

Naomi Woddis, our *Writer in Residence* is now available for half hour one to one sessions about your writing.

Please email her here if you would like to book a slot at culpeperwriter@btinternet.com <<mailto:culpeperwriter@btinternet.com>>



I took some words and phrases when I was last there and came up with this sonnet !

Ode to a Tea Hut

*There's a tribal gathering at the hut
where we drink from an endless pot of tea,
eat home made biscuits, make a sling and chuck
soup from our veg, clean the sink endlessly.
At the tea hut, we chat, eat, hide from rain
scrape mud from boots, know what it is to share,
It's winter now but Spring will come again
and when it does we'll feel like millionaires.
It is the beating heart of Culpeper,
where we come to after a hard days dig
it's the January to December,
the first bloom of Spring, waiting for the twig
that will bear blossom or scent on the branch.
It's all things to us, it's our song, our dance.*



Goldfinch

Culpeper photo competition

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO SUBMIT PHOTOS FOR WHAT WE HOPE MAY BECOME OUR ANNUAL PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION. **It will be held in September** AT OUR END OF SUMMER PARTY AND ALL PHOTOS SUBMITTED WILL BE DISPLAYED IN AN EXHIBITION AT THE GARDEN.



There will be 2 categories: 16 and over, under 16's

Photos can be black and white or colour, and should have taken at Culpeper between September 2009-10.

Blooming puzzles

*I thrive in winter, die in summer and grow with my root upwards.
What am I?*

Answer: an icicle

❧●Culpeper Nature News March 2010●❧

❧As I walked around the garden this morning, I noticed how the pace of life had really picked up. The activity isn't just all about survival now - birds are pairing up and starting their courting behaviour, and frogs have reappeared in the pond.

❧One bird that has been around for a while is the Chaffinch - there were several females in the garden this morning, and at least one male. This is a species where pairs spend the winter apart, but then meet court and breed again in the spring. However, Chaffinches seem to have a very formal, Victorian relationship to one another, and may often be seen separately, unlike most paired small birds. In Culpeper, they are usually seen in quite small groups, unlike the Goldfinches, which have been around all year, and which can be in flocks of up to 50 when there is plenty of food. It has been wonderful to see all the finches in the garden this year, in spite of the hard winter, and many thanks to those who have kept the bird feeders full, especially Patrick, who is now officially 'The Bird Man' of Culpeper!

❧In the East End of London, there was a fashion in the nineteenth century for using caged Chaffinches for singing competitions. These were held in the taverns of the poorest parts of the capital, and large amounts were bet on which bird would sing loudest and longest. Unfortunately, it was believed that blind birds sang best, so many of the finches were deprived of their sight. This made them extremely dependent on their owners, and there was a great deal of sentimental attachment to the birds by the very people who had caught and blinded them. Human nature, then as now, was something of a conundrum.

❧You will probably have noticed that the Blackbirds have started to argue and fight amongst themselves again. In the winter, they are quite tolerant of one another, and as we noted last year Culpeper can end up with a population of about 15 Blackbirds, of both sexes and all ages. However, Blackbirds breed very early, and by the end of February a lot of the youngsters will have been driven off so that the two resident pairs can start their breeding activity.

❧An increased number of Starlings have also been hanging around, perhaps because they've worked out how to get at the food in the bird feeders. Starlings were named after the white spots that break out all over their plumage in the winter, and which is thought to resemble the stars in the night sky. I always think of Starlings as 'pointy birds', with their sharp bills and jerky, busy way of bustling about. They look like little fighter planes in flight, with their triangular wings, and I love the way that they whistle. I am very intrigued about where the birds that visit our garden roost. Starlings tend to gather in huge flocks to sleep, and I'm sure some of our more 'mature' readers will remember the Starling roost in Leicester Square (where you could be fairly sure of getting decoratively spattered if you walked under the trees with due care and attention). You also used to be able to watch the most fantastic aerial show above the islands in St James's Park where another group of Starlings would whirl and spin across the sky before settling down for the night. Now, who knows where they roost? If you know, do let me know!

❧Some creatures that I haven't seen yet are the tiny birds that were around last year, such as the Goldcrest, the Wren and the Long-Tailed Tit. Again, if anyone has seen them, do let me know - I'm afraid that the terrible winter has been too much for them. Fortunately, the populations of these birds usually recover fairly quickly, as the territories will be vacant and ready for other birds to move in. It is very sad, but not unexpected - the smallest birds need to eat non-stop in the darkest, coldest months, and even with our help not all of them make it.

❧Finally, the frogs are back! No one really knows where they all go during the rest of the year - some will live in the compost heap, under stones and in other damp, secluded spaces, but lots will make a commute back to the pond where they were tadpoles. In the next few weeks we should see the start of the mating season - it will be very interesting to see how many of our bumper year in 2009 manage to make it back to breed themselves.

