

September 2013



This issue is illustrated with images of Edna Monteith's Ferry Road plot, taken earlier this summer. Edna won Third prize in the Edinburgh in Bloom competition.

Growing Curiosity.



Cucurbita ficifolia

Patrick Gibb writes:

Plants are interesting. Particularly if you can eat them and especially if you can't buy them in the shops.

That's the sort of thinking that got me interested in growing some lesser known fruits and vegetables. I'm writing here to share what I have learned and I would be interested to hear what experience other people have with these plants.

Cucurbita ficifolia.

I first heard of this on Gardeners Question Time, in answer to a question about the best kind of squash to grow. James Wong, guru of unusual edibles, suggested *C. ficifolia* as the hardiest of Cucurbits. (Cucurbits are the group that includes Squashes, pumpkins and courgettes.) So I thought yes, that sounds like the answer for Edinburgh.

To my surprise I couldn't find any British seed merchant who sold *C. ficifolia* seeds. I eventually found some on eBay, from a supplier in Portugal, for 99p plus £3 shipping for 12 seeds.

I planted 6 seeds. They all germinated quickly in a simple electrically heated propagator and grew rapidly, rather like courgettes. I planted two out in mid May and they grew rampantly. One would have been enough.

The fruits are impressively large but so far not over exciting. The ones I have eaten taste quite like courgette, and I already have plenty of courgettes. The fruits are said to keep for months, so that may be their advantage over courgettes. I have left one of the first ones to grow and mature in the hope of getting seeds that I can plant next year, or give away, or eat.

Has any one else tried them? Would anyone like some seeds?



Oca - *Oxalis tuberosa*

This is another plant I heard about from James Wong on the same episode of GQT.

They are tubers that you plant in the spring and harvest in early winter. A bit like potatoes but unrelated. Apparently you can grow them and replant the tubers without worrying about build up of disease. I've got some growing and they certainly look big and healthy now. The potential problem is that they only start to make tubers when the days get shorter, and then may be stopped by early frosts. So I don't know if they will be productive in Edinburgh. I should know by Christmas. Has anyone else tried Oca in Edinburgh?

Other things.

Here are some other plants I am trying or want to try and could write about another time when I know how they behave. Or maybe someone out here already knows about these and could tell me?

Sea kale - *Crambe maritima*.

I've got it growing, from seed. It'll be a year or two before I know if it's any good. It's included in Hessayon's Vegetable Expert book so may be quite well known, but you can't buy it in the shops. It has the added merit of being mentioned in Dickens' Tale of Two Cities. How many vegetables can say that?

Daubenton perennial kale.

Sounds interesting. Available by mail order from France.

Chilean guava.

Another James Wong recommendation. Can it survive the Edinburgh winter?

Saskatoon.

I haven't got any yet but there is someone in Dundee who is growing and selling them, so I think they must be tough enough for Edinburgh.

Click [here](#) to contact Patrick.



Oxalis tuberosa

Council Allotment Report.



The following report was given to FEDAGA by the City of Edinburgh Council Allotment Officer earlier this month:

From November weekly inspections will reduce to every 2 weeks. The new Kirkliston site was opened at the end of August. Work has commenced on preparation of the new site at Baronscourt. Completion is anticipated this year. From next spring the Albert Street and Nisbet Court sites will be managed by the Council. A further new site at Drumbrae will be created next year.

Under the agreement FEDAGA has with the Council these new sites should have larger plots than are being provided. The Allotment Officer was challenged on this. He replied that it is not Council policy to create smaller plots. The size is dictated by the conditions at the new sites and cited Dumbryden, where all plots are around 3/4 size.

Additionally, Midmar may be extended with the development into allotments of Field 3. More definitely, Stenhouse is due to be extended and part of the former Balgreen site will be returned to allotments once the housing development there is completed.

The tree work at Leith Links is now scheduled for the school holidays in October.

