

The Plot Thickens...



MAY ON THE PLOT

This is arguably the most exciting month in the gardening calendar. The soil has finally held onto the sun's warmth, and you can almost see the plants growing.

However, May is a month of high stakes. The "Big Three"—tomatoes, peppers, and squashes—are likely bursting out of their pots at home, begging to go outside. But beware: the legendary "Ice Saints" (mid-May) often bring one final, sneaky frost. Be patient, keep an eye on the forecast, and get ready for the busiest planting window of the year.

With that in mind, this issue is going to focus on a few key things relevant to this busy part of the season. We hope you find it useful, and welcome any feedback!

This Month:

- Keep Moss Lane Tidy!!!
- Important Notice
- Jobs for May
- Focus on....Gooseberry Mildew
- Seasonal Recipe: Spring Onion & Asparagus Tart
- Useful Resource: HUW RICHARDS social media and books

A reminder- we'd love to celebrate any good news stories or achievements within our community. Weddings, big birthdays/anniversaries or awards etc. Please get in touch and let us know if you have any moments you'd like us to mark in future issues!

SITE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We have noticed recently that the front gate has been left open - please ensure you **CLOSE** the gate **AT ALL TIMES** when entering and leaving the site. This helps keep us secure.

FACEBOOK SITE- Recently there have been a couple of incidents where spam posts have appeared on the page. To safeguard security, we are reviewing our admin functions to ensure we are able to remove any spam posts quickly- but please let us know if you spot anything before we do!

And as always, if anybody wants to join the Facebook group they should email chairman@Moss-lane.co.uk

Photo credits: Me this month!

A reminder that birds are commonly nesting around the site at the moment. Please exercise caution if you spot any, and do not disturb nests or cut down any trees/bushes where nesting is evident.

The Plot Thickens...

KEEP MOSS LANE TIDY!!!

Maintaining an allotment is a marathon, not a sprint. But nevertheless, it is a really important marathon that we must all take part in on an allotment site.

Not that we compete here, but we know from working closely with other sites across Sefton and Lancashire that our site isn't currently looking as tidy as some others.

As a committee, one of our responsibilities is to undertake regular plot inspections to ensure that plots are being maintained appropriately, and that they are all meeting the constitutional requirements around cultivating produce (FYI, the constitution states that you must be cultivating 25% of your plot with **produce**). Whilst it may feel upsetting to receive a letter about your plot, it is not a personal thing, and we are required to ask you all to keep your plots in decent order. We don't expect perfection, but we do ask for your ongoing commitment, and to **let us know if you are struggling**. We are here to support and if we know you are struggling, we are happy to discuss a plan to keep you going. You can approach any of us (our plots are signposted), or you can find email addresses on the Moss Lane website, if you need to discuss.

When the weeds start growing faster than your teenagers, and the grass paths look more like meadows, it's really easy to feel overwhelmed. However, keeping your plot in "good order" isn't just about aesthetics; it's about productivity, weed/pest control, and also keeping peace with your plot neighbours!

Here are four golden rules for a manageable, thriving space:

1. The "Little and Often" Rule

The secret to a tidy plot isn't a gruelling eight-hour Sunday session; it's the 20-minute weed. Try to visit your plot for short bursts. Hoeing off annual weeds while they are small (the "thread-stage") takes seconds, but pulling an established dock leaf takes a shovel and a prayer. Like many of us, I too have a lot of commitments outside of my allotment, and my plot is by no means perfect, but I find that regular short visits really help us keep better on top of things. Additionally I highly recommend the RHS book "The Half Hour Allotment" for lots of superb advice on *how* to use those short bursts in the best way to keep your plot at its best.

2. Manage Your Boundaries

Paths and edges are the framework of your plot. Keep paths clear as a well-defined path instantly makes the most chaotic bed look intentional but also helps you make your way around your plot. If you have grass paths, long grass at the edges is a luxury hotel for slugs and snails. Keeping these well trimmed removes their "bridge" into your prize lettuces. Battery operated trimmers are your best friend here and can be picked up really cheaply (or even borrowed from plot neighbours if you need!).

