



Newsletter

July 2016: 2 Months To The Show



**THE 2016
EDINBURGH
ALLOTMENT
SHOW**

Saturday 3rd September
Free Admission

Register your entries - 9am to Noon

Open to public - 2 to 4pm

City of Edinburgh Methodist Church, Nicolson Square

For full details including Entry Form go to -

www.fedaga.org.uk/annual-show

**Summertime, and the Livin' is
Easy...**

...BUT not for allotment holders as weeds and pests threaten our hard-earned produce. So why not show it off?

The Allotment Show is back this year and we need your help to make it a success. It will be held in The Methodist Church Hall in Nicholson Square on Saturday 3rd September.

To contain costs by using a smaller show space, we've had to reduce the number of classes. We're now concentrating on what we grow ourselves - flowers, fruit and vegetables.

We've introduced a new section for giant vegetables. We hope it will create some friendly rivalry. Cash prizes for the winners.

Finally, our section for children has been revamped to encourage our future ploholders to grow and show vegetables rather than producing handicrafts.

Please have a browse to the show section of our [website](#) for full details on how to enter



The 2012 Allotment Show

The decision to not produce paper schedules was another incentive to reduce costs. The traditional paper schedule printed and sent to all Edinburgh's allotment holders would have cost a staggering £500. A lot of money when you consider less than 50 people entered the last show. Realising some of us aren't Internet savvy, we've distributed details on paper to all sites. Please contact your site representative who will be

able to furnish you with full details and an entry form. Again, paper copies will be available at the show.

The hall has a small area where cars can be temporarily parked to allow exhibits to be left. After ten minutes you must park elsewhere.

Do please take part to keep the show going.

It started in 1953 when Edinburgh had huge numbers of allotments.

Now 63 years later, people are having to wait eight or nine years before they can enjoy growing on their own plot. Let's demonstrate we do value our plots and celebrate growing our own produce. It is of course, also the perfect place to meet fellow plotheholders and have a chat over a cuppa and a cake in the cafe.

See you at the show.

Stuart McKenzie

Plot Size Matters



Earlier in the year the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) surveyed the people on their allotment waiting list to find out what size of a plot they would prefer. There were three options: full, half plot and any other size (as stipulated by the respondent). To give those being surveyed an idea of the usual size of a plot, car parking spaces were used as a measure of extent. A full plot was represented by 8 car parking spaces and a half plot by 4 spaces. There was an excellent response to the survey with over 700 replies.

Historically, allotments were used to provide vegetables and fruit for families who moved to the cities from the countryside and who were used to growing their own. More recently there seems to be a move by those having or wanting allotments making a lifestyle choice and being happy with smaller plots. In fact, this perception was borne out by the survey as most respondents wanted a half plot. The breakdown was: about 50% wanted a half plot, 35% wanted a full plot and the remainder something smaller. CEC will be able to use this information to

inform their creation of the appropriate ratio of plot sizes on new sites and to balance out plot sizes on existing sites.



One thing prospective plot holders should keep in mind about the size of plot they opt for is that there are sound horticultural reasons in favour of a decent sized plot, always given that they have the time (8 to 10 hours per week in summer for a full plot) to cultivate one. Clearly the bigger the plot the wider the range of vegetables and fruit that can be grown while still leaving a portion for recreational space if desired. However, the main reason for a larger plot is one of crop rotation, a crucial aspect of good organic cultivation. Growing the same crops in the same situation year after year will eventually lead to diminishing crop returns and potentially an increase in soil based diseases. Basic crop rotation calls for the plot to be divided into 4 areas. On 3 areas, different groups of vegetables are grown in each and then rotated around the other areas year on year in a 3 year cycle. The 4th area is kept for perennial crops usually fruit.



Another well recognised benefit of having an allotment is the physical and mental health benefits that it brings. These benefits come from being active in the fresh air, focusing on an activity and socialising. A decent sized plot requires more activity and hence should generate more health benefits. Having said all that the over-riding thing for a prospective plot holder is to choose the size of plot which they are able to manage and CEC should always offer a new plot holder the size of plot they desire.

With the demand for allotments of varying sizes seemingly ever increasing CEC are to be applauded for carrying out the survey to clarify the size of allotment plots people want.

John McKinlay

West Mains Open Day: Reminder

For your Diary: The West Mains Allotments Open Day is on Sunday 7th August from 1 to 4pm. There'll be all the usual activities: produce stall, afternoon teas, children's craft and (if you come early enough) veggie curry lunches. This year there will also be a photographic exhibition. Free entry to all.

The Amazing World Of Potatoes At SASA (Just Beyond The Bypass)



The magnificent setting of the SASA potato plots

Most of us allotment people think we know a bit about tatties, but it's really nothing compared to what Heather Campbell at SASA could tell you about them. She has been our guide on two trips to SASA, which turns out to be a fascinating place and a window for us on the serious work they do to protect the future of the humble spud.

