



# Newsletter

## Welcome to the March 2013 edition



*Our Cover Star this month is Robbie, from Warriston. (pic: Rik)*

# Review of FEDAGA activities.

Following an article in last summer's Newsletter, FEDAGA undertook a review of its aims and activities. Plotholders were invited to give their opinions and comments, and from that feedback some clear themes for discussion emerged. A 'Review Day' was organised on Saturday 10th November. Site reps and committees were asked to send representatives and on the day plotholders from 17 sites participated. The Review Day was spent discussing the main topics that came out of the consultations we carried out and further comments and suggestions were recorded.

Small working groups have been set up to take on new initiatives such as:

- 1 Introduction packs for new plotholders;
- 2 Guidance and information packs for site representatives and site committees;
- 3 Making the website more informative and the issuing of more regular newsletters via e-mail.

The outcome of these initiatives will inform how FEDAGA improves its services to members.

FEDAGA is YOUR association and the committee of 16 volunteers is working hard to communicate, inform and help as many plotholders as possible. Obviously you have signed up - or you wouldn't be reading this - but many more allotment holders in Edinburgh have yet to do so.

Please help by spreading the word to your allotment friends. Tell them to go to [www.fedaga.org.uk/mailing\\_lists](http://www.fedaga.org.uk/mailing_lists) It's the best way to keep up with the latest news and information on Edinburgh's allotments.

A report on recommendations from the Review can be read [here](#).

# Something for the springtime.



Stinging nettles on the plot aren't necessarily a bad thing. As well as providing a good habitat for beneficial insects such as ladybirds, chopped up they act as a jolly good compost accelerator. They're generally a good indicator of very fertile soil, but it's their culinary uses that delight me the most. One of my favorite things to do with fresh, early spring nettles is to make home brewed beer. You only need a few ingredients and it's dead easy.

Ingredients

1kg nettle tops (about a carrier bag full)

5ltr water

500g sugar

Juice of 2 lemons

50g cream of tartar

2tsp Irish Moss

1 sachet of brewers yeast



## Method

Using a large stockpot boil the water and add the nettles and Irish Moss, they will quickly wilt down. The Irish Moss (which isn't moss at all, it's a type of seaweed) isn't completely necessary but it will help to keep the beer clear-ish, you can buy it in most health food shops. Boil for 15 minutes and then pour through a large sieve or colander into a sterilized plastic food-grade bucket.

To sterilize the bucket you can use any sterilizing fluid solution (Milton's, etc) and then rinse with boiling water.

Stir in the sugar, cream of tartar and leave to cool down.

When the liquid is at room temperature, add the lemon juice and the brewers yeast. (You'll probably have to activate the yeast first, just follow the instructions on the sachet.)

Put the lid on the bucket and leave it to ferment somewhere warm for 3 days.

Spoon off the scum from the surface and syphon the liquid into sterilized glass bottles being careful not to disturb or suck up any of the sediment from the bottom of the bucket. "Grolsh type" swing top bottles are the easiest to use but you can re-use any old beer bottles if you buy new caps for them (these can be purchased at any home brew shop or from a multitude of on-line retailers).

Leave the bottles somewhere cool for about 7-10 days and then give one a go. The beer will continue to ferment and go slightly fizzy in the bottles so don't leave them too long or they might go pop!

By Rik Hart (Warriston Allotments)

## How Not To Lose The Plot.



The City of Edinburgh Council and Bridgend Growing Communities are offering a hands-on course in allotment gardening for all plot-holders, both new and existing. The course aims to provide the knowledge and skills needed for a successful growing season, and will be delivered in 12 three-hour sessions starting on Sunday 17th March.

For further information please [click here](#).

## Edinburgh in Bloom.



The City of Edinburgh Council has agreed to support FEDAGA's Edinburgh in Bloom competition again this year. 2013 will see some changes. We would like to take the competition to individual plotheolders and encourage participation from as many of you as is possible. There will only be one category this year. We will be looking for the Top Plot in Edinburgh - and it could be yours. Generous prizes are being arranged and it is hoped to launch in May or June.



# Local Management at Wester Hailes Allotments.



*One of the benefits of local management is that there appear to be no restrictions on how fantastic you want your "shed" to be!*

...We were contacted by an aggrieved plotholder. A partly burned-out caravan and a pile of old car tyres had been dumped overnight on a nearby plot...

Wester Hailes Allotments have just over 100 plots on two sites situated in a quiet little backwater between the city bypass and the main Edinburgh to Glasgow railway line. Whilst we can't always boast a tranquil experience for our tenants, we have the huge benefit of autonomy from the City Council.

We pay an annual rent for our site to Edinburgh, and a small section of our land is rented privately. We get no services in return for this rent – there are no bin collections, no grass cutting, no maintenance of any kind. Whilst we have a mains water supply, we have responsibility for all pipes and fittings inside the site boundaries. There is no mains drainage and no loos! The lack of facilities and services is reflected in the rent

were are charged by the City Council, which enables us to charge affordable rents to our ploholders – currently £20 for a full plot.

