

Penny Grimley - Editor & Leicester's
Growing Spaces Co-ordinator.

Editor's Column

WHILST many of us are retreating a bit more indoors in the winter and planning next year's crop rotations, the wildlife in our growing spaces starts preparing for the colder months.

The natural theme for this edition highlights what we are doing to help the wildlife during these difficult months, and looking at the way we use water.

Piles of twigs and logs give a place of shelter for insects and smaller mammals to overwinter.

Did you know plants prefer rain water than tap water? Take a look at page 2 for details. Using recycled items can reduce the cost of buying in new materials. Harvesting rainwater is good for the planet as well as for your crops.

Also in this edition, we are sharing gardening questions and our own experiences of growing food.

I hope you enjoy this edition of your Gazette.

For support, advice and to send Gazette articles;

Penny.grimley@leicester.gov.uk or call

0116 454 4473 to reach me.

<https://www.facebook.com/LeicesterParks>



Helen Everett

A Wildlife Plot

Evington Parks Allotment Society

Plot 16, Stoughton Drive North is shaded by a mature oak tree hanging over the fence from the adjacent builder's yard. (Photo shows large branch of oak over track and plot, pictured top left). This limits the available vegetable growing area, but also has benefits for wildlife.

John Porter, a committee member at Evington Parks Allotment Society, took on the plot many years ago, with other trees already growing on it. Under these he has created a pond and woodpiles to encourage pondlife

and insects. (pictured top right)

There is also a mature bramley apple tree at one end. (pictured bottom left)

Next to the shed there is a disused well, (pictured bottom right) perhaps a future source of water for the site? This may merit investigation.

John is a regular visitor to his plot, feeding several cats there.

Thank you to Helen and John for sending in their article, especially for this edition.

Custard powder!

Top tips

Penny Grimley

As a custard lover, this is great news! Many of you have mentioned that custard powder is a good substitute for hormone rooting powder.



Top it off!

Top tips

Penny Grimley

During our allotments visits, several experienced gardeners mentioned taking the tops of their sweetcorn off, to fatten and ripen the crop. Others find they grow better in a poly tunnel.

Paul Howgill

Water – do we value it?

The Leicester Allotment Gardeners Council (LAGC) is a local branch of the National Allotment Society, set up to support the allotment societies in Leicester.

Over the past three months Penny and myself have almost completed visits to all society run allotment sites in the city.

One of the most contrasting differences is how societies manage rules on how water is used by their ploholders. Some have rule of times and what hosepipes can or cannot be used.

Some have a financial charge for hosepipe use. Severn Trent Water recently put up their costs for water which not all have been aware of.

There are two sites with no water on site, yet they manage without relying solely on water harvesting. Some sites have a number of really good collection systems, even from polytunnels which some claim cannot be done.

Our main problem is that some of our members do not try to save rain water at all but pay the same rent as those that can save enough for the whole year!

The more the good practice in water harvesting is spread around our sites from the good to the novices, the lower our water bills will be.

Some are not bothered whilst they are not charged more. Some societies have looked at charging the non-collectors more.

Are you being fair to your members who collect?

Why not look around sites who are doing something to increase water harvesting?

Paul Howgill, Secretary,
Leicester Allotment Garden Council



Eyres Monsell (left) & Knighton Fields (centre) allotment society sites and Clarendon Park Community Garden (right), examples of rainwater collection.

Penny Grimley

Why collect rainwater?

There are still allotments and community growing hubs that do not have mains water and rely on rainwater collection or extraction from the local brook to water their crops.

The rain is better for plants than treated water because it is soft (low in calcium and magnesium) and slightly acidic, which helps plants absorb nutrients from the soil.

Rainwater is free of harmful salts, treatment chemicals, heavy metals and has a better source of nitrogen than tap water.

Utilising buildings like sheds and greenhouses makes sense but when none of these are available, try upturned umbrellas or a hanging canopy with a small hole in the centre, positioned over old containers. Make use of natural resources and get inventive with recycled materials.

You could try condensation, collecting moisture from the air.

