



# Newsletter

## March 2021: Spring Is Delivered



*Arrival of the seed potatoes. Handy guide to social distancing: the width of a pallet.*

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# Balgreen Revival?

Murrayfield Community Council and Gorgie-Dalry Community Council are exploring the possibility of a campaign to re-institute the former **Balgreen** allotment site near Pansy Walk, that has most recently been used as a site for the storage of tram rails. There is a possibility that the City Council might view it as a housing opportunity. But there is noise arising from proximity to the Edinburgh to Glasgow railway and, of course, a shortage of allotments citywide. If you are interested in this matter, please email [secretary@murrayfieldcc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@murrayfieldcc.org.uk).



*Balgreen allotments after closure and prior to becoming a storage site for the tram rails currently being installed in Leith.*

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## Around The Sites

Hooray! Positive developments at **Northfield** where the saga of the on again off again water supply might be approaching a happy resolution. The water main has been located and now the application to close the road and dig a hole to connect the site to the mains can be made. The plan is to have the standpipes operational by the end of April. Plottolders are hoping for a long hot dry summer to fully justify their

efforts, reward their patience and watch their crops flourishing on the previously parched lands of Northfield.

Elsewhere, a contrasting problem. Last month we told of the chronic flooding at **Baronscourt**. We floated the radical solution of an Archimedes Screw to relocate the excess water. We are happy to report that a positive response from Edinburgh University has arrived. They think this could be an ideal community-based engineering project for undergraduates. Once normal life has resumed it is hoped that help may be at hand for the beleaguered Baronscourt plottolders.



Enterprising **Ferry Road** volunteers covered a large part of the cost of hiring a Car Club van to facilitate a spring clean clear-out of rubbish by selling a huge pile of metal to Dalton's. Trips were also made to the tip and Caledonian Horticulture for compost. As this site is entered straight off an extremely busy road the large Caley Hort vehicles cannot make drop offs, but Garden Solutions have more nimble vans that can drive into the site and unload there. Both companies offer allotment discounts.

Fierce winds a few weeks ago lifted up the **Saughton Mains** chalet roof causing an extensive horizontal split in the timber structure. Repairs are urgently required and the Allotment Officer has ridden to the rescue setting up the company who built it to come and effect a remedy.

Rats at **Saughton Mains** and rabbits at **Carrick Knowe** are making their presence felt. The success of the kestrel boxes installed at **Inverleith** is being monitored in the hope they will soon be occupied by hungry kestrels who might be persuaded to fly over westward.



*If you see this bird tell it the way to the Saughton Mains/Carrick Knowe quarter.*

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## Allotment Officer's Report

Edinburgh Council's Allotment Officer, Ian Woolard attended a recent FEDAGA Zoom meeting. He reported that the waiting list for allotment plots has rocketed to **4300**, which is an all-time high. Pre-pandemic the figure stood at 1290 and is regularly pruned so it doesn't get totally out of hand.

He is currently inducting prospective ploholders and tells us that the three sites seeing the greatest turnover are **Saughton Mains**, **Inverleith** and **Lady Road**. This year there is a marked reduction in the number of people giving up their plots.

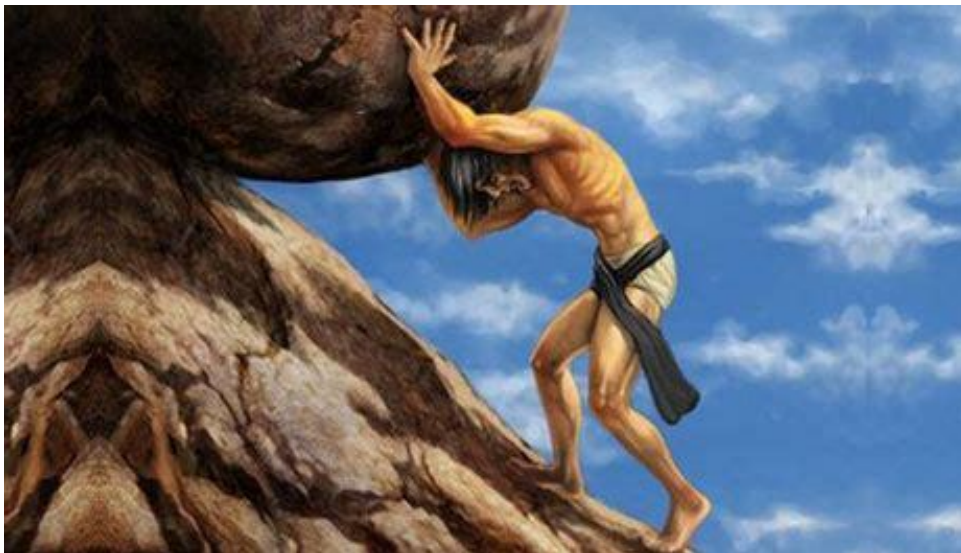
There are two new sites getting up and running. The COVID-delayed **Newcraighall** site is about to clear the final legal hurdles and be handed over by Barratt Homes. There will be 26 plots here, which should be occupied next month. There will be a further 9 plots at the new site at **Piershill Square East**.