❧**If you see an interesting animal in the garden, or a familiar animal behaving in an interesting way, do let me know.**

<mailto: viv_palmer_1999@yahoo.co.uk> or 07766 312359.



THAT'S THE WAY TO DO IT!



Steve Mullin explains the technique - and the benefits - of double digging.

Over the past 3 months I've been double digging the whole of my new plot. There are many reasons for doing this: it breaks up compacted soil into a crumbly tilth; it gets rid of perennial weed roots; it introduces organic matter a spade's depth down for the worms to get to work, but, most important of all, it breaks up the hard clay pan which underlies the whole of Culpeper and which can produce, alternately, water logging and dry baked soil.

My bible for vegetable growing over the last forty years has been the RHS publication "The Vegetable Garden Displayed" - alas no longer in print, though you can easily pick up a second hand copy on the internet. My edition is dated 1966 (price 8s 6d net), and contains the original explanatory photographs from the 1941 first edition, featuring, inter alia, a head gardener in waistcoat, corduroys and Trilby, carrying out double digging with military precision.

I have divided my 20'0" x 9'0" plot into three, with a T-shaped path. This produces three 6'0" x 4'6" vegetable beds (for annual crop rotation), a 4'6" x 4'6" seed bed, a 3'0" wide asparagus bed, and a 4'6" deep flower border. This allows cultivation of each bed without the need to step on the soil. It also divides the task of digging into easily manageable sections, and the 1'6" module reflects the most commonly used row spacing for vegetables.

First, mark out a 2'0" wide strip at the end of the bed. Dig this out to a spade's depth, and barrow the spoil to the other end of the bed, removing any perennial weeds and brick bats as you go. When digging is complete, shovel up the 'crumbs' at the bottom of the trench and add them to the spoil heap. Now fork over the hard subsoil you have exposed, breaking up and turning over the clods; and barrow in three inches of compost.

Mark out the next 2'0" strip, and repeat the process, this time turning the dug soil into the previously dug trench. When you reach the final strip to be dug, shovel the earth you excavated at the beginning into the trench. You will find that the ground level may now be some six inches higher than the original level. This will gradually settle somewhat (it helps if you can work out this in the autumn before the frosts set in, so that they can break up any clods).

This all sounds like a lot of hard work, but providing you pace yourself with only a strip or two a day, work proceeds at a satisfying rate, and you should soon notice the difference in plant health and yield. And remember - now you've got the soil in good heart it should only need forking over at the end of season with a good mulch of compost to keep it that way.



Play & Stay for under 5's comes to Culpeper

Thanks to funding from the West Area Committee, we will be running Play and stay sessions for the under 5's on:

Wednesdays 9.30 - 11.30 (term time only).

This is a one year project. Islington Childcare Trust, a not for profit organization which supports people training in childcare, are helping us to run these sessions. Selma Whi is employed by the trust. She will be running the sessions and introduces herself below. **Sessions are free** and we look forward to seeing lots of little people in the garden.



I've been in the childcare sector for a few years now and really enjoy the work. I am local, and have relatives living around Angel. I speak fluent Turkish. I also enjoy the natural environment and have always been around flowers and planting with my family at our allotment, it's a calming environment to be around. I used to spend a lot of time in Culpeper community garden as I used to work and study locally.

I'm looking forward to this experience.

❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️ Culpeper updates ❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️

We are finally getting towards the end of what has been a long and hard winter and hopefully spring will arrive with a colourful splash anytime now. The frogs made a brief appearance one warmer day last week but quickly returned to hibernation. By the time you read this they should be back so call in as soon as it warms up for the annual frog spectacle in the main pond- it never ceases to amaze! Bring your friends and neighbours. School parties and groups visits welcome.

Culpeper's bird population is thriving thanks to the Viv and Patrick who have made a great team – filling the bird feeders daily. It's really paid off – read Vivs wildlife notes for all the details of what you can see at the garden. Talking of wildlife Greenspace are arranging a talk on the bat population in and around Culpeper gardens to coincide with putting up the boxes made by members and volunteers in the autumn. Cindy Blaney (Bat expert) will be giving a talk on bats and their habitat etc. No date set yet so watch the notice boards. We were all really sorry to see garden worker Kirstie move on to a new job, but as she is still working in the area and for the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens as a food growing advisor, we can expect her to be popping by regularly.

Exciting times as the Tea Hut refurbishment is almost complete – Paula and Robin are adding the final coat of paint to the shirting board today. We hope you like it. A big cheer to everyone who has helped out with the project with especial thanks to Robin who was the logistics and style mastermind!

A big welcome to new garden worker Laura, and urban food project worker Scarlett. Laura will be at the garden on Thursdays and Fridays and as well as all the normal garden worker roles will be leading work on the dry garden developments. Scarlett works: Wednesdays and is leading the afternoon food growing sessions throughout the year. Lots of you have already met them, and I'm sure will agree that they are great new additions for Culpeper.

