

# Cripley Meadow Newsletter June 2020

[www.cripley Meadow.org.uk](http://www.cripley Meadow.org.uk)

The Committee has reviewed [C-19 arrangements](#) and is making two changes – with immediate effect, **members may bring one non-household person to their plot.** Existing constraints remain - 2m social distancing, hygiene at the gate, closure of communal areas and staying on your plot (using the most direct route to it, no wandering around the site).

**Many thanks to all following our C-19 guidelines,** we have had only very few concerns. Clearly members are keen for the site to stay safe; we know we have some members where the allotments are the only outside space they can use. We must all **keep our guard up – our membership and households include many vulnerable people.**

The second change: we intend making **a tentative start to Working Parties** – more on this soon, but it will be pre-booked and numbers limited by the practicalities of social distancing for the task in hand. We will probably start with orchard work.

Driving and parking arrangements remain the same.

Limit car use.

5mph speed limit.

Never drive when tracks wet or frosty.

Only park in spaces indicated on [map](#). If full, use public car park.

Regular drivers, use public car park ([get £20 annual permit](#)).

Stop on track by plots for unloading/loading then move to parking space.

**No Jericho Street Fair** this year. I missed bumping into old friends but not producing so many plants to donate!

## New Members

We had to stop tours for new members on March 16<sup>th</sup> and, as we approached the end of May, our waiting list grew to 32! That is more than our usual turnover in a year; clearly the pandemic has made more aware of the benefits of working with nature, and food security. We had cleared and covered unoccupied plots as much as we could so that neighbours were not dealing with seeding weeds. But towards the end of May we were looking at how we could safely put this space to use. Our induction tours have been a characteristic of Cripley Meadow membership for 17 years but we had to adapt. With a mixture of potential members responding to questions, maps and a plot information form, followed by telephone discussions and very short, suitably distanced visit to look at one plot, we have taken on new members. We still have some to accommodate and more are joining the list. **Please make welcome Martin, Emilija and Felix, Sophie, Flo, Vendi, Atif, Abigail, Jac and Bernard, Maureen, Anna, Michael, Ard and Mary, Annie, Maggie, Bernie, Alice, Senta and Audrey.** This is not an easy time to take on a plot but there are already some good starts. We can now see we have enough headroom to lift the embargo on existing members applying for more space.

## Spring Audit

**Our audit has clarified where there are plots with members who cannot attend at the moment. We are working to do the best we can for them and their neighbours.**

**The driest and sunniest May and a humdinger of a frost.** -5°C is rarely recorded in my experience, (although June 6<sup>th</sup> is till the latest frost ever to hit my grapes!) I have never seen so many native and supposedly hardy plants so badly affected. It was patchy across the site. Pears, which usually suffer, remain untouched whereas plums and cherries were wiped out. We had had a lot of sun but not much rain so although some plants were well on, it was soft growth.

**We still have a restrictions on fires of any kind. Whilst the bonfire is out of action** Kostantina sent us a note about using wood in **Hugel beds.** Search online, there is lots of info. It raises soil levels above flood, and finds a use for stuff that goes on the bonfire. We would not recommend, though, using any treated wood and beware willow! Its sprouting capacity is well known.

May was even drier and sunnier than last year. As I write there has been a bit of rain but the surface is still dry. I know I have been banging on about rainwater harvesting... but here I go again.

## Water Harvesting

Thanks to our river-extraction water tank fillers Doke and Robin, Christine and Barrie, Richard, Alison, Peter, Tia, Rodney, Rob and Louise. This is not an easy job. These communal supplies are intended for dry periods such as this. We are keen to conserve natural resources and we encourage

everyone to do their best to increase their own rainwater harvesting.

Castle Mill rainwater and our communal shed water butts ran out a week ago... so nearly lasted. We did warn you the Castle Mill ones would never be tapwater filled again. Rainfall is the simplest to collect but it can be unreliable from month to month, so you need larger storage volumes to cope with drought. It has few/no costs as it usually relies on gravity. Groundwater or river harvesting are presently more reliable sources for collection but start-up and maintenance costs are VERY much greater and require energy and people to pump water for storage. Thames Water are no longer giving grants for boreholes and extraction as Thames basin extraction is over-committed.

By far the simplest way to have water on hand is to collect and store water from your shed, polytunnel or toolbox. There are lots of wells on plots but if we all use them the water table drops dramatically and can dry up. Now we have more **small- and half-plots, we are allowing members on them to apply to the committee to have small sheds** so that they can store materials but also harvest rainwater (we are keeping a watchful eye on their position and the risk of shading). Allotment sheds must be temporary. There are model raised bases on plots 64/65 and 54 using only sand, breeze blocks and paving slabs. No concrete ever! Now could be a good time to think about putting some water butts in. You'll be surprised how much water you can collect off sheds and greenhouses. Look at [ODFAA's info](#) about how much you could collect. A large 10 pole plot might need 4-8 water butts to get through a dry patch. I have 10 water

butts and a well and have never yet run out of water nor used the communal supply.



Kostantina, our inspiration in getting recycled Council waste bins and adapting them to be water butts, is looking for another 4 to add. We are not sure if OCC are still doing this but will investigate and will continue to try to support members in rainwater harvesting; we still have sheds on site with little or none. We have looked into stocking guttering on site, but unfortunately the Shop is not suited to storing it. You can order guttering and bits from Wickes. It is light, if not easy to bring on site, so we may try to have some kind of guttering day once C-19 allows.

**Other water tips** Do hoe the surface of the soil. It helps stop evaporation, keeping the soil below damp and makes it easier for rain to soak in instead of running off. Hoeing is best done when the soil is dry as this creates a 'dust mulch', which inhibits the germination of new weeds. Long-handled hoes are easier on the back, whereas a short-handled 'onion hoe' is better for closely-planted areas,

where you don't want to damage nearby plants.

**Don't just sprinkle a bit of water** around if it looks dry. Stick your finger in the soil and if dirt is attached as it comes out there is still some water down there. Do see if it is actually dry below the surface. When you do need to water, give it a good soak so the water goes down. This encourages the roots to go down after the water, rather than spreading out on the surface. Shallow roots are easily damaged and vulnerable to drying out in really hot dry weather, and there is some evidence that sprinkle-watering can actually pull more water out of the deeper levels. We are so very fortunate to have water below us, so if your soil is in good heart plants will survive longer than you think. Sink plantpots for watering transplants, or in polytunnels, as this will take the water down where needed rather than evaporating.



I never water my plot as a whole and water the polytunnel once every 4 days. I have well-conditioned soil with years of organic management and added compost,

mostly home made, but I have been pushed into watering carrots to get some germinating, and lettuce for germination and continuity.

Good growing to all,  
**Wendy**