ROAD AR = ASHERIDGE ROAD		The representatives are here for you. Please do come and talk to us about any issues!