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MONTHLY ROUNDUP

BIRMINGHAM & DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS COOPERATIVE

Birmingham & District Allotment Cooperative : 2024 Issue 6

Welcome back to the Monthly Roundup. Unfortunately due to a number of issues there were no issues in July and August.

August 2024 saw the cancellation of the Annual Show. sadly poor harvests and other concerns conspired to frustrate the venture but we hope to see its return in 2025. Hopefully, also returning in 2025 will be some form of site competition.

If there is anybody out there with experience of marketing or similar skills that help make your local show a success then it would be useful that if you would be willing to join the events team or offer ideas and/or enthusiasm please drop us a line at events@bdacallotments.co.uk

On the Plot

This year has definitely been the worst growing season that many plotholders can recall. It seemed that not only was it the wrong weather it came at the wrong time. Too little sunlight, too much rain. Plots flooded and crops dying for lack of water. Now that harvest time is with us things don't seem quite so bad. It has been a good year for fruit and brassicas but some other things have yet to ripen or reach full-size.

September is traditionally a time when allotments start to shut down but with greenhouse, polytunnels and low

tunnels some people will keep growing.

If you are thinking about covering the plot, with either plastic or cardboard ready to unveil in Spring there is the alternative of growing green manures. As tenants we have a responsibility to maintain soil fertility and this is one way of doing this. Some can over winter or others like fast growing mustard can be dug in during October or left to die down and cover the ground over winter. For the No-dig gardeners most green manures you can "chop and drop" and leave it for the soil biome to take care of it. In addition if you choose field beans the tips can be added to salads and eaten raw.

There are many different green manures to choose from Kings Seeds offer a wide variety and in quantities to cover a raised bed to a whole plot so check out your local allotment shop. Alternatively look at https://www.kingsseeds.com/products/vegetable-seeds/green-manure

For the more dedicated researcher there is even a website dedicated solely to selling green manure, "Green manure" which has a guide to help you choose the most appropriate seeds. https://www.greenmanure.co.uk/pages/choosing-the-right-green-manure

Read more about Green Manure on the RHS Web site

Committee Talk

Committees should be getting ready for the end of year.

Two particular challenges for officers this month are preparing for rent collection but even before that this is

the last opportunity to address non-cultivation this year.

How do committees ensure plots are being well managed by tenants?

In an ideal world, every tenant would follow the rules, maintain their plot and grow fabulous produce, but every committee knows this isn't always the case.
So how do committees deal with people who aren't?
With the rent season almost upon us, it is an ideal time for committees to communicate to these tenants whose plots are falling short of the required standard. According to the management handbook, plot inspections are to be carried out in April and before the October rent period in September. However, some sites do not follow this protocol. Generally, September inspections give a better view of plot activity. There should be evidence that produce has been grown that season.

To help association committees the BDAC MOSA Group (Management of Sites and Associations) has developed a manual, which will help associations and committees understand what is laid out in the management handbook. Thinking about cultivation guidelines, plot inspections, what the required standard is for plots, letters, how to proceed where there are mitigating circumstances and how this is enforced. This user-friendly manual is very simple to use, it incorporates flow charts which guide you through the process. This will be emailed to all site secretaries and can be downloaded from our website.

We hope that committees find this new manual useful. In the meantime, here are some other tips

- Does your site have a generic email address? BDAC advice is to set one up if you haven't already. Formal letters should be sent from this if going by e-mail, rather than using personal e-mails. Also, consider having a mobile phone for tenants/prospective tenants to contact rather than giving out personal mobile numbers. Personal numbers and email addresses shouldn't be published. This also allows continuity as and when Committee members change.
- If you want to have a more formal chat with a tenant, make sure there are two committee members (where possible) present, and if necessary, send a letter to confirm what was discussed.
- Use the standard letters. If you send a letter you have written rather than the ones in the Management Handbook it may compromise any future action if you are seeking re-entry
- All tenants should be treated equally. Leeway, with regards to plot inspections, should only be granted where there are mitigating circumstances, and even then, needs to be monitored and reviewed.
- If you allow one person to break the rules, you set a precedent. Issues regarding rule-breaking can very quickly spiral out of control.

Officers also need to be checking section **4.1.1 RENT COLLECTION** of the Handbook and preparing for rent collection. Hopefully, most associations have now moved away from cash and cheques, and are using Bank Transfer to collect payments. Asking plotholders to ensure they state their plot number when making the transfer to the association account overcomes most problems. It is not in the best interests of any officer or committee member to be collecting cash, storing it at home or taking it to the bank. Section 4.1.4 advises "cheque or postal order", the handbook having last been published in 2020. Money should never be paid into or transferred to or from a personal account.

Rents: October 2024

Allotments are rented on a yearly basis. Rent is due on 1 October each year. If you take on a plot after 1 April, you will receive a 50% discount.

You will be charged a late payment fee of £10 if your rent is not paid by 9 November.

A reduced rate is offered to pensioners.

Allotment annual rent charges from 1 October 2024

Plot category	Yearly rent	Yearly rent for over 65s
Mini (category A* or M)	£63.00	£34.00
Small (category A)	£78.00	£41.00
Standard (category B or C)	£115.00	£60.00
Large (category D or E)	£141.00	£72.00
Raised bed	£19.00	£12.00

Information from BCC website: https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20090/allotments/173/allotments_information/3

Helping Associations

Do have a policy, practice or protocol that helps in the running of your site?

Do you need help in moving your association forward?

Do you have additional rules that association members need to follow? How do you enforce them?

The first of the draft documents is about Plot Maintenance and guidance on how to deal with non-cultivation.

Let us know so we can share them and help associations. Contact webmaster@bdacallotments.co.uk

The annual half-yearly meeting will be at 2pm on 16th November 2024 at Bordesley Green Allotments, Bordesley Green B9 5PD. The agenda will be made available in October. The meeting is open to all association members. Anybody who wishes to raise any item should forward it to secretary@bdacallotments.co.uk

Did you celebrate National Allotment Week on your site? What are you doing to encourage biodiversity on your plot or site? Contribute to the Monthly Roundup and receive a £10 Voucher

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