

Down the allotment Price rise in the homegrown veg department

Rental charges for allotment plottolders on the nine sites owned by the HGS Trust will increase by 10% this year. This follows an increase of 15% on the previous year and is in line with the Residents Association Allotment Committee's aim to satisfy the need for a closer relationship between income and spending, the latter being somewhat greater than the former. Certainly, the days of peppercom rents and concessions are well and truly over, although few would disagree that the facility offered for growing one's own vegetables remains value for money.

Principal items of expenditure recently have been incurred by the provision of a water supply to two sites (Willfield/TF Hill and Asmunds Place) and the costs associated with the management of trees bordering the sites and the damage caused to some older trees by storms.

One act of tree 'management', however, has not attracted an invoice. Before Christmas a 10 foot conifer on the Chatham Close site was cleanly cut above the ground and removed. The allotments constabulary is seeking to identify the culprit by checking on discarded Christmas trees.

Another source of significant expense over a long period has been the investigation of and works related to a water leak at one location.

To meet these and other costs, the Trust looks predominantly to rents. On sites where these are applied on a per-square-metre basis, the charge is in the region of 60p a square metre, a figure which would equate roughly to plots on sites where a more notional method of charging is applied.

This figure compares with the higher end of charges that are applied on the 46 Barnet sites, now managed independently by the local members who fix their own rents under the aegis of the

Barnet Federation of Allotment and Horticultural Societies.

Using the old agricultural appellation of poles as a measure, the 4,000-odd plottolders in this organisation pay rent on the basis of a charge per square pole (25 square metres); the standard size of a Barnet plot is 10 square poles, considerably larger than those in the Suburb.

The latest rent rise follows an upward trend and rents are likely to increase above the rate of inflation for some time ahead. Nick Packard, the Trust Estate Manager, says the allotments play an important part in the communal life of the Suburb and the Trust is keen to see them fully used and well maintained. "We are conscious that rents have risen significantly over the past few years," he says. "But we have increased the amount of maintenance and improvement work over the last five to six years with the aim of making them more attractive to Suburb residents."

The allotments cost to the Trust – a £2,200 loss last year, £7,300 the previous year – is borne by the Trust's own funds and not by the Management Charge. "We have said to the allotments committee that we must try and bring the rental income closer to the costs of maintenance," says Mr Packard. The figures he quotes do not include any allocation for insurance, management and administration expenses "nor any assessment of the time given by the volunteer site secretaries and those who help them."

Most sites are being fully used and any inquiries by residents about availability should be directed to the site secretaries whose names and contact details are in the Suburb Directory.

Patricia Major is to take over as the Allotment Committee's chairman. She succeeds Pia Duran who has served in the role for seven years.

PETER HODGSON

Market Place Post Office scare

There was a time when a visit to the Temple Fortune post office was really a pleasure with the smiling Sue and Eugene Lim running it as a friendly village shop and post office. Everyone who knew them was sorry when the Lims decided to retire.

New people arrived who ran it rather differently. Many and often are the complaints that crop up every now and again on the hgs list (the RA chatline) about the service, the queueing and the mistakes with frequent declarations that "we always try to use the one in Market Place" or "I don't go near it if I can help it"

Much consternation then when it was rumoured that the

Market Place Post Office might be about to close. However that turned out to be an exaggeration. The post master, Mr Jitendra Dave, told Suburb News, "The Post Office wanted to reduce the level of services on offer but I have persuaded them to keep things as they are." So he looks forward to an increase in custom after a small refurbishment planned for May, which should speed up the queues.

Asked about those queues he said they do usually operate both counters when it is busy. Jitendra Dave enjoys dealing with the friendly and interesting people he meets, some for over 25 years.



Chris Page chairs the Horticultural Society

At the Horticultural Society's 99th AGM and Prizegiving held at Fellowship House on 12 November, Chris Page was elected Chairman of the society. Chris, who recently retired from medical practice at the Temple Fortune Health Centre, is also Chair of the NW support group of the North London Hospice. The outgoing Chairman, Michael Franklin, was away in New York celebrating a significant birthday, but he was thanked profusely for his valuable service for the last six years and given a gift on his return.

The committee proposed a new post of Vice-Chairman and,

following agreement of members present, Yvonne Oliver was duly elected. Prizes, cups and medals were presented to show and garden competition winners by one of the society's Vice-Presidents, Joan Rees Phillips.

The full programme of events for 2014 will be published in the society's members' handbook in the new year and on the website www.hortsoc.co.uk.

Membership costs £7 (single) and £10 (double/family), under-18s free. Contact David Broome hgs@virginmedia.com or call him on 020 8444 2329 to join or renew.

Join us for a fruitful 2014

Whatever the weather has in store for us in the next few weeks, Spring is on its way, and with it comes the new programme for HGS Horticultural Society. There is something happening every month and you don't need to be a professional gardener to enjoy what's on offer. There will be day trips to lovely gardens and a three-day visit in and around Herefordshire. Talks, a gardening quiz and a gardeners' question time will provide fun and answers to your horticultural conundrums.

