

Culpeper community garden news

Spring Plant Sale

The daffs have been out for weeks, the frogs are spawning in the pond and Spring is once more well and truly upon us.....so it is time for Culpeper's members to turn their hands once more to the Spring Plant Sale. Twice a year the gardeners of Islington pour through our gates to snap up some hardy bargains - whether its veg seedlings, herbs, ornamentals, indoor plants, or just the home-made tea and cakes, there's always something for everyone! Sunday 11th May is this years date, we hope you will be able to join us. Its always a great social event, as well as being a good fundraiser and way to introduce new people to the garden.

We rely on volunteers to get the day running smoothly – doing a hundred and one tasks from potting on spare plants from your plots or from home (compost and pots available from behind the tea hut,) setting up the tables & bringing out plants, serving tea, giving advice and packing away at the end of the day. Please sign up on the sheet in the tea hut or leave a message for Kate if you can help out.



Greenspace Ranger Lynne leads a joint work day on the border next door in the Culpeper Open Space.

2008 Membership Subscriptions Due

Plotholders: £15 (£8 concs.)

Non Plotholders: £12 (£6 concs)

Please send to 25 Batchelor Street, London N1 0EG or drop round when Kate is in the garden.

NEW STUART LOW ACTIVITIES

This spring Robin King, who leads gardening sessions on the SLT plot at Culpeper on Thursday afternoons, will be leading a series of narrowboat trips. The first outing will be a day return to Little Venice on Wednesday, April 9th (cost £10 per person). He and fellow SLT trustee Virginia Low will also be leading a series of outings to places such as Kew (in a joint venture with Culpeper), the Geffrye Museum and the RAF Museum. All are welcome, subject to capacity for the boat trips. For details contact The Stuart Low Trust at 020 7713 9304, e-mail info@slt.org.uk.

Every Friday from 6.30-9.00pm SLT holds Evening Events at St Mary's Neighbourhood Centre. Pick up a flyer in the Tea Hut and see for yourself.

Starting April 23rd, SLT evening activities will greatly expand with a new Wellbeing Project at Hargrave Park Extended Community School, 51 Bredgar Road, N19 (near Archway tube station). On Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 6.30 to 10.00pm there will be a variety of activities including Pilates and aerobics, cookery, music and drama workshops, drumming, complementary therapies and a café. Weekly timetables will be available at the school after Launch Day. Further details will be available from the SLT office but the programme is not finalized at time of writing. We look forward to meeting Culpeper Newsletter readers at our activities inside and outside of the Gardens.

What was the question?

Its not too late to complete and return your Culpeper questionnaires – it's a really important part of our monitoring and evaluation of the garden, and we really value what you think! Didn't receive one? – then let us know and we'll get another copy to you.

Dates for your Diary

Sunday 13th April	Workday, 11am-3pm
Wed 30th April	Culpeper Trip to Kew – see p2
Sunday 11th May	SPRING PLANT SALE
Tuesday 13th May	Visit to Barnsbury Wood & Square
Sunday 8th June	Culpeper Open Day, 11am-4pm
Tuesday 15th July	Pensioners Strawberry Tea

Welcome to Culpeper's Latest Recruits Joining the ranks are new members Aletta de Jong, Pauline Sturges, ploholders David Melody, Michael Bell, Geraldine O'Sullivan. Hanover Primary School will be getting their hands dirty this year as Culpeper's newest ploholders! And a very warm welcome to Kirstie our new garden worker.

