

## October 2016: Stenhouse Special



*Business and pleasure on a windy afternoon: See September BBQ story.*

ONE smiling face at Edinburgh's Allotment Show – this face – lit up the room come prize giving.



First-time entrant Lai Fun Russell harvested a whopping five firsts, three seconds and a third, for outstanding blue potatoes, garlic, cabbages, courgettes and African marigolds.

After waiting eight years for a plot on Stenhouse site, inheriting a plot thick with weeds seven feet high, and spending the first two years of her four-year tenure preparing the soil and creating decent walkways, Lai has more than proved that persistence pays off. This surely, is worth a smile.



A GP by profession, mother of two, grown up and away, Lai knows about juggling pressure. “When I get stressed I come straight down

here and turn the compost,” she says. “It’s very, very hard work and I’m more than delighted because at the moment my carefully tended compost is radiating hot-to-the-hand steaming heat. This is so exciting and it will be wonderful for my garden – probably raised beds, as the compost is made in allotment for the allotment.”

Secretary to the Stenhouse committee, Lai says that having a plot is not just about coming to a site and doing simply your own thing. “It’s more than that,” she says. “There are sometimes headaches involved in trying to improve things for everyone, but to some extent we each have a duty to take this on and work with the challenges.”



A typical ‘headache’ is the wildly varying commitment that some plot-holders have towards winning a plot on Edinburgh’s much coveted sites.

Stenhouse also has its outstanding examples of zero tolerance weed-catchers on the one hand (below) dedicated and zealous treasures on every site, worth their weight in gold, and, to the fury of everyone, including the committee, careless and almost entirely absent gardeners on the other.



Recent development of unused land at Stenhouse has pushed the once 34 plot site up to 50 now, and adjoining land also houses a dozen newly constructed raised beds.

Working to build a cohesive group of plotholders who value the land that they work is a challenge for any site, but Lai and her fellow gardeners are keen to prove that it can be done. They will probably see you, arms laden and en masse, at next year's Edinburgh Allotment Show.

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## Doing business in a social setting



THE Stenhouse September BBQ fired through the local wind tunnel and swirling grit to attract 20 plus people determined to have a good time. They came, not only for the plump sausages, purple potato salad, exotic home-made pickles and spicy noodles with prawns the size of your palm, but the good conversation and the business meeting thrown in.

New plot holder and environmental scientist Robin Cathcart, (pictured above with husband Simon and children Marius and Skye) would like to see more of these social events. “They’re a great way of sharing information and working with others to develop the site,” she said. “It’s by working together that we are going to overcome the problems that are common to most allotments.”

Born in California, where tomatoes grow rich and red outdoors, Robin has had to adjust to this country’s slightly more challenging circumstances. “We have had some good berries this year, but it is the citrus I miss,” she said. “However I won’t be discouraged. I will raise a greenhouse orange tree one of these days. Meantime I’ve enjoyed helping the children to plant potatoes and dig up the crop.”

Committee Chair David Smillie (in the top picture, third from the left), a ten-year veteran of the site, welcomes a team spirit and collegiate decision making. “With a recent extension to our site, we have a new crop of plot holders,” he said. “They have brought a fresh approach to some long-standing problems. They help us to look for solutions and take more responsibility for managing site problems.



“I would like to see Stenhouse exchanging ideas with other sites about common problems, like sharing storage space on no-shed sites and keeping public compost areas free from dumping. I look forward to a new year of outreach ahead.”

At the business meeting that followed a good nosh, delegate to FEDAGA, Alan Wilson urged members to attend the AGM scheduled for Tuesday 25th October.

“We will send two delegates from Stenhouse,” he said. “But there will plenty of space at the Southside Community Centre for anyone else who wants to attend.

“This won’t be just any old committee meeting. It promises to be stimulating and packed with some good ideas.”

