

The GROWER

May/June 2018

www.cheshamallotments.org.uk

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

To dig or not to dig.....

Probably most of us have heard, even if vaguely, of the No-Dig method and of Charles Dowding who has brought the idea to the mainstream with a series of books on the method. I was able to go on a day course locally with Charles and this is what I found out.

The basic principles of no-dig are very simple: the key to growing crops is the soil. The activity of worms and soil fauna create the best conditions of aeration, beneficial bacteria and fungi. Digging and turning over the soil destroys these. No-dig aims to replicate the way nature works by covering the soil with a layer of compost or manure, in the same way as nature covers it with leaves and animal droppings, leaving the wildlife below to do the job of incorporating it into the soil. This saves the soil from being disturbed which stops carbon being released into the atmosphere, keeps the soil structure intact, retains moisture, and prevents weed seeds from being exposed and given the chance to grow. Over time even the stickiest clay will improve and become a good tilth. The soil structure is firm and can even be walked on without compaction. So far, so understandable - but how do you stop weeds from growing?



Well, no-dig doesn't mean no work or no weeding. Weeds will still grow but are easier to remove from the layer of compost and fewer weeds grow as light doesn't get to the soil encouraging the germination of dormant weed seeds as it does with bare soil. There is also the cardboard factor: when creating a new bed from scratch i.e. grass or perhaps overgrown allotment, Charles suggested first mowing the area to cut the weeds and grass short, then covering with a layer of cardboard before adding a top layer of 10 inches of compost. On the course we created beds like this, with propped up planks at the sides just to hold the compost in place until it settles in, then we planted module grown plants straight in, including peas, brassicas and lettuce. The cardboard holds back the weeds underneath so they are weakened. The cardboard disintegrates after a few weeks so it doesn't have to be removed. Of course weeds do still grow back but should be removed with a hand tool and, if really kept on top of, will eventually give up. Even couch grass and bindweed need to photosynthesise and they can't do that without leaves. There was a huge emphasis on being very vigilant about weeds and keeping a tidy plot.

Once the bed has been created and had a chance to, ahem, bed down, the wooden sides can be removed as they are a good habitat for slugs as they decay. Beds are then never dug, each year another layer of compost is added to the beds, about two inches, again without disturbing the soil underneath. It certainly seemed to make sense to me, particularly for a plot like mine which is clay and hard to dig. But it does require lots of compost or well rotted manure, and being vigilant with weeds. However a number of trials do seem to be showing larger yields from the no-dig methods, and it is also being used in farming, called No-Till.

Kate Hutchinson

More information can be found on www.charlesdowding.co.uk and he has made a number of instructional videos which can be found on YouTube.

***FISH & CHIP SUPPER/QUIZ 19th May
BOOKING FORM INSIDE!***



CHESHAM ALLOTMENTS GROUP CALENDAR

EVENT	DATE & TIME	LOCATION
Coffee mornings	Saturday mornings from 14th April to 13th October 10am—12pm. 23rd June & 25th August will be held	Focal Point Hut, Cameron Road at Asheridge Road Allotments
Fish & Chips/Quiz Evening	Saturday 19th May 7pm	Town Hall, Chesham
Summer Social	Saturday 7th July 7pm	Focal Point Hut, Cameron Road
Open Day	Saturday 18th August 10am to 1.30pm	Cameron Road Allotments

CHESHAM HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY DATES

EVENT	DATE & TIME	LOCATION
Plant Sale	Saturday 19th May from 9am	On the steps of The United Reform Church, Broadway
Early Summer Show	Saturday 7th July	Trinity Baptist Church, Red Lion Street
Late Summer Show	Saturday 1st September	Trinity Baptist Church, Red Lion Street

Discount card:

Don't forget to pick up your free discount card from the Focal Point at the coffee mornings. It entitles you to a 10% discount at JPS Stationers in Chesham and 10% discount on many items at South Heath Garden Centre. If you know of a business that would like to be added to our scheme please get in touch.

Fish & Chip/Quiz Night 19th May 7pm Chesham Town Hall

BOOKING REQUIRED FOR(no. of people)

COST £10 PER HEAD

I enclose payment of

Name.....

Plot No..... Tel No.....

Email.....

Please bring your own drink and nibbles AND a dessert with a view to sharing.

There will be a raffle, so bring some extra cash! Contributions for raffle also gratefully received.

Please Indicate the number of meals required below :

FISH

SAUSAGES

FISH CAKES

VEGETARIAN

Please email cheshamallotments@gmail.com to reserve your places or hand your form/ payment in at the Coffee Mornings or at JPS Stationers in the High Street or to any Allotments Group Officer/Representative. Please make any cheques payable to Chesham Allotments Group. Thank you.

View from the Chair

Spring has arrived at last! It's been great to visit with so many fellow plot holders on the sunny Saturday mornings we have had recently and enjoy a catch-up after the long winter. Welcome to all the new plot holders especially. If you haven't been up yet, 10am to 12pm on Saturdays we run a little café at the Focal Point Hut on Cameron Road site. Come join!

Summer Social

Our annual Summer Social is at the Focal Point at the Cameron Road site on Saturday 7th July. We always have a great turnout and everyone brings along a delicious selection of dishes so do come and get to know your neighbours. Rain or shine, we will be there.



Best Plot Competition

The Chesham Horticultural Society Judges will be making their way around all the plots on Tuesday 19th June for the first round of judging for the Best Plot competition. Remember, it is not just about tidiness: points are awarded for number of different crops grown and the healthy plant as well. And there is a trophy presented for the Best New Plot too, so there is something for everyone to aim for. All the details of the judging process are in the March 2016 edition of The Grower, available to read on our website.