Songs of the Solstice

Back in the dark depths of December, Culpeper celebrated the Winter Solstice in the time honoured way, with mulled wine, munchies and merriment around the fire. Sayed "the Shish" and the Room2Heal gang lead the barbecuing once again, with chicken and chestnuts the popular choice. Many members drifted through for a moment's peace amidst the pre-Christmas rush Natasha then set the tone and opened our ears with a beautiful array of multilingual harmonies. She inspired those huddled around the fire to find their voices and share a host of folk songs from all over the world. Mark gave us the Sikh Mantra "*E Kong Kar*," followed by Dave's rendition of "*Malaika Na Kupenda – Angel I Love You*" from Kenya. Sayed then gave us a deeply felt Farsi song, "*Gozast Offsonayeh In Omre Hasti – The Passing Fable of Existence*," which seemed to momentarily transport us into ancient Persia. However Soheila managed to bring us back to the present with a more modern Iranian tune "*Amu Sabzy Furooj – Uncle Sells Vegetables!*" "*Parsley Sage Rosemary and Thyme*" seemed appropriate for the garden, but it wasn't until Margaret's arrival that the stirring grand finale was to be heard "*On Ilkley Moor Bah' Tat (What's That?)*". Amidst these songs and others, the embers of the winter fire glowed strong into the longest night.

Right On Kew

Robin of the Stuart Lowe Trust will once again be leading a band of merry men (and women) on a trip to Kew Gardens. In addition to the Spring displays and the multitude of tantalising trails, visitors will be able to follow the trials and tribulations of this year's nesting season. Camera ready nest boxes are installed throughout the gardens and are linked through to monitors in the Visitor Centre. The entrance fee and sustaining picnic will be provided, so all you need is money for your train travel – leaving overland from Highbury & Islington at 11am. Those wishing to join us on Wednesday 30th April can sign up on the tea hut notice board or contact Culpeper's garden workers. Why not help out preparing the food at the Culpeper tea hut from 9.30am?

Mini Allotments at St Lukes

The St Luke's Centre on Central Street EC1 is planning to turn its car park into a garden! Individual raised beds will be available for EC1 residents to use to grow herbs, vegetables, flowers or any other plants of their choice. This new allotment system will be launched on Saturday 26th April at a 'Grow Your Own' day. This will feature food growing workshops, simple home cooking demonstrations, plants to take away, pot painting as well as various bee themed activities for children. If you are interested in getting a raised bed of your own or want more information about the Grow Your Own day then please contact Heather on 0207 608 8549.

New Building Well Underway

Members using the garden will have noticed that after a slow start, due to problems with the foundations and the drains, our new building is beginning to take shape (the green roof is just about to go on). The plans are available on the tea hut notice board for those interested. The old tumbledown office will be replaced by one more spacious &

Robin surveys the silhouetted mural on the temporary hoardings



up to date, and members will have a new tool store. There will also be a Resource room and a disabled access lavatory; these will be used for educational purposes, projects, meetings and social events.

The existing tea hut will remain for members' use and we hope to improve and streamline the facilities there. The expanded yard area will be paved and planted to make an attractive courtyard available to everyone – these improvements will enable Culpeper Garden to continue and extend its many community activities and I hope will be of great benefit to everyone using the garden.

Elizabeth Evans

CULPEPER NATURE NOTES

T.S Eliot wrote that 'April is the cruellest month', but for the small birds and animals that we see in Culpeper, February and early March is the hardest time. The weight that the birds managed to put on in the autumn is melting away, and there are not yet the abundant insects that sustain so many small animals. It has been estimated that at this time of year, a Blue Tit spends 85% of its waking hours searching for the 10 calories of food that it needs to survive for each day. However, so far the winter has been fairly mild – there was a week of glorious mild weather at the beginning of February – and the animals seem to be getting by.

There are a number of Great Tits who count Culpeper as their 'patch' – in the warmer weather, you can hear them singing vigorously as they defend their territories. There are also small flocks of Blue Tits, sometimes mixed with Long Tailed Tits as they flit from tree to tree. Although food is scarce, Blue Tits and Great Tits can co-exist because during the winter, they feed in slightly different ways. The Blue Tits prefer to feed high up in the trees, in the outer branches looking for any remaining insects, buds and seeds, whilst you are more likely to see a Great Tit lower down, or even on the ground turning over leaves in search of a beetle or grub. When the summer comes, and food is abundant, the Great Tits take to the big trees as well, looking for caterpillars. It has also been suggested that tits will sometimes take nectar, and certainly a pair of Great Tits was giving the Winter Flowering Honeysuckle flowers a thorough search last week.