**The Stenhouse Special was prepared by Jenny MacKenzie.**

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## Allotment Consultation (so you can't say you weren't asked)



The Council is now consulting on the draft of its third Allotment Strategy: Cultivating Communities – A Growing Success. Use this [link](#) to obtain an overview, a survey to use to comment and the draft strategy document.

You have until **7th October** if you wish to comment.

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## Apple Press News



At the last minute, Restalrig have been forced to cancel their Apple Press weekend - on the 1st and 2nd of October. It is hoped a new date later in the month can be scheduled. Midmar will have the Press on 15th and 16th October. Carrick Knowe hope to have the Press soon but nothing's been arranged yet. Sadly, no further sites have expressed interest. If you'd like to organise the Press for your site, please get in [touch](#). Check our [events](#) page for the latest news throughout the month.

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## Seed Potatoes, Onion and Shallot Sets - Order Now



The FEDAGA Trading Scheme which gives members the opportunity to order seed potatoes and onion and shallot sets for next year is open. Your site representative or nominated committee member has been provided with the details and is waiting for your order. Delivery will be in February.

Last time there were complaints about the number of potato varieties which had to be substituted and also the poor quality of the onions, which FEDAGA was very disappointed about. To remedy this we have changed suppliers. Kings Seeds, who are tried and tested suppliers of seeds through our online scheme, have been selected this year. They guarantee 99% assurance that what you order will be provided.

The closing date for orders to be placed with our Trading Secretary, Brian Bleakley, is **Tuesday 1st November**.

The potatoes on offer are:

First Earlies: Casablanca, Duke of York, Pentland Javelin, Lady Christl ( \* ) and Red Duke of York.

Second Earlies: Catriona, Kestrel, Maris Peer, Wilja, Gemson.

Main Crops:

Cara, King Edward, Pink Gypsy, Picasso, Sarpo Mira.

Salads:

Nicola, Charlotte, Pink Fir Apple ( \* ).

Exclusives:

Rooster, Vivaldi, Colleen Organic (all three \* ).

All £3 ( \* £3.50) for a 2.5 kilogram bag.

Onions:

Red Karmen, Sturon, Stuttgart - £1.50 for a 500g bag.

Shallots:

Golden Gourmet, Red Sun - £1.50 for a 500g bag.

For further information about potatoes click [here](#) to read what Kings say.

For further information about onions click [here](#).

Take a look at the prices on the Kings website and see what a saving you will make by taking part. The prices include a contribution of 25p per bag of onions or shallots and 50p per bag of potatoes which FEDAGA will pay to your site funds. By taking part you make a big saving and your site funds get a welcome boost.

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## Allotments Get Top Marks for Pollinating Insects



A new organisation, the Lothian Pollinators Project Group, has recently been set up. At their first meeting they heard a summary of the some of



the urban pollinator research undertaken in Edinburgh and other British cities.

Niall Corbet of Scottish Natural Heritage writes: “One of the stand out results of this research was that allotments provide the best urban habitat for both abundance and richness of pollinator species in all four cities sampled. This may be due to the range of plant species being grown, possibly a low use of pesticides, the likely presence of a few unmanaged areas with abundant “weeds”, and maybe a good quantity of somewhat rickety wooden sheds which provide lots of nooks and crannies for nesting, shelter and hibernation.”

His conclusion is that even a modest expansion of allotment provision is one of the best things that we could do in Edinburgh to support pollinator populations. It is hoped this information can be fed into the Allotment Strategy to help persuade decision makers of the value of allotments.

Lothian Pollinators Project Group are extending an invitation to someone from the allotment community with a particular interest in this topic to join them in their work. If you are interested, please [contact](#) FEDAGA.

Niall adds: “Gardens are the second most important urban habitat for abundance and richness of pollinator species, and as there are far more gardens than other urban habitats even a relatively small improvement in gardening practices across the city could also have significant benefits for pollinators.”

You can read SNH’s Pollinator Strategy [here](#).

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## And Don't Forget The AGM...

Details [here](#).