3. Bartering

We thrive on a barter system here. We are a friendly bunch, and once you get to know your neighbours, you will often find that you can trade "goods or services"- spare paving flags, wood offcuts for raised beds, glass cutting for greenhouse panes, help with trimming trees, or even sharing the grass cutting are all things that we often swap and share amongst ourselves. The two golden rules here are don't be afraid to ask, and ensure you are being fair in return. If you're unsure where to go or who to ask, contact one of the committee and they will be happy to advise.

4. Compost with Care

A messy compost heap is just a rubbish pile. Turn your organic matter regularly and keep it contained within a bay or bin. Not only does this look better, but it also generates heat faster, killing off weed seeds and giving you that "black gold" for next season much sooner.

Top Tip: If you're struggling to keep up, **COVER UP!** Covering bare soil with cardboard, tarpaulin, straw, or woodchips suppresses weeds and retains moisture, doing half the maintenance work for you.

Happy growing, everyone! Let's keep our site looking its best for the season ahead.

The Plot Thickens...

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Following on from the above, I'm really sorry to say that I need to take a moment to get all serious (you know by now, I usually try to keep things light and entertaining here).

One of the things we noticed on our recent plot inspection which concerned us, was the build up of waste left outside Plot 1, The Village. (Corner Plot) and along the ditch between our site and JA Jones' field.

For obvious reasons, this ditch must not become clogged up with plot waste, as it will prevent the ditch from doing its job properly. The dumping of waste is also contributing to a health and safety issue, it may prevent the path being used safely and could lead to someone falling while trying to navigate around mounds of earth building up on the paths. To be safe and accessible, the general rule of thumb is to allow around 1m comfortable width for paths, and the continued dumping of waste may compromise this.

Additionally, now that some obstructive trees have been removed, we intend to try to let out Plot 1 and this isn't going to be possible if there is a continual build up of rubbish and waste dumped in the corner (be fair-you wouldn't want someone dumping their waste outside your plot)

I'd like to reach out to each of you to ask that you dispose of your plot waste appropriately, that is to say:

- Any waste that can be composted, should be composted on your own plots either in bays or bins
- Waste that cannot be composted should be removed from site and disposed of appropriately for example at council waste sites

If you are struggling to remove waste from your plot, please reach out to the Committee for further advice on composting or disposal options available.

We will always endeavour to resolve issues informally where possible, but as a Committee, we would seek to take a more formal approach should anyone be found dumping more waste inappropriately in this, or any other, area of the allotment site. This is not because we want to be heavy handed, but to preserve a nice environment for everyone on site.

Let's Keep Moss Lane Tidy....!



Jobs for May



HANDY REMINDERS

May is a busy, important month on the allotment, characterised by warmer weather and a need for caution against late frosts. As a result, the focus shifts from preparation to planting and protection.

Key tasks include hardening off and planting out tender crops like tomatoes and courgettes, sowing summer vegetables, earthing up potatoes, controlling weeds, and installing supports for climbing plants.

The Great Planting Out:

Towards the end of the month, once the risk of frost has passed, it's finally time to plant out your tomatoes, pumpkins, courgettes, and runner beans.

Support Your Beans:

Get your bean poles or "wigwams" up now. Runner beans grow at an incredible rate in May and will need those supports the second they start to "twine."

Thin Your Seedlings:

It feels cruel, but you must thin out your rows of carrots, beetroot, and parsnips sown in April. If they are too crowded, you'll get tiny, distorted roots instead of prize-winners.

Earthing Up Potatoes:

Keep drawing soil up around the stems of your emerging potato plants. This protects the delicate shoots from late frosts and prevents the developing tubers from turning green in the sun.

And finally- watch out for all those pesky weeds, which seem to have a sneaky habit of growing at a rate of knots this month!! Remember that pernicious weeds (e.g. horsetail, bindweed) should not be composted unless fully killed off, and annual weeds can be hoed off and left to decompose on borders (at least that is one less job to worry about!!).

Defence Mechanism!