The site is looked after by a Management Committee operating under a constitution laid down by an annual general meeting of ploholders. This gives us responsibility for infrastructure, all lettings and plot inspections, site security and running our monthly Management Committee (MC) meetings and AGM. We have complete responsibility for our financial affairs, including the payment and collection of rents and the keeping of accounts, which are audited annually. There are properly instituted complaints and appeals procedures.

The nine members of the MC have their own specific responsibility. Apart from chairperson and deputy, secretary and treasurer, we have members looking after lettings; deliveries of manure/wood chippings/leaves/mushroom compost; site security and maintenance; working parties/social events/annual show, and more recently a member with responsibility for grant applications for what will hopefully be our new site committee rooms. One of our members helps with the running of the [website](#). In addition to this team, there are volunteers who take on everyday tasks such as emergency water supply problems, grass cutting and pathway maintenance. Larger projects (digging new trenches for water mains, clearing overgrown areas of the site etc) are taken on by volunteers on one of our Saturday working parties. These are increasingly popular – probably because of the free barbecue! We have our own waiting list for plots – we allow applications from throughout the city and wider area – and it is possible to apply via our website. Those on the waiting list have to confirm contact details annually, and in return get copies of our newsletters by email (or can access it on the website). Communication with ploholders has a high priority, and email is used wherever possible. Those without email are being assigned to ‘cascade groups’ where one person in the group can pick up email and communicate details to others in the group (by printing it out or by word of mouth etc). All communications are posted on the two noticeboards.

Nobody is offered a full plot at Wester Hailes until they have passed an induction process: We have divided up two of our plots into quarters and incomers are offered a quarter plot for a six month trial. They are allocated a committee member as a ‘mentor’, and have several meetings with them through the trial. Starter plots have a small communal shed with combination lock for tool storage. We are attempting to set up a managed half plot as a ‘demonstration plot’.

We have evolved a set of criteria for plot inspections, which we carry out three times a year – all publicised in the Spring with reminders by email and on noticeboards. The criteria are clearly displayed. Two members of the MC carry out inspections, usually on a Saturday morning when there is time to chat to plotholders and congratulate them on their plots. All plots are graded on a 5 point scale taking all the criteria into account. Plotholders in category 5 ('failing') are contacted, and a meeting arranged at the plot, where the problems are discussed with them. A set of improvements and a timescale will be agreed, and the plot inspected again. Depending on the history of the plot, this will happen with category 4 plots ('basic'). Category 1 and 2 plots ('Outstanding' and 'Commended') are sent congratulatory messages. It is made clear to members of the MC that their own plots should be category 1. Inspection records are entered into an ongoing database so that we can trace the history of a plot. This database, along with site plans and other plotholder records are held in secure cloud storage, with different access rights to different members of the committee to ensure proper compliance with the data protection acts. All plots are photographed at least annually.

For the last two years we have held a small annual flower/produce show on site. Winners get certificates. We make a small profit, which is donated to a local hospice.

Our model isn't yet perfect. Crucially, we depend on lots of goodwill and hard work on the part of committee members and others. Anne Wheeldon, our secretary is a key member – she spends many hours working on allotment matters, and is incredibly generous with her time and expertise.

...After several phone calls, the tenant removed his caravan the next week. He eventually decided to give up his plot. The car tyres went in the back of a car and were taken to the tip.

Chris Griffin

Chairman, Wester Hailes Allotments



# The FEDAGA Shop.



*Sorting the Seed Potato order at the FEDAGA Shop (disguised as a freight container!).*

The FEDAGA Shop at Inverleith Allotments is open throughout March and April. Come along on Sundays, between 2 and 3.30 to pick up bargain-priced seed potatoes, onion sets, fertilisers or root trainers. We have reduced the range of other items - such as seeds - but still have the basics to get you off to an inexpensive start.

We apologise for the Shop not being open last Sunday but this was unavoidable as unfortunately one of our volunteers was unexpectedly called away at the last moment. Under the circumstances it was not possible to make alternative arrangements. Sorry.

Pre-packed Onions - £1.50 a bag

Pre-packed Shallots - £1.75 a bag

Loose Onions - £1.00 half kilo

Loose Shallots - £2.00 half kilo

Potatoes - £3.00 a bag

Organics and Rooster Potatoes - £3.50 a bag

Potato Sacks - £1.00 each

There are also a few old seed packets past their expiry date that are being given away.

Potato varieties we have are (although it's possible we may have sold out of some of these now):

Salad Crop - Pink Fir Apple and International Kidney.

1st Early - Duke of York, Foremost, Casablanca and Sharpe's Express.

2nd Early - Nadine, Wilja and Marfona

Main Crop - Maris Piper, Picasso, Rooster, Desiree, Sante, Lady Balfour and King Edward.

Please note that the FEDAGA Shop will only serve bona fide members.

Be prepared to give your plot number and site.

## The King's Seeds Scheme.



Many of you have already taken advantage of our innovative on-line seed ordering scheme with King's Seeds. One of the advantages - apart from being able to order up without braving the freezing conditions down on the plot - is that there's No Closing Date! If you're about to be caught napping in the spring with insufficient supplies now is the time to click [here](#) and get your order in. Cheap as chips!