Rabbit problems are now being reported at Stenhouse and Redhall. At the former site the gate has often been seen to be left wide open which would probably be the cause of the problem. The control program at Midmar and Bridgend is nearly complete. A baiting program is underway at Inverleith to deal with a rat infestation. One plot at Warriston is similarly affected and is being treated.

The Trade Waste Bin uplifts will cease after the week commencing 4th November and will restart in the week commencing 3rd March 2014. Savings from this will be spent on tree work.

There has been vandalism at Carrick Knowe. Youths had been throwing stones into the site. Police were involved and the problem has ceased. However, more recently sheds have been damaged.

The tap upgrade at Restalrig was agreed. 7 new water posts for Carrick Knowe (1), Chesser Crescent (3), Craigentenny (2) and Stenhouse (1) were agreed. New noticeboards for Redhall and Carrick Knowe were agreed. The fence at Carrick Knowe is considered to be satisfactory. The price for the proposed path upgrade at Warriston is over double what was anticipated. A fresh quote will be sought. Also at Warriston, it was confirmed that the Council is responsible for repair of the wall at Warriston Road. As the wall does not form the boundary of the allotment (which is a fence about 7 feet back from the road) it was agreed that pointing work should not proceed if it has to be paid for from the allotment budget.

A new noticeboard has been installed at Bridgend and the proposed fence at Ferry Road is not now considered to be required as thick brambles have grown up which will adequately protect the site. It was agreed to discharge these items. The unstable east fence at Midmar may require to be shored up. Also at Midmar, safety matting has been purchased and delivered. The site committee will organise the installation. Finally at Midmar, Capital Skills will donate labour to install sleepers to shore up 3 plots that are in danger of slipping down the hillside.

At Carrick Knowe, the creation of a soil bund will soon take place to prevent further flooding. The large heap of soil recently delivered to Stenhouse will be left as it will soon be required for the extension that will follow the completion of the tram works. In the mean time ploholders may use it to enrich their plots.

A new fence for the bottom field at Warriston is required. The tree survey at Warriston has been completed and the results are keenly anticipated.

The path leading from East Fettes Avenue to the west gate at Inverleith is often a quagmire in winter. A quote for upgrading this will be sought. It was agreed that the Allotment Officer will contact the relevant site representative by e-mail or text when about to visit a site where there is an issue that requires discussion.

The Allotment Officer concluded that this year has seen the smallest number of improvement letters issued perhaps due to the particularly fine summer weather. Last year the failure rate was around 5%. This year it has been 0.5%.



Time for another look at Edna Monteith's plot.

FEDAGA AGM.

This year's FEDAGA AGM will take place at the Southside Community Education Centre, 117 Nicolson Street, Edinburgh at 7.15pm on Tuesday 15th October.

- 1 Apologies
- 2 Edinburgh Beekeepers Association: brief talk and Q&A.
- 3 Minutes of the 2012 AGM.
- 4 President's Review of the year 2012 – 2013.
- 5 Financial Report by Treasurer.
- 6 Election of Management Committee.
- 7 Election of Auditors.
- 8 Forward Plans for coming year

9 Any other competent business

10 Date of next Annual General Meeting

Further resolutions, for inclusion in a Final Agenda, are welcome; but must reach FEDAGA by Tuesday 24 September.

They must be properly authenticated by a Site Association official and sent by post to 25 Cambridge Avenue, Edinburgh, EH6 5AW.

Your Site Association should be represented at this meeting, in order to make known the views of your members. You are invited to send delegates and to put forward nominations for membership of the Federation Management Committee. Forms for this purpose, which have been given to your site representative, should be completed and returned to the above address by Tuesday 24 September 2013. A final Agenda will be published at www.fedaga.org.uk prior to the meeting and will be available on the day.

The Alloted Month



J Greenfingers writes:

This is a busy time in the allotment as many vegetables are now ready for harvesting and the decent Summer weather means that crop yields are much higher than last year. A few weeks ago I lifted all of my onions as the soil conditions had become so dry that the onions had all

pushed themselves out of the ground and the leaves had started to die back. Onions will start to rot in the soil if left too long after they have matured so lifting them seemed a wise choice. Onions will keep for several months if allowed to dry out and kept in dry, cool conditions. Next year I must remember to mulch the ground around the onions as this should help stop the soil drying out so much.