Cold Frame Giveaway!

Just perfect for hardening off those seedlings. This cold frame is free to a good home.

It is all intact and fully working but could do with a clean.

If you have the perfect space and are happy to collect, please email the editor.



Featherstone Drive Community Orchard



Evington Parks rainwater collection.

Laura & Clare

New watering system trial at the Saffron Acres Project.

The latest updates

Here at the Saffron Acres Project, we have been trialling a different watering system in our polytunnels. It's hard to achieve consistent, efficient watering without a pricey investment in a controlled watering system.

This year we have been trialling "ollas" (pronounced oy-yahs). These are unglazed terracotta pots sunk into the ground which allow water to diffuse out slowly as the plants require it. The technique originated in Latin America and the purpose-made pots are often beautifully rounded urn-like vessels.... but we've opted for the budget option, using deep terracotta plant pots with a cork in the bottom and a plant pot saucer as a lid.

The tomatillos have grown really well. We filled the pots 2-3 times a week and they lasted well even over some of the hottest weekends. It meant targeted watering so we used less water, had no scorched leaves and no hard crust on the soil. It was also an easy instruction for our mixed-ability volunteers...just fill the pot!

We're hoping to be able to expand the system throughout our polytunnels next year.



Saffron Acres watering system (left), and an image of a Western Honey Bee and a seven spotted Ladybird (good for controlling aphids), kindly donated by wildlife photographer Dave Bradley

Taruna Mistry

Our Gardening Adventure!

Leicester Community Links CIC

We're thrilled to embark on another year of gardening for wellbeing at our community allotments on Holden Street in the heart of Belgrave.

Why We Decided to Garden

- **Growing our own food:** Enjoying fresh, homegrown produce is a major motivator.
- **Creating a relaxing outdoor space and supporting our wellbeing:** A garden can be a tranquil retreat.
- **Attracting wildlife:** Supporting local ecosystems and enjoying nature's beauty.
- **Sustainability:** Reducing our environmental impact and living more sustainably.

Our Garden Vision

To encourage more communities to start gardening big or small! We are proud to share we have been awarded the most innovative community hub in the East Midlands region in the UK SME awards 2024, also we have just heard that one of our dedicated volunteers is a finalist in the VAL awards 2024!

Join Us on Our Gardening Journey

If you're a community group looking for an allotment space, why don't you join our sessions on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Please contact Taruna on 07368 873569.



Penny Grimley

Hedges for the wildlife and added security.

Funding, security and free hedgerow whips.

All growing spaces are a lifeline for wildlife and along with Leicester Parks and Open Spaces, they provide a valuable corridor and haven for wildlife to thrive.

Leicestershire Police have advised us that by keeping buildings, trees, and compost bins away from a sturdy perimeter fence and establishing a second natural hedge with thorns inside the site, this discourages intruders, as it slows their exit from the site.

Established hedges are a deterrent on their own. Next to streams and

brooks, they offer bird nesting areas, food and shelter for wildlife. Why not grow a mixed edible and nature loving hedge and extend your harvest calendar?

The Woodland Trust are offering free hedgerow whips to schools and communities.

Take a look at their website. <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities/>

There are a range of different types of free packs, depending on the type of hedge you wish to create.

In addition, The Tree Council are also offering their 'Branching Out Fund'.

Take a look at their website. <https://treecouncil.org.uk/grants-and-guidance/our-grants/branching-out-fund/>

Branching Out supports applications ranging in value from £250 to £2,500 depending on the size of your project.

If you would like my support to make a funding application, please don't hesitate to get in touch.



Image of a Robin, kindly donated by wildlife photographer Dave Bradley

Ian Underwood

Romans at Red Hill.

Belgrave Allotment Society

In May 2009 whilst excavating a wildlife pond on site, members of Red Hill Allotments, on the edge of Leicester city and Birstall, discovered human bones.

After initially reporting the find to the police it was suggested that they were better off talking to the university. The bones were Roman.

A University of Leicester small scale excavation team uncovered two, possibly three, roman burials interred in the latter half of the third century AD. Associated pottery and hobnailed footwear indicated a pagan burial rite.