Something that surprised me greatly was the abundance of bumblebees in the garden, even in some very cold days in January. Normally, queen bumblebees hibernate underground in winter, emerging in late March or early April. They then start to lay the eggs that will form the new colony. On mild days, a queen might emerge and have a quick meal of nectar before going 'back to bed'. However, the bumblebees that I saw were workers. There are hundreds of species of bumblebee, but the ones that I saw were Buff-Tailed Bumblebees, and in this species the queen has a rusty 'tail', whilst the workers have a white one. This implies either that the colony is surviving through the winter, or that the queen is starting her new colony much earlier, possibly even in the autumn. The phenomenon of winter flying bumblebees is a relatively new one, and indicates that our winters are milder than they used to be.

In other news, a pair of young Magpies started to build a nest in the big plane tree opposite the garden, but they appear to have given up. This will be good news for the pair of blackbirds that may already be breeding in the garden, as magpies are notorious nest raiders. There are at least two wrens, and I am always amazed by the volume of song that comes out of such a small animal. Maybe they have amplifiers hidden away! It was also very good to see a small flock of House Sparrows. Once, they were so common that they would hardly have been worth mentioning, but now they are an unusual sight. Culpeper is the only place in Islington where I have consistently seen sparrows, so there must be something in the mix of plants and the environment overall which is conducive to them in a way that ordinary parks and gardens are not.

Please do also let me know if you've seen any unusual animals, or animals behaving in an unusual way, while you've been in the garden, or if you have any feedback on this column. You can contact me via e-mail on viv_palmer_1999@yahoo.co.uk

Vivienne Palmer

KNOWING OUR SOIL

Whenever I have a chat with a fellow garden member in the tea hut, the conversation almost every time reaches a point that we mutually agree how fortunate we are that we can do gardening in such a lovely place. I wonder whether we really appreciate this and show our gratitude to our garden and particularly the soil, the most important tool with which the gardener works. Are we giving back enough to our soil or just simply taking and not returning... Three years ago the very first activity I attended in Culpeper was a workshop on composting given by Gareth, which was a breakthrough for me to understand the full cycle of birth-death-decay and re-birth. I would like to thank Gareth for this eye opener and say good-bye to him.

Soil is a living thing. By feeling its texture and squeezing a small handful of it we can learn a lot. If it moulds and stays in shape, we can say that the soil is clay or silt. If not then it is more likely a sandy soil. Generally London soil is clay soil and the Culpeper is not an exception to this. This brings limitations and some advantages. It's good for water retention since it consists of very small mineral particles which help retain water and nutrients. On the other hand for the very same reason it cannot let water and air through it well and also it's slow to warm up in spring and has poor working properties in winter. By digging and forking in organic matter to the soil such as well rotted farm manure and garden compost the texture and aeration improves. This encourages soil organisms particularly earthworms. Digging or at least loosening with a fork is very beneficial to the soil which helps plants grow more freely and drainage is not impeded. It is also a good exercise for the body if moderately done!

And good news, thanks to Kate, huge amount of mushroom compost and horticultural grit will be on sale available very soon. For more information on soil: The Allotment Handbook – Caroline Foley New Holland Publishers 2004

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/>

http://www.rhs.org.uk/Learning/Research/Horticultural_Themes/soils.htm

Ahmet Caglar

Goodbye from Gareth

It was three Springs ago that I first ventured as a prospective garden worker into the hitherto unknown territory of Culpeper Community Garden. The first person I saw was Simon, knee deep in the pond and sorting out the red legged frogs. In the tea hut was Elizabeth, distributing the home-made rations and just outside was Danny, tattooing the farewell bench for the previous garden worker Clare..... and there behind the scenes was Kate, quietly coordinating the various hubs of activity. Immediately it seemed that this was a good place to be.