The National Allotment Society

National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Ltd

The National Allotment Society

You may not know that the CAG is a member of The National Allotment Society which is a not-for-profit organisation representing the allotment movement in the UK. The NAS (*also known as the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners*) promote allotment growing - working with councils and developers to create new allotment sites; help protect land - any councils considering selling allotment land are obliged to seek the opinion of the NAS; run National

Allotments Week - encouraging allotments to open their gates to the general public; provide Allotment Officers Forums - for local authority allotment officers to network and encourage good practice; and offer Legal Support - fighting for the rights of allotment holders and the aims of the allotment movement.

It is also possible to be an individual member which offers a range of benefits including a quarterly magazine, horticultural advice, an e-newsletter, legal advice, insurance and a discounted seed scheme. Check out the NAS website www.nsalg.org.uk for all the details plus Growing Advice, News and Campaigns and other Resources.

Our email — cheshamallotments@gmail.com:

@ If you have provided us with your email address, you will have recently been contacted asking @ for confirmation you would like to remain in the list. This is to comply with new Data Protection Laws coming into force in the new few weeks. If you haven't responded yet, please do so or your details will be removed. If you haven't yet given us your details, please send us a quick hello with your plot number to be added to our email list for occasional reminders of allotment events. Your details will not be shared with anyone else.

Time is running out to plant your Spud in a Bucket !

CAG's new easy to enter competition for all ages. The rules are simple:

1. Plant one potato in a bucket (or container of your choice)
2. Nurture your potato plant in any way you see fit, but don't dig down to see how your crop is doing!
3. Bring your bucket along to the coffee morning on Saturday 8th September 2018, where it will be emptied and the potato yield weighed.
4. Entry fee is £1 per bucket. You can enter as many buckets as you want : perhaps try different varieties?
5. The prize for the heaviest yield will be £20



Chesham
TOWN COUNCIL

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Hints for dealing with mice in the greenhouse

1. Get at least two good hunting cats and a roll of chicken wire. The cats will see off the mice but you will need yards of crushed chicken wire to prevent them from sleeping on your seeds trays (or worse), seeing as you will have to leave the door open enough for them to get in.
2. Invest in some traps. I don't recommend the killing type as birds sometimes get caught in these, and as you will have to open the greenhouse a bit when it warms up you can't keep them out (small bird can get through even small gauge chicken wire!). Remember to check your live traps every day (you will feel dreadful if you forget and your caught mice die of thirst) and drive the mice at least three miles down the road before you let them out or they will be back.
3. You can try poison but they won't eat it - they know perfectly well that your seeds are a better bet.
4. Keep all broken pieces of glass. You can put these on top of pots and trays until seedlings come through. Their weight will prevent the mice from moving them. Once the seedlings are up you are not safe, the mice will still dig up the pots, so now you need propagator type covers, which allow for a bit of height. You may still need to weigh them down as a big mouse may be able to shift them.
5. Remember that mice will get up through the staging as well as approaching from the top so make sure your lid fit exactly or if you have one cover over several small pots - stand them on glass, slates or metal sheets and make the sure the edges of the covers are within one of these.
6. A small mouse can get through any hole which will admit a pencil, so be very thorough.
7. Don't accumulate anything that would encourage mice to make their home in the greenhouse. It's bad enough when they come and go but if they take up residence you are in real trouble. Keep string in jam jars - you would not believe the resulting mess when a couple of mice have had have had some fun with a ball of garden twine.
8. Be vigilant - they will keep coming back, and they are much more clever than you! Good luck....

Margaret Mason

This article first appeared in The Cottage Gardener and is reprinted by kind permission of The Cottage Garden Society: www.thecgs.org.uk

Rhubarb Shortbread

Heat oven to 180°C/Gas 4.

Shortbread base: Mix together **125g soft butter, 125g plain flour, 25g cornflour** and **2 level tablespoons of icing sugar** to form a dough. Press evenly into a tin approx 7" x 11" lined with baking parchment. It will feel like there is not enough mixture but have faith. Use a small jam jar to roll it smooth if needed. Prick with a fork and bake for 15-20mins until browning at the edges but still pale in the middle.

Topping; Chop **250g rhubarb** into small pieces. Mix with **2 large eggs, 25g plain flour, 200g caster (or demerara) sugar** and **3 drops vanilla extract**. Pour onto shortbread base and cook for 40mins or until top is set and golden. Cool in tin then cut into pieces.

CHESHAM ALLOTMENTS GROUP REPRESENTATIVES

MARSHALL HALL (Chairman) Plot 47A/47B CR	TIM ANDREW (Vice Chair) Plot 48A CR	RAY WILLIAMS (Treasurer) Plots 215/216 CR	BEVERLY MACKAY (Coffee Morning Organiser) Plot 3B AR
ANDREW SINCLAIR (Community Liaison) Plot 45B CR	JIM ABBOTT (Historian & Archivist) Plot 31/32 CR	DAVE HALL (Maintenance and Facilities) Plot 12 CR	TONY MUIR (Website) Plot 28 AR
CLAIRE MALAN (Secretary) Plot 235A CR	KATE HUTCHINSON (Editor—The Grower) Plot 58D/80A CR	CHRIS SPRUYTENBURG (Education and Orientation) Plot 93 CR	CHRIS MACKAY (Database Manager) Plot 6A AR
JANE MACBEAN Town Council Representative		CR = CAMERON ROAD AR = ASHERIDGE ROAD	Email: cheshamallotments@gmail.com