

Cripley Meadow Allotments October 2020 Newsletter

That dry September came to a rather sudden end, the water level is rising... Please **stay off Cripley Island as it is dangerous** while there is so much water on it.

Thanks to members' consideration, regular driving is now very limited; please remember not to drive if there is standing water or frost. The recent track work is still a bit loose so take care. There is someone parking on the headland of plots 64/65. Please never park on plots - you can only stop temporarily on tracks to load and unload, otherwise park in designated areas.

Audit reminder – Committee members Emma Delap and Christine Melia are leading our Audit team this Sunday, October 11th. [Here is a link to the basics.](#)

Bonfires Manda was watching the wind



forecast; a Southerly on 30th saw her, Rodney and me burning off the backlog at the communal bonfire. It had been covered, so was dry, and burned really well without much smoke. We now have space for woody material from Member's plots. You can bring it for the Committee to burn (no

weeds please). Place on the bottom tarp at the



side of the burning area and cover over with the top, red, tarp to keep it dry. There still should be **no fires on plots** because of the risk of complaints and a blanket ban but, in addition to the OK for gas BBQs already in force, the

Committee has decided to allow charcoal BBQs on plots - in a proper 'Weber-style' or BBQ grill only as they generate little smoke, no wood fires – on an experimental basis.

National Allotment Society - Cripley Meadow will soon be renewing its membership of the [National Allotment Society](#), mainly to access legal advice and help with incorporation (see [last newsletter](#)), but there are also [benefits for Members](#) (not co-workers). Our [Data Protection Policy](#) includes passing on Members' names and

contact details to the NAS but you can individually unsubscribe from emails from them. The £3 per head NAS annual membership fee is covered by Association funds.

The Oxford Direct Services Mowing Team has been with us for a year and has worked well. Remember to keep site paths by communal/ small plots clear. If there are stones, weed piles, compost bins etc. the Team cannot mow.

The badger hotel area by the gate is awaiting clearance by Oxford University Parks. The corner onto Roger Dudman Way has very poor sight lines. Please take care.

Our waiting list continues to grow; since March it has been between 20 and 30. We have turnover as usual but have processed an unprecedented 54 plot offers since January and still have some 28 people waiting. The Committee is charged with making good use of the whole site: existing plots are full and we have just 1.65 plots to reclaim (after leaf drop) so we are looking hard at where we can find more space to cultivate. We do have areas in communal use which could become plots and the Committee is exploring this. For example, Cripley Island Orchard is underused and some fruit trees, that have failed to thrive, need to be removed anyway, so could become our communal space instead of all or some of the Green and the Green space turned into plots.

The Good News - Harry's Cup

In the summer we invited new members to apply for this award in memory of Harry Stone, who first won it in Oxford in 1930. The winners of the cup are Sandra Fisher-Martins and Maria



Alejandra Crosta of 126b and 126c. This area was long neglected but became a small plot area last year and has blossomed into a productive and attractive kitchen garden. They will each have a photo of the cup and share the £50 award donated by Mike Stone, Harry's grandson.

You can learn more about Harry Stone and family on the [ODFAA web site](#).





We shall not be able to do the presentation at the annual BBQ as hoped but when we can meet together again we shall celebrate!



And the Bad News - The Member on plot 94/95 has reported that two lovely black iron gates that formed the entrance to her plots have gone missing, presumed stolen. She thinks this happened when she was away in August and September. **If anyone can shed any light it would be much appreciated.** Members must never enter other plots without permission nor remove any items. Our community relies on all respecting our rules.

Reset, rethink time!

The Site has never looked better and it is probably as full of produce as it has ever been during my long time here. It is wonderful to see. A handful of members have been absent but we are trying to keep in touch so that this do not adversely affect others. We are so fortunate that allotments have been able to stay open

throughout with a few changes to ensure it is a safe haven for all.

Much has been written about food security, working with nature, and many questions have been raised about food production with industrialisation, mechanisation use of fertilisers, pesticides, mono-cultures. Now more seem aware that much of this 'development' could be hostile to our own best interests and those of the planet. Working with nature, as one must do to garden successfully means that allotments are rising as a beacon of light and sense. The diversity of vegetables, fruit and complementary flowers are amongst the richest of habitats for birds and insects. With a common purpose in looking after the soil, growing food sustainably, considering our neighbours and the common good, we will be set fair to continue to enjoy and share the amazing resource that is Cripsey Meadow.

Harvesting has been a bright spot in a depressing return of infection and concern. My crops have been pretty good all year... except for cauliflower which never really got going in that cold wet, followed by a dry spring. In August tomatoes were in full flood. In September, fantastic Goat's Horn peppers and beans were being somewhat hastily harvested during that bout of glorious weather. Pears were good but, as many others are reporting, my apples were not great (usually we have enough fruit to add to our porridge every morning but not this year). There are still apples on the large tree behind the Members' notice board opposite the Gate, do help yourself. They ripen quite late but lots are high so you may need a long pole.



Unfortunately, we were not able to get to the allotment as much as usual in September due to commitments elsewhere so our harvesting has been a bit hurried. I have, once again, benefited from a plot neighbour's quinces so have jelly and membrillo for the

next two years; it has such a fantastic colour and fragrance.



My plot neighbour has also been adding sunflowers to her water butt allotment garden that will cheer us up even in the greyest of winter days.



All my beans were originally from Franchi, but they have been from saved seeds for some years, so they are acclimatising well to Cripsey Meadow.



Do remember September and October are good planting times for over-wintered crops if you are prepared to take a risk with water levels. I always plant some garlic, shallots, onion sets, broad beans and sometimes peas.

Mulches retain moisture, suppress weeds, reduce nutrient loss due to rainfall, and insulate (or cool) if used with crops. Already I have begun mulching using a cover,

compost or green manure as soon as beds are cleared. I will use all my available compost to cover beds under plastic. Sometimes I put grass cuttings on top of the compost under the plastic. I have a store of much re-used black plastic sheets that are bed sized so easy to manage. I peg them down firmly and really look after them so that they will last many more years. You can also use comfrey leaves, cardboard, composted bark, straw and any bought in green waste or well-rotted manure. Be sure of your source so that you do not introduce too many weed seeds or infected material. Also take care with wood-based mulches which can reduce the pH and rob a bit of nitrogen.

I also mulch to protect crops still in the ground like brassicas or stored there like carrots, beetroot, celeriac. I have never liked the taste of veg stored on sawdust or sand; I use my own compost and most years my system of mulch and cover works well. It feeds the plants and, most importantly, the soil flora and fauna. The worms will pull much down over the winter, so not only protecting a crop, but also readying to sow or plant in the spring. I also cover generously with environmesh.

I have been working on my compost-making and had my bins hotter than usual with regular use of grass clippings and brown and dry material alongside weeds and plot waste. I try to compost everything I can off the plot and this year I am running out of compost space. I keep my grass well cut for this very purpose... and usually so that grandchildren can enjoy running along so many different spaces, but this year, sadly, they have been seriously restricted! I bring in my vegetable kitchen waste from home, but I rot it down in sealed bins before I add it to the heap so that rats are not attracted.

Good gardening, Wendy