**The water supply will be turned on at the end of March.** As this was a really hard winter it is likely that there may be some burst pipes discovered when the flow is restored.

Major winter jobs completed include the removal of a tree and path repairs at **Lady Road**, a hard cut of the beech hedge at **Pilrig Park** and

infilling potholes on the access to **Redhall**. Across the city, there has been a lot of tree pruning done. More to come with **Warriston** next. **Trade waste bin uplifts** have unfortunately continued to be sporadic with the operatives seemingly being expert at losing keys. **Saughton Mains** was mentioned as having suffered particularly badly in this regard. Also at Saughton Mains, the communal shed sustained roof damage (see "Around The Sites" above) and is due for a repair. It was reported that pest control may be getting on top of the unwanted rodent problem.

Finally, the new **Allotment Rules and Regulations** are due to be adopted by the Council in June. They have been 12 years in the making and therefore represent a lot of consultation and effort on your part, that of the Allotment Service and FEDAGA. We hope next month to be able to highlight how the new regulations will affect how allotments are used.



*The Allotment Officer's task is not an easy one.*

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# Forthcoming Initiatives

FEDAGA is looking ahead. We are exploring insurance options to cover our activities. Now that sites are acquiring powered equipment such as shredders we feel it necessary to ensure that they are insured for theft, damage and injury. Site open days and allotment shows attract members of the public and so must be insured appropriately. We are seeking advice from the RHS who may be able to provide cover. If any members have expertise in this area we'd love to hear from you.

You will be aware from last month's Leith Links story that the planning procedure falls down when notifying neighbouring allotment sites. We are looking at proposing FEDAGA be automatically notified as a "statutory consultee" so that if any planning proposal affects an allotment site we will know.

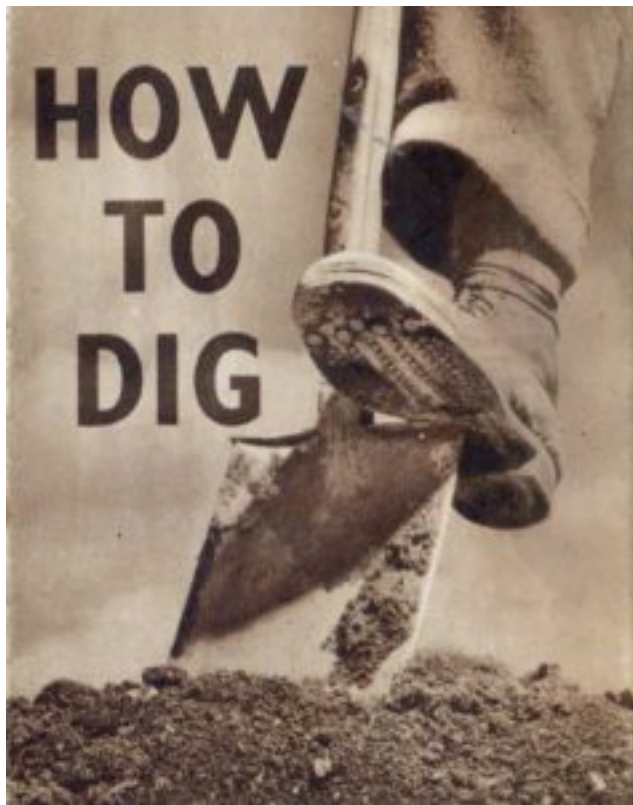
The Allotment Show working group will soon reconvene. All possibilities are on the table. No-one knows where we'll be at come September. Regardless of whether it is real or virtual you can start thinking about your exhibition entries.

Finally, the seed potatoes and onion and shallot sets have been distributed. Massive thanks to those who volunteered to make it work. Procedures have been forced to evolve and we are considering how to keep it virtual and reduce the time and effort spent making it happen. If we could get everyone to order in the autumn we would have no need for a shop in the spring. In June 333 bundles of leeks (16,650 individual plants!) will be distributed to those who had the foresight to place an order last year. This will complete the 2020/21 trading cycle.



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# Back To Basics: Tips For Beginners



*Harry Pottager writes:* How should I approach the noble art of digging my plot?

Once upon a time this would be a simple enough task. You'd lift a digging implement and get cracking. Nowadays there is hot debate from all sides that takes into account a large number of factors and like so much in modern life it gets complicated.