✓ **Well Being in EC1** ✓

Life is full of challenges - joblessness, relationship breakdown, bereavement, work and family stresses are to name just a few. In times of recession many of us have to deal with extra problems that threaten our mental wellbeing and leave us feeling low. Lack of opportunities can damage our self esteem, leave us feeling powerless and unable to get what we want from life.

A new Wellbeing Project, which is part of EC1 New Deal, is running free training courses throughout 2010, open to anyone living in EC1. This could be your chance to make some positive changes and get more from life!

The course aims to give people the skills and confidence needed to face life's difficulties - and to survive them!

By the end we hope that participants will feel able to take more control over their lives and enjoy more positive mental wellbeing.

Emma Charlton

T: 020 7837 6082

E: emmajcharlton@btinternet.com <<mailto:emmajcharlton@btinternet.com>>



New Islington Council wildlife blog Islington has launched a new 'Islington Wildlife' blog to celebrate nature in Islington. A large amount of wildlife lives here and a lot is happening every day in our natural environment as the seasons change.

Our blog will keep you up to date with what our birds, pond life and other wildlife are doing as well as our telling you about our trees, plants and the habitats that exist in Islington. We'll be telling you about unusual things that are happening, rare species that we spot and giving readers an insight into the habitats and lives of wildlife in Islington.

To find out more please visit: <<http://www.islingtonwildlife.typepad.com/blog/>>

FREE food growing training

As part of the Edible Islington Community Food Growing Programme the council are funding a food growing training and support programme called Master Gardener. Master Gardener will train a network of volunteers (Master Gardeners) through accredited training and support run by Garden Organic. We are running an open session on Sunday 14th March from 1pm - 2pm at the Islington Ecology Centre. Philip Turvil the programme co-ordinator will be on hand to give you an overview of the Master Gardener programme, how you can get involved and will be on hand to answer any questions you may have over tea and coffee.

The Ecology Centre can be found at:

Islington Ecology Centre
191 Drayton Park
Islington
N5 1PH

<<http://www.islington.gov.uk/contact/visitingoffices/ecologycentre.asp>>

If you would like to come along then please confirm your place by emailing Oliver Burke at oliver.burke@islington.gov.uk <<mailto:oliver.burke@islington.gov.uk>>

or phone 02075274343

☞★☞ Hello everyone at Culpeper garden ☞★☞

My name is Laura and I am the new garden worker. I will be working Thursdays and Fridays in the garden, so come and say hello (if I haven't met you already).



I thought I should say a few things about myself. I was working at Spitalfields City Farm for 2.5 years full time before I applied for a job here. In fact I still work there now, just part time. Work with lots of different groups doing various gardening projects from landscaping, wildlife gardening, school garden clubs, growing herbs, and high-rise gardening. I have also bumbled around Wales, Herefordshire and East Anglia enjoying the scenery, studying and working for various small companies. I love the seaside and coastal walks. One of my favourite pastimes is going for long walks and identifying wildflowers (but I am no expert). I also love cooking and using loads of herbs, so hopefully will get a chance to cook at the garden. If I had my own garden I would grow loads of veggies, culinary and medicinal herbs but just moved into a flat as so alas that dream will have to wait. Anyways enough about me, looking forward to seeing the garden come alive and drinking tea and sharing biscuits with you all.



I should also say that I have taken on the dry garden project from Kirstie. On Valentines Day we successfully moved loads of shrubs from the old area to the border in the park - so thank you everyone for your help. Now the area is pretty much clear, the landscaping will begin very soon (dates not confirmed yet) and the first job is to remove and clean up the granite steps, so they can be incorporated into the new raised bed design. Will be keeping you posted on the landscaping of the dry garden but please feel free to ask any questions and hopefully I can answer them. Laura Stobbart

COMMITTEE AWAY DAY

The worker and committee away day took place last Saturday. While we didn't make any earth shattering decisions it was decided that we should focus on consolidating all the things that Culpeper does well and are especially keen to recruit new members for the management committee who can help. If you have a few hours a month to spare and are interested in helping the garden to continue to thrive then we'd love to hear from you. We are looking for:

☞ - General committee members who just love the garden/ gardening

☞ - Members from a group currently not well represented on Culpeper committee: men, people from black and ethnic minority communities, younger people

☞ - Members with experience or interest in any of the following : use of public space for creative/arts events, IT including website management, human resource management

⇒ The committee meets every six weeks on weekday evenings. If you think you might be interested get in touch for an informal chat or arrange to come along to one of the meetings to find out more.

Urban food growing @ Culpeper

It is with great pleasure and much excitement that I embark upon leading Culpeper's Urban Food Growing Project. The formal title is "Showcasing food growing and healthy eating at Culpeper Community Garden" but since the main focus is growing food in an urban environment the shortened version is easier to use, less formal and less of a mouthful.