The two flower shows at the Free Church Hall bring the sights and scents of the country to our suburban setting, with the

added attraction of children's fancy dress and adults' fancy hats competitions at the June show (hopefully to be judged by Hon President Jonathan Ross), and a return visit by the very popular Grimsdyke Brass Band at the September show. Your children and grandchildren could have fun growing and making things for the children's sections at the shows too. If you have an allotment, why not enter your produce at the shows?

Several members' gardens will be open in the Summer in aid of the National Gardens Scheme charities (Yellow Book).

MARJORIE HARRIS

Rain well above the norm

Now the Suburb can bask in the reflected glory of a storm named after our very own St Jude, patron saint of the parish church. Thank goodness, St Jude looked after his own and we did not have the destruction and flooding that some parts of the country experienced. However, there was over an inch of rainfall over that night of the 27/28 October, bringing the October total up to 4.4 inches, way above the norm of 3.4. Again, in December, another gale brought over an inch on the 23rd, giving a monthly total of just over 4 inches, compared with an average of 2.8 inches.

November's 2.6 inches made for a very wet end to the year, though not as wet as last year in the same period. In neither year did the three-monthly totals of 11 and 12 inches come near

those of 2000 (17.2 inches) or 2002 (16.7 inches). Since 1980, there have been five years with higher autumn rainfall.

The yearly total rainfall of 29.2 inches was just below the average and well below 36.8 inches of 2012. It was also far below the totals of just over 41 inches for both 2000 and 2002. Unfortunately, at the time of writing (6.00pm on January 4), there has already been another 1.5 inches in less than four days, so 2014 has not started very well. At least this winter's rain followed a dry late spring and summer. So the ground did not become waterlogged as soon as it might otherwise have done. We will all now be hoping for a drier spell though this will mean colder as well.

DIANA IWI



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Gardening in the winter

Living alongside Hampstead Heath doesn't just offer advantages to human residents. A fantastic variety of birds live in the Suburb and if you want to entice them into your gardens then choose plants that produce berries and fruits.

Winter is an ideal time to plant berry-bearing trees or bushes in the garden. Consider the following shrubs and trees synonymous with the Suburb: Native berry-bearing species such as rowan, holly, whitebeam, spindle, dog rose, elder, hawthorn, honeysuckle and ivy.

For highly decorative shrubs plant pyracantha, berberis, and particularly cotoneaster adored by field fares and redwings. To supplement naturally grown food supplies why not install a bird table, ideally where you can see it from your house. As well as general purpose Wild Bird seed mix, which attracts garden stalwarts such as tits & robins, introduce white sunflower hearts and nyger seeds for goldfinches and black sunflower seeds for nuthatches. Fat blocks are favoured by woodpeckers. Fallen fruit can also be saved in the freezer and put out onto the bird table in the depths of winter. Most importantly make sure you top up the bird table regularly so that supply doesn't run out and you will be rewarded by visits from most if not all of these birds.

Camellias are very popular winter flowering shrubs, and do particularly well in the Suburb, but a lot of local gardeners are put off due to their reputation for high maintenance. A few simple steps should alleviate these concerns:

- ✿ Yellowing leaves: Shrubs are probably nutrient starved so feed with ericaceous fertilisers in late summer. A thick mulch with composted pine bark or needles or composted bracken will help maintain the pH balance.

- ✿ Buds don't form: Camellias start to bud up with next year's flowers in late summer so water well during hot dry spells.

- ✿ Flowers go brown and drop off prematurely: Camellias are woodland plants and therefore grow best in loose well drained soil in shelter and light shade. Camellias should never be planted on an east facing wall. The delicate tissues of the flowers will freeze overnight and rapid thawing in the heat of the early morning sunlight will cause the flowers and buds to burst and be destroyed. Against a west-facing wall however, the plant will thaw gradually with the rise in air temperature, so by the time the sun hits it directly it has already defrosted.

Hydrangeas seem to sap the confidence of gardeners too. The most common concern is when and how to prune them. It's not so much the traditional mop head and lacecap types, where, at the end of March, you cut one or two of the old stems back to ground level and the rest down to a healthy pair of buds. It's hydrangeas paniculata Annabelle and Limelight that cause confusion. Gardeners tend to either leave them unpruned for fear of preventing them from flowering, resulting in floppy and leggy stems bearing unsupported blooms, or to prune them at the wrong time of year, resulting in no flowers at all. However if you follow a few simple tips, success is assured:

If you want to keep your plant compact, with large flower heads, cut it back to ground level around the end March once the worst of the weather is over.

For a bigger but leggier bush, only cut a third of the stems to ground level, also in early spring, leaving the rest to grow on, but this will mean earlier but smaller blooms.

CAROLINE BROOME



Welcome to St Jude's

Mothering Sunday
30 March 10.30 am

Children are always welcome especially on Mothering Sunday.

Easter services

Palm Sunday: 13 April 10.30am
Maundy Thursday: 17 April 8pm
Good Friday: 18 April 10.30am
Easter Eve: 19 April 8pm
Easter Day: 20 April 8am & 10.30am

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