**Avoiding injury:** This is best done by limbering up beforehand, going at it gently and steadily with regular breaks to stretch, and making sure you are using the correct implement. Spades are useful if you're creating a trench, but more often a fork is best. It is lighter and can help to break up the soil, exposing perennial weed roots. Keep your implement clean so it doesn't get clagged with wet soil. Use the shaft and your boot to gently lever the soil up and place it next to where you're working. From time to time alternate your position by changing

the foot you use to press down with. But most importantly - as digging is the single most likely cause of allotment-related injury: only dig where you have to. Excessive digging can destroy soil structure and compromise the living network of helpful creatures that contributes to a good growing medium. I have known of ploholders who have become a bit obsessive about digging to the detriment of their plot. There are better ways of getting exercise. Digging should be limited to special projects such as clearing an overgrown, weedy area or creating a trench for a crop of potatoes.

**Recognising your soil type:** There is an excellent guide from the RHS [here](#). Sandy, clay and silty soils will all benefit from the addition of organic matter and this can be injected directly by digging it in. Once the soil has been improved and has attained the status of loam it could be maintained by top-dressing with compost or manure. I limit my "direct injection" to the planting of potatoes and I add a generous layer of rough compost to the bottom of the trench which is no deeper than the length of the blade of my spade.

**Double digging:** Space prevents me from going into detail, but again the RHS has a great guide to this arcane art [here](#). Double digging is required when preparing an area for a permanent feature, such as a raised bed or an asparagus bed, or when you need to improve a thin layer of topsoil. It is a major piece of soil shifting, and as you will see from the RHS piece it requires a wheelbarrow.

**Timing:** The disturbance of soil is best done in the autumn or over the winter to allow time for things to settle down again before the growing season. This is becoming more difficult with climate change as the winters seem to be getting wetter. This year it is only now - the early spring - that the soil is in a condition to dig without difficulty. Of course, if you're taking on an overgrown plot then you have no choice and must get in there before the weeds take off.

**Dealing with weeds:** Annual weeds can be dug into the soil where, deprived of light, they will quickly die. Perennial weeds, however, must be removed. Couch grass in particular is tricky. Even worse, horsetail. This devilish invader once required a [special issue](#) of the Newsletter to fully explain its nasty nature. A rotovator could be the solution to all this, but for the fact that a whole new plant can spring from a small piece of snapped root that is left in the ground. While you dig inspect what you are unearthing and get rid of dodgy roots and rhizomes or you will live to regret it.



**Minimising impact:** You may be heartened to learn that the concept of "no dig" is an actual thing. This has grown out of the permaculture movement and is based on observing deep and productive temperate forest and grassland soils, where a top layer of nutrient-rich material is added without disturbing the existing topsoil. Click [here](#) for more information. There are several benefits: fewer weeds as seeds remain buried and don't germinate; existing soil structure remains intact, including pores and channels in the soil which improve aeration and water movement; soils retain moisture and are less prone to erosion (by up to 90%); animal life is less disturbed; and soil biological diversity is maintained. My final piece of advice is to avoid compacting the bit you've just dug. Use a plank of wood to stand on so you spread your weight across the ground. Either that, or dig backwards so you are standing on the ground you will dig next.

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## What The Blazes?



**The bonfire ban will be reinstated on Council managed sites on 1st May and operate until 30th September.**

Allotment holders are encouraged to compost where possible. Although many see having a bonfire as an essential part of the allotment tradition, creating smoke can upset others and is of course a source of pollution. In some cases neighbours and passers-by have been known to express their ire at those who are burning their rubbish.

If you must burn, try to dry out woody material to minimise the amount of water vapour emitted and make sure you don't burn plastics or other noxious materials.

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## **Hebrides Liquid Seaweed**

Crops won't grow without nutrition being applied. If you intend to gorge upon the produce you grow you will sooner or later have to feed your soil. Liquid seaweed is a great all-round source for hungry fruit and veg.

It seems Brexit has done for the export hopes of Donegal Seaweed, who we told you about last summer. It is no longer possible to buy their produce in the UK although they tell us they will try to surmount the trading obstacles again in May. If they are successful we'll let you know. However, you could do worse than try the Hebrides Liquid Seaweed instead. They're currently applying big discounts and the shipping is free! Click [here](#) for further information.



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## Gardening Volunteer Opportunity

*Sue Souttar writes:* I've been a volunteer at Inchview Care Home (233 Gilmerton Road, EH16 5UD) for the last few years but I'm going to have to give it up as my circumstances have changed. At Inchview, I look after two beds at the front of the building, two large window boxes and two sizeable enclosed courtyards. I dread to think what state they must be in now as I haven't been there since the first lockdown last year and COVID prevents me going into the building. Inchview provides a £200 annual budget for plants and materials and also reimburses the gardener's travel expenses.

Is there someone/some people who would like to take my place? If so, please get in contact: [sue.souttar@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:sue.souttar@hotmail.co.uk)