A couple of weeks later I was sat in the tea hut facing the interview panel of Kate, Elizabeth and Raj. All I can really remember of that day now was the dreaded third question: "What do I know about pruning roses?" There was no option of bluffing my way through that one.....so I came clean about my total ignorance of all things rosy and ploughed my way through the rest of the interview..... somehow it worked and I ended up joining Culpeper as the new garden worker! I do remember the heartening welcome that was given to me by so many members that made me feel right at home.

So, 200 Pots of Herbal Tea later, it is time for me to move on and make way for the next garden worker. I feel very proud to have played my part in the Culpeper story - and very happy to have worked alongside so many wonderful people in such a beautiful space. I am especially grateful to my comrade Kate's endless patience and good humour as the seasons have rolled by. This is a description I wrote for last year's Annual Report, which describes what I believe is so great about Culpeper:

There are many senses in which Culpeper today qualifies as an "established" community garden. Mighty trees and shrubs that two decades ago were but delicate saplings now tower high above the surrounding buildings, providing fruitful bounties for birds and human gatherers alike. The array of beautiful plants that cover the patchwork quilt of plots contain such diversity that every new turn presents a unique and abundant floral display. Culpeper is also well established within the community, set firmly on the map as the emerald jewel in the crown of Islington's green spaces. When the local newspapers need a gardener's angle on current affairs, or a new set of gardening activists are looking for some tips on setting up, we are frequently their first port of call. Culpeper is pre-eminent amongst gardens as a model voluntary organisation, run by the community for the community. Just check out the wikipedia entry for community gardens! With almost 200 members taking care of its physical, social and organisational health, the garden is truly in the safest hands.

Four and twenty years of Culpeper history now lie behind the garden as it is today, with generations of volunteers investing countless hours of toil, tribulation and tender care in this hidden corner of Islington. When today's vistas are compared with the fading snapshots of yesteryear in the tea hut gallery, one notices many differences – witnessing not only the changing fashions and hairstyles, but the whole magnificent tale of regeneration out of urban decay, from dereliction to the divine. Occasional visitors from the past drop by the garden now and again, usually floating through with a look of accomplishment in their eye – to have planted such seeds and to have seen them grow! Some call in briefly as if they had just wanted to remind themselves of a time gone by, see the fruits of their labour and then walk on, leaving with a quiet and knowing smile. Others stop for a chat, casually recollecting the day that they dug out this pond, planted that tree, laid the other path.

So what is our role, as the present incumbents and inheritors of this Culpeper legacy? Do we sit back on our laurels and bask in the glow of our predecessors' hard work? Of course not! Any gardener worth their beans knows how quickly a neglected plot can invite an unwelcome burden of bindweed and bramble. The continual flow of plot-holders' energy is vital to the life of the garden, ever stimulating new growth and keeping these enemies at bay. And the members' stewardship goes far beyond the maintenance of the grounds. We are forever striving to build new bridges and reach out into the constantly changing Islington community. This is reflected in the diversity of our membership, with over 30 flags represented on the map of "Culpeper's World" in the tea hut, spanning all ages and backgrounds. As with any eco-system, the diversity of its components and the beneficial connections between them corresponds proportionally to its resilience and stability. This is surely one of the keys to the garden's success. The Culpeper Calendar is also full to the brim with all manner of events: regular workdays, workshops and educational occasions; musical, artistic and social celebrations; plant sales, open days and outings into community events with our displays; so many opportunities to get involved!

There is a permaculture principle which states that the yield of any system is theoretically unlimited: that no matter how productive or successful a project seems to be, new elements can always be added, better use can always be made of existing resources. And just as grasses colonise the bare earth, as bushes succeed the grasses, followed by shrubs, trees, and whole forests teeming with life, so may Culpeper continue to evolve.....