



Romsey Allotment Holders Association

growing together

December 2018

Message from the Chair: *I do hope everyone has had a good enough growing year to have some produce from their plot for the season's feasts. I have kale, spinach and sprouts in quantity! But after the weather we've had, we are amazing to have anything. Wishing you all a lovely Christmas Season,*
Carole

Water storage safety

Members must take necessary precautions to prevent harm to anyone and anything with regards to the collection and storage of water. A lid will help prevent welcome visitors (such as beneficial insects) from falling in, and a "gang plank" will provide an escape route for any that do. Remember that our site is exposed to the wind, so consider what you can do to prevent anything on your plot being blown away.

Rats

As the saying goes, "you are only 6 feet away from a rat": they are part of every day life and do have a benefit as a natural waste disposal system. However, they breed fast (a healthy female can be responsible for a dynasty of 2,000 in just 1 year) and, not only do they feast on our produce, they are the main carrier of diseases including Weil's disease, a potentially deadly bacterial infection. Anyone who has tried to eradicate them will know they are hard to kill, and this is because they have "new object reaction" which means if you put down a trap or poisoned bait, they will simply avoid it.

Allotments update

We believe that the main cause of the rat population explosion at our allotments was the "poop pile", with lots of undigested seeds providing our resident rodents with a feast. This pile has now been removed and there is no plan to reintroduce it.

The rat situation will be monitored over the coming months.

So what can we do?

As another saying goes: "**prevention is better than a cure**": a tidy plot is less likely to attract rats:

- Turn the contents of your compost bin regularly (at least twice per year) to disturb any nests.
- Plastic compost bins should sit on small gauge wire mesh lining at the base or on paving slabs to prevent rats from burrowing in underneath.
- Regularly kick your compost bin to ensure it is not a peaceful place for rats to sleep.
- No household waste!! Never put meat, dairy, bones, cooked foods in your compost bin.
- Harvest ripe fruit and vegetables promptly and take them home to enjoy.
- Do not leave discarded fruit and vegetables on the ground; clear them away to your compost bin.
- Keep your plot tidy and ensure that your plot is not overgrown, with no piles of timber, old carpet etc.
- Remember to thoroughly wash (and peel if appropriate) any food you harvest.
- Sheds and greenhouses must be kept rodent proof.
- Consider storing seeds, bulbs etc in rodent proof containers.

As a last resort

If you feel that you really have to use rat poison, first email info@romseyallotments.org.uk

Any use of poison should be responsible, and this website is a useful point of reference:

<https://www.thinkwildlife.org/code-of-best-practice/crru-code/>

Suggestions welcome!

If you have any suggestions for rat control please email info@romseyallotments.org.uk

Skip

We are arranging a skip for January, but to get a sense of the size of skip to order, can you please e-mail info@romseyallotments.org.uk with the type of rubbish and an idea of how much volume.

Fruit harvest sharing

Some of the fruit trees at our allotments don't get all their bounty harvested, and it is a shame to let this go to waste. Other allotment holders and a few charities would be happy to use excess produce if the plot holder agrees to this.

Jenny and Alex have volunteered to wander around the plots noting the position of fruit trees and asking plot holders if they would mind sharing the harvest. Of course, you can say "No" - please e-mail info@romseyallotments.org.uk if you have a preference already.

2018 Butterfly survey

Over the summer months 10 volunteers took part in a butterfly survey, with 13 species encountered especially the brassica-grower's enemy: the large & small whites although not as much as nationally recorded. Some less common species were also identified. The greatest diversity was around the periphery where the habitat is wilder and also on one individual plot.

The survey will continue in 2019 and ideas for planting to benefit larvae and butterflies will feature in the January newsletter.

Other wildlife

If you find other wildlife on your plot, such as hedgehogs, slow worms, kestrels, owls, bats etc please email Robert Le-Grice (robertlegrice@ntlworld.com) with details.

Moths

As well as butterflies, bees and other daytime pollinating visitors, moths are important to allotmenters as they are pollinators too. A survey carried out in September and October on the site at 2 particular plots, identified 35 individual species (different ones appearing each week) seen in October and November. The moth spotter predicts seeing around 330 species over a year on these 2 plots alone. One of the moths identified was the "Mocha" which is "Nationally Notable" with less than an estimated 100 in 10 sq km, and which munches on groundsel which is a weed we often try to eradicate. So maybe we should be planting for moths as well as other pollinators. Moth spotting will continue throughout the year when weather conditions permit.

"The greatest fine art of the future will be the making of a comfortable living from a small piece of land." Abraham Lincoln.

Estate Manager needed We desperately need someone to fill this role, which is to oversee the day-to-day running of the allotment and arrange maintenance of the infrastructure (roads, hedges etc). If you would like to know more please e-mail info@romseyallotments.org.uk

Life on your plot from November to January

Even in these winter days there is still plenty to be doing on your plot. So why not wrap up warm and take a flask of coffee... or even hot chocolate for an indulgence!

- plant garlic, onions and shallots. Cover with fleece to protect them from the worst of the weather.
- prune fruit bushes: blackcurrants, redcurrants, whitecurrants and gooseberries can be pruned any time between November and March, while they are dormant. Prune out any dead, dying or diseased wood and aim for an open, goblet shape.
- cut down autumn-fruiting raspberries which bear fruit on new wood: cut all old canes to the ground.
- net brassica crops: make sure that it lifts clear of the plants so birds can't peck through it.
- stake brussels sprouts as they can get top heavy and topple in heavy winds.
- divide large clumps of rhubarb: replant the outer sections into soil enriched with well-rotted manure.
- plant bare-root canes, bushes and trees

Newsletters, old and new can be found on our website:

<https://tinyurl.com/RAHAnewsletters>



Sign up for the latest news

If you have an email address you can sign up to Facebook to get the latest Allotments news & chat from the Romsey Allotments group.

If you are unsure about Facebook you can get help from various places
e.g: Weds 10-12 or 1-3 at All Saints North Baddesley (£3 incl tea/coffee)
& 2nd & 4th Tues 10-12 at Carers Together 9 Love Lane (£2 incl tea/coffee)

More than you need? Sometimes we grow more than we, our families and friends can possibly get through. For times like that (but not for planned excesses) you can join the Romsey Country Market for just 5p a year. You would need to be available to help now and then, and a small commission is taken on sales.

To find out more drop into the Town Hall (10-11:30 usually 2nd & 4th Fri, sometimes additional dates – see sign in Town Hall) or to Ampfield Village Hall: 1st Sat 10-12 (not Jan/Aug)



Moving?

New email address?

New phone number?

Need help with your plot?

No longer need your plot?

Please remember to let us know!

Useful advice for all allotmenters can be found on the Royal Horticultural Society website:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own>

Email: info@romseyallotments.org.uk

Website: <http://www.romseyallotments.org.uk/>

Facebook: [Romsey Allotments](https://www.facebook.com/RomseyAllotments)