I must admit that 18 months ago I didn't know what they do at SASA just outside Edinburgh. I was aware that there is a significant seed potato business in Scotland and we all know tatties can get a few nasty diseases and pests. Well, it turns out that Scotland is the biggest exporter of them in the world and SASA (Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture - www.sasa.gov.uk) is a key part of the Scottish Government's diligent work to safeguard and inform that industry. We are now into our second year of collaboration between FEDAGA and SASA. Our 'potato club' is open to all FEDAGA allotment people. Each year we each get to try an unusual potato variety from SASA's living collection of 1225 named varieties. These are a magnificent genetic resource, but it's not something you can lock away in a seed bank - it has to be grown out each year at two different locations.



Heather and our potato enthusiasts

You can't buy most of these heritage tubers - only around 100 varieties are certified for commercial use. We get to grow three tubers from the SASA collection and in the spirit of citizen science, we report back on our experience, harvest and tasting notes.

This year SASA hosted 15 tattle club members for a morning at their potato growing fields at Gogarbank. They train potato inspectors here. In fact they were doing their final practical exam while we were there. We arrived at the trial plots by the M8 to the sight of a magnificent sea of acres of potatoes and got a guide book to the 2800 plots there. Each one shows something interesting and important. Inspectors need to recognise varieties by foliage habit (30 different aspects!) as well as colour, flower size, shape, colour and many more factors. Heather guided us through this 'sweetie shop', informing and entertaining us

with her knowledge of the amazing world of potatoes. Even a torrential shower didn't have us running for the marquee, as we were too enraptured.



Even rain couldn't dampen our potato enthusiasm

Inspectors need to recognise potato diseases so they intentionally infect some tubers with viruses and grow them alongside healthy specimens. Now we can recognise blackleg. They also give some a blast of glyphosate so you can see what herbicide damage looks like and others get aminopyralid, which is still sadly an issue with some manure. Many more fascinating demonstration plots got us sharing our potato enthusiasm and increasing knowledge.

After nearly a couple of hours we got to the collection field and I think we all visited 'our' potato variety. It turns out mine had a couple of issues, with half the tubers having picked up what looked like a virus with curled up foliage (back at the allotment two of my three plants are a bit stunted, but now I know I have no virus). But it is a variety from 1836, so that seems fair enough and may be why it isn't a commercial variety. I have yet to find out what it tastes like and whether to recommend they breed the next super potato from it.



'My' potato variety for 2016

I certainly found it a fascinating visit and a eyeopener on what is done to secure our future food security. Looking around, all the other FEDAGA folk seemed buzzing too. Maybe you would like to join the tattie club in 2017?

Andy Crofts

An Introduction to Food Growing Strategies



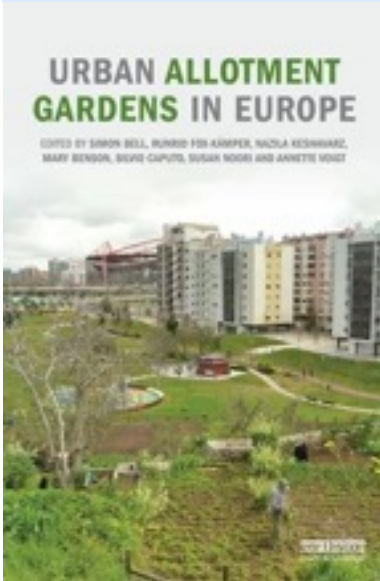
The Community Empowerment Acts brings new rights, duties and responsibilities. Local Authorities will be required to produce a food growing strategy that identifies suitable land for allotment sites and community growing. A workshop on Thursday 22nd September organised by the [Grow your Own Working Group](#) will take place for local authority staff, organisations which support groups with an interest in community growing and allotments and other community groups. It may of particular interest to those who are hoping to start up a new allotment site. For more detailed information and booking see [here](#).

Garden for Life



A new [blog](#) has been set up by the Garden For Life Forum. It will include a series of handy tips on gardening for biodiversity. To find our more about the Forum and to access great handy guides on many aspects of wildlife gardening see [here](#).

Pricey Academic Allotment Tome



The following publishing puff caught our eye:

"Although urban allotment gardening dates back to the nineteenth century, it has recently undergone a renaissance of interest and popularity. This is the result of greater concern over urban greenspace, food security and quality of life. The new book *Urban Allotment Gardens in Europe* book presents a comprehensive, research-based overview of the various features, benefits and values associated with urban allotment gardening in Europe. It assesses the policy, planning and design aspects, as well as the social and ecological benefits of urban allotment gardening."

As the blood rushed to our heads and we cried "Haud me back!", we were disappointed to see that to buy said item we would have to part with very nearly the same sum of money we pay to the Council for our unsubsidised, full-scale allotment plot: £90. However, you can look at the first 40 pages [here](#) and if tickled perhaps ask your local library to order it. For those with deep pockets Word Power can provide it at a [discount](#).

Duddingston Community Field

Are you still waiting for an allotment? Maybe you're unsure about what looking after a plot entails. A new project on the slopes of Arthur's Seat above Duddingston village may be of interest. To find out more and get in touch with the organisers, click [here](#).