Further residual roman pottery suggested activity on the site from the first century AD onwards. The burials are likely to be part of a small cemetery related to a settlement in the immediate vicinity, possibly a villa. Fragments of a roman column were previously found on the other side of Loughborough Road.

A collection of struck flints were found in the dig indicated earlier activity in the area as far back as the Neolithic or Bronze Age.

Penny Grimley

Gardening questions

Rats and squirrels are eating my crops! What can I do?

There are all sorts of ways to naturally keep rats at bay. Many allotment sites have resident cats, that will keep the rodent populations down. Feeding birds does attract rats and squirrels and increases their population, due to a plentiful food supply. Instead, perhaps consider installing wildlife areas for the birds who visit, offering natural food - an alternative to feeding stations.

There are quite a few solar powered ultrasonic devices that you can place in the ground that can act as deterrents. Peppermint sprays are also available. Consider growing peppermint plants in pots or troughs, as mint spreads via the roots and will quickly take over your plot. You could make your own spray from the mint leaves. Consider alternative crops if still no success.



Eco School children making improvements in their school grounds, to enable the wildlife to move in.

Leicester’s Wildlife Friendly Schools Project.

Jasmine Walker



Leicester City Council has a dedicated Sustainable Schools team, based in Sustainability, who provide support to schools to help them become more sustainable in all that they do.

The Sustainable Schools Team have just finished their Wildlife Friendly Schools project. Funded by Air Wick and WWF, the project worked with 13 schools across Leicester and Leicestershire to create habitat for wildlife. Changes made include:

- Hedgerows planted in eight schools with 895m of hedgerow and 3600 trees planted
- Three new ponds created
- Five ponds which had maintenance work
- Two schools received pond dipping resources
- 34 nest boxes to be installed across eight schools including swift, tawny owls, grey wagtails, sparrow and bat boxes
- Three hedgehog champion schools carried out interventions including hedgehog nesting boxes, planting flowering plants, identifying hedgehog highway locations and litter picks
- Hedgehog information evening at Lancaster Academy and hedgehog family event at St Joseph’s Catholic Voluntary Academy

What an amazing project! Well done to everyone who took part and made a difference to their school grounds.

Compost Karaoke!

Take a look at this fabulous You Tube video, it will make you smile, as well as tell you all you need to know about composting!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6DfPvVubPg>

Many thanks to Hannah Keys, for taking the starring role and giving me the green light to post this for everyone to enjoy! Penny Grimley.

Green Flag Awards!

Laura Barke

Congratulations to the following schools for securing their Eco-Schools status for this year. Schools have either achieved Green Flag (G), Green Flag with Merit (M) or Green Flag with Distinction (D). We are very proud of your achievements, well done!

Barley Croft Primary School	M
Braunstone Frith Primary School	M
Bridge Junior School	D
Brook Mead Academy	G
Buswells Lodge Primary School	D
Castle Mead Academy	D
Catherine Infant School	G
Catherine Junior School	D
Charnwood Primary School	M
Dovelands Primary School	M
Ellesmere College	D
Evington Valley Primary School	G
Fosse Mead Primary School	M
Fullhurst Community College	M
Gateway College	M
Glebelands Primary School	G
Granby Primary School	G
Hazel Community Primary School	D
Highfields Primary School	D
Hope Hamilton CE Primary School	G
Inglehurst Junior School	D
Leicester Islamic Academy	G
Linden Primary School	M
Mellor Community Primary School	G
Millgate School	G
Montrose School	D
Nether Hall School	D
Queensmead Primary School	D
Sandfield Close Primary School	G
Scraptoft Valley Primary School	M
Sir Jonathan North Girls’ College	M
Soar Valley College	M
Sparkenhoe Community Primary School	G
Spinney Hill Primary School	G
St John the Baptist C of E Primary School	D
St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School	D
Stokes Wood Primary School	D
Tudor Grange Samworth Academy	M
Uplands Junior School	G
Whitehall Primary School	D