



Gleanings from the
Compost Heap
Spring 2006

See you at the Show!

2006 is our centenary year and one of the things the Committee hopes is that as many of you as possible make this the year you enter an exhibit at the Summer or Autumn Show. Look at the Show Schedule that came with your membership pack and choose one section. Perhaps you grow wonderful roses, or your runner beans are always magnificent. Fill in your entry card and experience the excitement of being an exhibitor, rather than just an onlooker.

Tom Chilvers has been a Show Committee member of LDGA and an avid exhibitor since 1959. He has won more prizes and trophies than most of us would ever imagine and has been persuaded to share his years of exhibiting experience with our readers. He will also be present at both shows and will be happy to answer questions and pass on his expertise.

Easy tips on how to exhibit: Tom Chilvers

1. Don't be put off. The shows are friendly events and everyone enjoys seeing what is produced and displayed.

2. Exhibiting chrysanthemums, dahlias, roses, and sweet peas. The judges are looking for uniformity of size and shape, freshness of bloom - and the right length of stem for the size of flower gives additional appeal. Three points to bear in mind are:

- a) Freedom from blemish.
- b) An attractive arrangement
- c) Correct naming of the varieties.

All these factors will score points and to make sure you have the best selection, always pick a few extra to allow for damage when transporting your flowers or the blemish you don't see until you start to make the final arrangement. To make absolutely sure, take one spare bloom for a vase of three and two spare for a vase of five flowers. Look at your blooms five to seven days before the show and if you think it is likely to rain or be very windy, think about protecting them, so you have perfect

flowers for show day.

3. Vegetables. The Show Schedule gives details of the number of each type you need to provide and how these should be displayed. The aim, as in the flower section, is to have a display which has uniform size, shape and freshness. The vegetables should be displayed as simply as possible and should only be washed gently in water and dried.

The allotment scene: Jack Collins

December 15th, 2005 saw the Annual Meeting of site supervisors, chaired by Steve Sears, at the North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) offices. Wilbury, Runnalow, Radburn and Norton were represented.

All active sites are reported as fully tenanted, with waiting lists. Although 64% of all tenants are aged over 50, it is the efforts on television by Monty Don and Jamie Oliver which have mainly caused the increased demand for fresh, organic produce among parents of schoolchildren. Grandpa still has his uses!

The long-neglected Hillbrow site is to be cleared, rotovated and the fencing upgraded. This will provide a useful collection of new sites for those on the waiting lists.

All new applicants are restricted to half plots and the Council is getting tougher with serious neglect and half-hearted efforts. In future, the Council will send just one warning letter and if no satisfactory explanation of poor upkeep is forthcoming, the tenancy will be terminated. In 2005 there were eight evictions and more are expected in 2006.

In an effort to eradicate vandalism, NHDC is starting a joint venture with the Community Police and Anti-Social Behaviour Officers. Site representatives will be supplied with Incident Report sheets which NHDC will discuss with their partners for investigation. The culprits (usually children) will be interviewed with their parents. It seems the system has proved very effective in other parts of the country.

The upgrading of roads and fences has been completed for Runnalow, with Old Hall Way, Hitchin and Clothall Common, Baldock, scheduled for 2006.

NHDC is offering a system called Devolved Maintenance to LDGA. If the Committee approves the scheme, LDGA will be given annual grants which site representatives can spend how their fellow tenants choose and there are other sources of finance available to add to these grants. There will be a need to study the small print very closely and we shall certainly be involved in paperwork and time to administer this satisfactorily.

Recycle and save money!

There are many ways in which gardeners can save money, without much effort, by recycling household items - though in all cases these need to be thoroughly cleaned and dried before use.

Yogurt pots with small holes punched in the bottom make splendid containers for

young plants and margarine tubs (without holes) can be used to stand them on window sills, or as seed trays themselves. The containers which supermarkets use as bases for meat, poultry and fruit can also be used as plant stands.

Larger cream or yogurt pots with usable lids can be used for sowing small seeds. Replace the lid, make several holes with a small screwdriver or steel knitting needle and shake the pots to help sow seeds thinly and without losing them through your fingers.

Stockings (or tights cut in half) make excellent plant ties. They are elastic, so they don't harm the tree or plant, but also strong, and the colour usually fades into the background rather better than the 'official' plant ties sold in garden centres.

Readers of 'Compost Heap' must have many more ideas along these lines. Please pass your money-saving suggestions to any of the Committee or send them to the Editor.

Dates for your diary

March 18th*

Seed sowing and cuttings.

April 20th*

Successful growing in the greenhouse.

May 17th at 7.30 in the Plinston Hall:

**Centenary Event: RHS Lecture
Adam Pasco, Editor of 'Gardeners' World'
on "Ornamental yet edible".**

Tickets £5 (£4 for RHS members) – from 01462 742475 or from the Store.

Note: tickets are limited, so book early

May 18th*

How to produce professional hanging baskets and tubs.

* These events start at 7.30 in the Guide Headquarters, 247a Icknield Way, Letchworth Garden City.