Growing your own food is incredibly empowering. Aside from the wonderfully calming, patience-inducing experience of pottering around with seeds and compost and watching your food grow, from one day to the next in front of your eyes, as you nurture your plants through to the pride of harvest, the greatest joy has to be the eating. Even if you only have space to grow a small bag of potatoes or a single tomato plant, you will never taste potatoes or tomatoes as delicious as those you lovingly grew yourself, from seed to plate. Home grown veg tastes fantastic, you know where it's been and you didn't have to pay a shop (and therefore pay a tax) for it. What could be better?!

We'll be building a mock balcony area to see how much variety can be grown in a limited and difficult space, and we'll incorporate all kinds of container growing around the garden and the buildings. With input from Ahmet's EPP group, we'll turn the little bed in front of the tea hut into a square-foot potager garden.

Recycling will play a big part of the project too. Since most urban dwellers do not have much, if any, horizontal space, we'll knock Heath-Robinson-esque things together and experiment with different ideas to grow healthy food in the available vertical space. I have a lot of ideas and very much welcome yours.

Paula's knitting group is currently collecting clean carrier bags to knit into hanging baskets and containers. There's a collection bag in the tea hut where you can bring your bags, and if you have the inclination while having a cuppa you can cut the bags into strips and knot them together to make a twine. I've started a little ball off already, so have a look at it if my directions are unclear!

Whether you have a tiny garden, a balcony or nothing more than a window box, you can grow something delicious to eat. Come along and get involved. Bring your energy and ideas. If you have friends who live in flats bring them too. Let's experiment and have some fun growing healthy food at home! By Scarlett.

Sessions are on Wednesday afternoons from 2 - 4pm, and start March 10. Everybody is welcome.

A groovy kind of famine

Throughout much of the dark ages, the poorest citizens dreaded the height of summer as it brought the "hungry gap", when those who could not afford to store grain, or buy food, often went hungry. They existed on a meagre diet, usually including rye bread, which was invariably mouldy. The mould that grew on it was ergot, which gave the peasants a dose of lysergic acid - otherwise known as LSD. At best it would render them delirious; at worst, it could kill. They also scavenged in the hedgerows for poppies and hemp, which were ground up and baked in a cake. The peasants knew what this "crazy bread" did to them but they had little choice. The result, as contemporary historian Piers Plowman recorded, was a kind of mass hysteria expressed in over excited summer festivals, fuelled by the unintentional drug taking and light headedness of hunger. From Nikki, the History of Britain Pocket Companion



Common
Starling
In London

CULPEPER COMMUNITY GARDEN

SPRING NEWSLETTER - MARCH 2010

Reg. Charity: 291156

TEL: 020 7833 3951

Email: gardenworker@gmail.com Website: www.culpeper.org.uk

www.flickr.com/photos/culpepercommunitygarden

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/culpepercommunitygardengroup>

AVAILABLE IN LARGE PRINT – CONTACT US

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2010

① ♦ **Sunday April 11th** - Work Day 11am -2pm
& Users Forum 12am -1pm with a focus on
gardening and plants at Culpeper.

② ♦ **Sunday May 9th** - Spring Plant Sale

③ ♦ **Sunday June 13th** - Culpeper Open Day

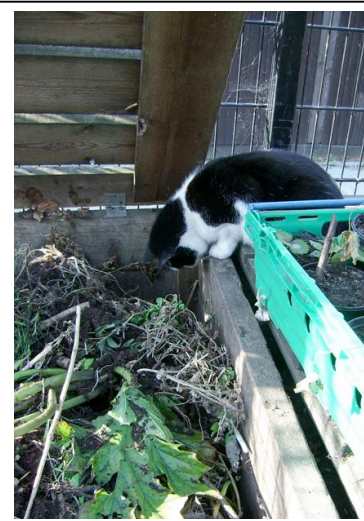
④ ♦ **Sunday October 10th** - Autumn Plant Sale

&

Urban Food Growing - Wednesday(s) 2pm-4pm

Weekly Volunteer Sessions

Tuesday(s) 2pm-4pm Friday(s) 11am-1pm



'Culpeper is paradise'
by: Mr Cat.X

BAGS of BAGS workshop @ Culpeper community room

Tuesday 13th April 2-5 pm

Come along, design and make your own Hessian bag. Help, advice and materials provided. Please donate beads, buttons and embellishments to the garden. Nikki



Knitting and crocheting @ Culpeper community garden

Every Wednesday 1-2.30pm

Our spring project is knitting and crocheting, hanging baskets and containers from wool, plastic bags and twine. They will then be used to grow salad and vegetables. We will also be knitting and crocheting insects and flowers to decorate them.

All welcome, beginners and experts. Paula