Again - for members only.

# The Allotment Officer.



The City of Edinburgh Council's Allotment Officer has kindly agreed to attend a number of our Management Committee meetings to give a report on problems and projects on the Council-managed sites. Together we try to agree on how to address the problems and prioritise the projects.

Although we do our best to ensure that each site, large or small, is given equal treatment it would be really good if your site ensured that it sent a representative along to ensure you get a proper say. Failing that get in touch with us [here](#). We will clear the first half hour of the agenda to deal with this business.

The next meeting is at 7.15pm on Tuesday 2nd April at the Southside Community Centre on Nicolson Street. The Allotment Officer will attend the following meeting at the same time on Tuesday 7th May. We will use the April meeting to discuss matters amongst ourselves and decide upon our approach and the May meeting to make our representations. This initiative replaces the Liaison Meetings and will bring the Allotment Officer closer to site reps. We hope this procedure will make things more transparent and improve accountability.

Meanwhile if you look at the [Minutes](#) of the March meeting you can read an account of the Allotment Officer's first meeting with the Management Committee.



# The Allotment Show.



With regret FEDAGA has decided not to stage the Allotment Show this year.

Every year an appeal is made to allotment holders to volunteer to help with planning, booking in exhibits or setting up on the day. Each year the response has been disappointing. Each year the tasks have fallen on the shoulders of the usual suspects. Also, despite our attempts to change things around and keep the Show relevant the numbers of exhibitors and exhibits has not really increased.

We also decided that to continue spending the larger part of our income every year on an event that only commanded the involvement of a small proportion of our members was unjustifiable. So, no Show this year.

But there's always 2014. Please get in touch if you either have ideas for how a revamped Allotment Show might look - or if you reckon that we're barking up the wrong tree and could use our energies and finances to better celebrate our allotments in another way. [Contact us](#) if you think you can help.

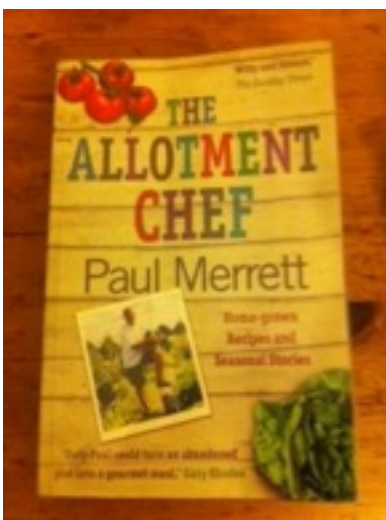
# Are there any auditors out there?



FEDAGA is constitutionally required to have its annual accounts examined and presented to the AGM in October. Our previous auditors are no longer able to fulfill this task so we are appealing for anyone with the required skills to volunteer to help out.

Please [contact us](#) if you can help.

## ...and finally, the Literary Review.



The Allotment Chef by Paul Merrett - (Collins paperback, 2010)  
OK, I admit it - I have a tremendous weakness for cook books and also for anything about veggie-growing. So when I found this book during my

last visit to the public library, I couldn't resist. Two passions to be fulfilled in a one! "Witty and honest" said the Sunday Times review on the cover while Gary Rhodes said "Only Paul could turn an abandoned plot into a gourmet meal."

My hopes of finding a whole new clutch of exciting ways of cooking the fruit and veg from my allotment were to be sadly dashed, however. Perhaps I'm not the best critic of Paul Merrett's recipes as I don't eat cow and pig - and the Merrett family seem to enjoy a great deal of both - but he also uses vast quantities of cream in many dishes, which will be regarded as none too healthy by many in 2013. Out of seven soup recipes, for example, only his Tomato Soup has neither meat nor cream and his White Onion Soup manages to have both, including chorizo sausage and double cream - a somewhat queasy sounding mixture to me.

Many of the main course recipes are of the same ilk and I was disappointed that in numbers of them the vegetables played only a very minor bit part. Two pages were devoted to Grilled Cider-cured Salmon where, out of a list of eighteen ingredients, only the potatoes, the spoonful of dill and the spoonful of rocket could have been grown in the allotment. We also get two pages of Slow-roasted Shoulder of Lamb Studded with Garlic and Rosemary where yes, you guessed it - the allotment provides just the garlic and rosemary.

I might just try the Courgette Pickle but otherwise these recipes seemed to me to be somewhat unoriginal fare with little that was fresh and exciting. And Merrett's cooking seemed to me to be cheffy in a rather old-fashioned French kind of way.

The other half of the book, where he talks about his own experience of taking on an overgrown allotment and trying to win his wife and two children over to The Good Life (no more Tesco shopping!) was written quite amusingly and it kept me mildly entertained on an otherwise dull train journey to Aberdeen. But ultimately I have to say that I was glad that I had borrowed this book from the library rather than shelling out £12.99 to buy it. I would recommend that you do the same.

Unfortunately, the book (published originally in 2008) as *Using the Plot* failed sadly to live up to my expectations.

Maggie Sinclair (Lady Road)

©2013 Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotment and Gardens Associations I  
FEDAGA