

A.W.S.L.G. ALLOTMENT NEWS
ADDISCOMBE, WOODSIDE & SHIRLEY LEISURE GARDENS LTD
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**CONSERVING AND
USING WATER WISELY**

NEWSLETTER MAY 2025

March was an incredibly dry month across the UK with England and Wales experiencing their driest conditions since at least 1961. Here in the south-east, we were the driest of all, receiving just 13% of its normal rainfall. So far in April we have had wildfires and mini-heat waves and seen only around a fifth of the rainfall we would normally expect to receive.

The forecast of May to June has a higher-than-normal chance of conditions being warmer than average. Rainfall is likely to be similar to normal, However the chance of summer heatwaves could be higher than normal. We are also swiftly approaching the critical time when recharging groundwater is ending as once the trees open their leaves, they will start to draw up vast amounts of water from the ground.

Now is the time to start thinking about rainwater harvesting on your plot just in case we have drought conditions with hose pipe bans. All plots must have rainwater harvesting with at least one water butt, more if you can manage it. You will need a gutter and a downpipe and if you have room, you could always link an extra water butt with a connecting pipe kit to join them together. With the threat of drought and increasingly hotter summers many ploholders have begun to have more than just one rainwater receptacle. Now is the time to do likewise if you don't have any sort of rainwater capture on your plot in order to save as much water as possible. Have you ever thought about keeping an oxygenator plant in your water butt? This keeps the water fresh. It is also advisable to cover any open receptacles with netting to stop leaves and other detritus falling in.

Some handy tips. First, you need to ensure that precious water is not wasted on bare soil, so mulch round your plants as you plant or sow. Black plastic makes a good mulch and weed suppressant, and if you do not want to spend money on big sheets of plastic, you can use black dustbin bags or reuse empty compost bags, black side up. Pin them down with U-shapes cut from coat hangers, then just cut a cross where you want a plant to go. Alternatively, fill a bottle with water and put a corner of the plastic over the neck before putting the cap back on then just rest the bottle on top of the plastic.

To make sure the water gets straight to the plant roots, save plastic drink bottles, cut off the bottom, take off the lid and place them close to the individual plants (or in between two plants) holding them in place with a thin stick down through the bottle into the soil. Then when it is time to water, just fill the bottle and leave it to sink down. In hot weather it is best to water in the evening so the plants can soak up their drink when it is cool.

Another way to give water to specific plants is to fill a plastic bag with water, tie the top tightly and attach it to a stick, then make a tiny hole in the bottom of the bag so the water seeps out slowly. You can also buy watering spikes to fit on plastic bottles – fill the bottle with water, add the spike and push it into the ground next to the plant. You may need to loosen the spike a little to make sure the water flows properly – watch for bubbles rising as the water soaks down. With any of these methods, you can add liquid manure to the bottle or bag as needed.

Mulching fruit trees promotes healthy growth, giving the tree all the help it needs to produce the best possible crop. Spread the mulch 10cm deep around the base to cover the rootball area but make sure you keep a mulch-free circle of about 10 cm around the base of the tree-trunk to prevent the bark decaying. Organic mulches improve soil structure and fertility as they are drawn down into the surface layer by earthworms. Well-rotted manure, leafmould, straw or garden compost are ideal.

Wholesale water costs are rising by c40% this year. That would mean the equivalent of an additional £20 per full plot as a cost for the society, which will need to be reflected in plot rents, unless we can collectively find ways to reduce usage.

The committee is seeking suggestions from plot holders, please email or speak to a committee member to share your thoughts.

Can we remind all plot holders to let the Ground Steward know if they spot a leak, or suspected leak (areas of soggy ground etc.)

TRADING CENTRE OPENING TIMES - SATURDAY & SUNDAY 10.30AM TO 12.15PM SATURDAY 2.30PM TO 4.15PM.

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JOBS TO DO IN MAY

VEGETABLE CARE:

Watch out for late frosts, Protect tender plants with a covering of horticultural *fleece*.

Continue earthing up potatoes, and promptly plant any still remaining. Earthing up is the drawing up of soil around the stems, leaving just 5cm of shoot uncovered so that the plant has enough foliage to continue growth.

Regularly hoe off weeds to prevent them from competing for moisture and nutrients. Try hoeing on dry days between the rows to make sure the weeds dry up and die.

Pinch out the tips of broad beans once they start to flower as this helps to discourage blackfly. This is the most effective method, far better than using sprays.

Move plants to cold frame for hardening off before planting outside. Ensure adequate ventilation in greenhouses to prevent the risk of powdery mildew and Botrytis.

Sow direct into prepared beds: French & runner beans, squash, outdoor cucumbers and pumpkin, however if this month is cold, wait until the end of the month or start crops off under cover. Sow cauliflowers and purple sprouting broccoli for harvesting next winter. Courgettes and ridge cucumbers are best started off in the greenhouse or on a windowsill for planting out in June.

Sow leeks in rows when they reach 10cm in height, use a large dibber, an old spade handle is ideal to make a hole 7cm deep, drop the leek into the hole then fill with water. The use of a fine cover such as *environ mesh* is recommended to help prevent the infestation of pests such as leek moth and the allium leaf miner.

Use the gaps between the rows of autumn plants such as brussels sprouts for short-term crops like radishes or little gem lettuces.

Sow sweetcorn in planters such as root trainers, this helps the long roots to grow without a check.

Plant out your hardened off tomatoes once the risk of frost has gone, I find that by using old glass frames or an equivalent wind break protection from the north east wind works wonders for a good crop.

A **BIG THANK YOU** to all those who organised the Easter Monday event, the volunteers who helped on the day and to those who donated food, cakes and items for the tombola. We were lucky with the weather, overcast but no rain to spoil the day.

FRUIT CARE:

Fix *pheromone traps* in apple and plum trees to help reduce the codling moth numbers. This is the month they start to mate, so trapping them will reduce the numbers of eggs. Allow one trap for every 5 trees.

Spray plum trees against aphids and spray apples & gooseberries against powdery mildew.

Dead shoots on tree fruit may indicate a number of disease problems. Check for signs of canker, bacterial canker and blossom wilt.

Tie-in new shoots of fan-trained fruit such as peaches, cherries, plums and gages.

Remove strawberry runners to conserve energy from the existing plant. If you want plants for the next year, pinch off flowers from a selective plant, this encourages them to produce green shoots and runners, save and pot up separately.

FLOWER/GRASS CARE:

Mow lawns regularly but do not cut too short as this can damage the grass. Apply selective weed-killer if necessary. Apply a light dressing of a nitrogenous fertilizer in late May. The trading centre has good quality grass seed for front and back lawns and a variety of lawn treatments.

Lift and divide overcrowded clumps of daffodils and other spring-flowering bulbs. Dead head all spent bulbs regularly as it is important to ensure as much nutrients return to the bulbs as possible. The foliage should be left intact and a little light dressing of general fertiliser to follow.

Please support the Allotment Society's Trading Centre as it brings in much needed funds for improvements.

MOWERS

Now that we are able to start cutting our grass paths obviously the mowers are in great demand at the weekends. Please make sure that when you have finished return your borrowed mower asap for the next person. All mowers must be returned at least 30 minutes before closing as mowers are always cleaned to be ready for the next person.

SATURDAY & SUNDAY CANTEEN OPEN FROM 10AM TO 12 NOON

SATURDAY ONLY OFFICE OPEN FROM 10.30AM TO 12 NOON