GOOSEBERRY MILDEW

If you have gooseberry or currant bushes, May is when Gooseberry Mildew usually makes its first appearance. It looks like a white, powdery coating on the leaves and developing fruit. It's official name is "American Gooseberry Mildew" and for those of you who like a good Latin name, the scientific term for it is *Podosphaeramors-uvae*

This mildew affects mainly gooseberries, but can affect blackcurrants as well, and is signified by powdery grey-white fungal patches on the leaves, which later turn brown. You may also spot:

- Mildew on the fruits turns brown as it ages
- Young shoots are stunted and twisted at the tops, and die back
- Tiny fruiting bodies (just visible as black dots) may develop within the mildew growth in late summer and autumn

Why it's a May focus:

The combination of warm days and damp nights is the perfect breeding ground for this fungus.

How to deal with it:

The RHS recommends the following non chemical controls for gooseberry mildew:

- Prune to an open form to aid picking; this also discourages stagnant air amongst the branches (which is favourable for the disease) and promotes the circulation of air
- Avoid planting in low-lying or enclosed areas or with poor air flow
- Opening up bushes will also greatly ease picking and control of gooseberry sawfly
- Avoid applying excessive quantities of nitrogen-rich fertilisers (dried poultry manure pellets for example) or mulching with manure, because the resulting soft growth is more readily attacked
- A dressing of a balanced fertiliser, such as Growmore, is more suitable – use 50g per sq m (1½oz per sq yd)
- The fungus overwinters within the buds and on the shoots, and (with blackcurrants in particular) on fallen leaves. It is therefore essential to 'tip' prune the bushes by removing and disposing of (bonfire or shredding and composting) the ends of affected shoots as soon as they are seen, as well as disposing of all fallen leaves in autumn

For information, the RHS also recommends the following cultivars as resistant to the fungus:

'Captivator'

'Greenfinch' AGM

'Hinnomaki Red'

'Hinnomaki Green'

'Invincta' AGM: (Although young plants of this variety may show moderate attacks of mildew, the shoots of mature plants and fruits are highly resistant)

'Martlet'

'Remarka'

'Rokula'

Monthly Makes



Spring Onion & Asparagus Tart

Asparagus is the "king of May," and if you're lucky enough to have a bed (or a neighbour willing to swap!), this is the time to use it.

Ingredients:

- 1 pack of ready-rolled puff pastry
- A bunch of asparagus (woody ends trimmed)
- A bunch of spring onions, sliced
- 150g soft goat's cheese or feta
- 1 egg (beaten)
- A drizzle of olive oil, salt, and pepper

Method:

Unroll the pastry onto a baking tray and score a 1cm border around the edge (don't cut all the way through).

Prick the middle of the pastry with a fork and bake at 200°C (180 fan) for 10 minutes.

Remove from the oven, press the middle down if it has risen, and arrange the asparagus and spring onions on top.

Crumble over the cheese, drizzle with oil, and brush the pastry border with the beaten egg. Bake for another 15 minutes until the pastry is golden and the asparagus is tender.

Useful Resources

HUW RICHARDS



If last month was all about Charles Dowding, allow me to use this month to introduce you to Huw Richards.

If you haven't already heard of him, Huw is an absolute goldmine of information on growing produce for free, or very very little.

Having followed him on social media for a while now (@huwsgarden on Instagram and on Youtube if you're interested), he offers a wealth of advice that is useful and interesting to even the most experienced of ploholders.

Not only is he an accomplished gardener and grower, but Huw is also an established author, having written multiple books including one of my favourites, "Veg in One Bed" (I highly recommend this for those who are first getting started and have only one or two beds cleared and ready for planting). His writing in this book is very much geared towards maximising space, permaculture methods, and optimising food production. Definitely worth a read. He has also written "Grow Food For Free" (probably needs no explanation!) but if you are new to allotments, I highly recommend this book as it lays out a wealth of practical advice to get you started.

His books are also available on Audible for those who don't have time to sit and read a physical book - and what could be more appropriate when you're down on the plot!

Huw also writes on Substack- <https://huwrichards.substack.com/about> (and for those of you who aren't familiar, Substack is a blogging site- think Instagram but for newsletters, not pictures). Every week on Substack, he publishes a free newsletter. There are some paid tiers of subscription (sigh, isn't there with everything these days?), but the newsletter is perfectly sufficient. As an example- here is a link to a really interesting article he has written on stopping using compost as a mulch - <https://substack.com/home/post/p-178957173>