Most of my onions were grown from sets this year however I did try growing some from seed as an experiment. The seed grown results were very disappointing and I am still uncertain of what I have done wrong.

Read [more](#)

Edinburgh hosts Allotment Officer Day.

FEDAGA was privileged to be invited to a gathering of Allotment Officers from around England and Scotland last month. The event was hosted by the City of Edinburgh Council. Also in attendance were representatives from the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS) and academic Dr. Richard Wiltshire, senior lecturer at King's College, London.

In Edinburgh we are fortunate to have a relatively proactive and supportive Council - perhaps in part due to pressure groups such as ourselves. However, it became clear during the day that across the UK allotments are suffering from decades of local authority neglect. There were truly hair-raising stories that made last year's Allotment Wars TV programme seem like an episode of In The Night Garden.

Dr. Wiltshire set the scene by delivering an engrossing history of allotments from The Enclosures to the present day.

Ian Welsh of SAGS gave a Scottish perspective and described how allotments have fallen off the map since local government reorganisations of the 1970s and 90s. In many cases Councils have lost their records detailing land titles, leases and regulations. Now SAGS is leading a strategy to increase the amount of allotment land in Scotland from around 12,000 plots to 50,000. That will require finding land equivalent to the size of Holyrood Park.

The current legislative position in Scotland and the rest of the UK was discussed. South of the Border, the Localism Act 2011 sets the framework for developing allotments in the future. Here, the Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill is still trundling through the Scottish Parliament with an expected arrival date next year. Only then can the

new Allotment Regulations and Missives of Let policy be set in Edinburgh. So much red tape to grow a few greens!
A fuller report from issues raised on the day will prepared for a future Newsletter.



A riot of colour going on at Ferry Road.

Alternative sources of funding.



All sites, whether independent or Council-managed, are increasingly pressed for cash and must look further afield to secure funding. Well-organised sites such as Midmar and Saughton Mains have shown it is possible to make successful applications and have the communal benefits to show for it. FEDAGA is keen to help other member sites to access essential finance.

In all cases, however, the first step is to demonstrate that your site is properly led by a representative Site Association. To that end FEDAGA is intending to provide help to any member sites that want to restart their local associations. This should take place soon after the AGM. If you are interested in helping your site please attend the AGM, or contact [FEDAGA](#).

Edible Edinburgh: a Sustainable Food City.



Korstiaan Allan of Edible Edinburgh writes:

The Edible Edinburgh initiative aims to inspire, motivate and connect everyone across the city in developing new relationships with food, choosing healthier and tastier food and bringing social, economic and environmental benefits for the whole community.

The Edible Edinburgh steering group has therefore drafted a consultation document to encourage everyone to join in the debate about our food. [Edible Edinburgh: A Sustainable Food City](#) initiates a collective conversation about how we re-imagine a new food system and culture for our city. You can get involved by completing our short [survey](#) once you've read the consultation document.

Edible Edinburgh is also hosting a [Feed the 5,000](#) event in Bristo Square on Saturday 5th October. Come along for a free lunch, find out more about food initiatives in the city and have your say on how you would like to see Edinburgh develop as a sustainable food city.

For more information about Edible Edinburgh,
contact sustainability@edinburgh.gov.uk

Scraping the Barrel.

Calum Carmichael of the [Hanging Bat Beer Cafe](#) writes:

We had a lot of takers for our unused eco-kegs previously from your members, hopefully they found them useful as waterbutts and compost bins.

Just to let you know we have a large amount spare again, so they are again free to a good home. Someone should be in the bar from 10.30 each morning if anyone would like to come and pick them up.



A final peep at Edna Monteith's plot. Next month - another award winning site in pictures!

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