

On The Plot

Meet Your Neighbour

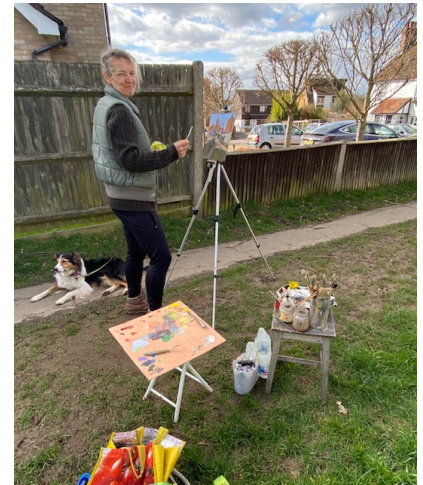
The first in an occasional series of profiles of members of our community

Lia has been allotmenting here at Sandridge Road for many years now and is one of the very lucky plot holders whose garden backs on to the site. Initially, it was her interest in protecting the space from any future development that motivated her to join the waiting list for a plot. Homegrown vegetables were very much part of her own childhood and as her children have grown Lia has wanted them to play a part in producing what they eat too.

When the family were living out in Singapore she grew okra and physalis but now the focus is on carrots, beans and cavolo nero, a firm favourite with all the family including the rabbits. Lia says her biggest challenge annually is deterring carrot fly and thinks the surest prevention is to bury environmesh into the soil around the carrots so there are no gaps and only to disturb the carrots for harvesting.

Although she trained as an architect Lia's true vocation is as an artist and the allotment site has inspired much of her work. She says that she loves the phenomenal sunsets she sees from her plot and that the light is fabulous for painting as the site slopes to the west down to Beech Bottom Dyke.

Lia's work is sold through a gallery in Notting Hill but she will be exhibiting for the first time this year at the Childwickbury Festival in the summer. Also look out for Lia's cards on sale at SRAA events such as Seedy Sunday. If you would like to see more of Lia's paintings do check out Instagram @lia_hattersley_artist



Do you have an allotment neighbour whom you'd like to tell us about, or do you have an interesting story about yourself to tell? Let us know by emailing communications@sraa.org.uk

The weather has been quite variable with warm, cold windy and wet all throw in for good measure, but a priority for the upcoming growing season is to get the ground cultivated. The council will expect tenants to have 75% of their plots either dug over or with crops growing during the growing season (ie March onwards) otherwise they may get a Non Cultivation Order issued!

Here are a few jobs on the plot for the next few weeks: -

Tidy up any veg/ leaf debris (they may attract slugs).

Dig over (if ground not frozen or sodden), or lay down cardboard with at least 15cm of compost over the top. This is the **no dig** method: layers of **compost** (composted leaf mould, manure, homemade or council compost) are added each year with the double layer of cardboard suppressing the weeds.

Plant fruit trees, bushes canes etc again if soil OK.

Joy's Spring Jobs

Sort through seeds or make a **plan** for coming year, ensuring that no plant group goes in the same space 2 years running, especially

1.brassicas, 2.onion family and 3.tomatoes & potatoes.

Garlic, onion and shallots can be **planted** in sandy light soil.

Sow seed outdoors if light soil, eg: broad beans, carrots, parsnips, beetroot, onions, lettuces, radish, peas, spinach, summer cabbage, salad leaves, leeks, Swiss chard, kohlrabi, turnip and summer cauliflower. Be guided by the weather, and sow only if conditions are suitable. Protect early sowings from slugs and pigeons.

Sow seed **indoors** of sweet peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, celery, salads and globe artichokes. Normally this requires a minimum temperature of 15 degrees C (day and night). Please note that a date we aim for planting out tender crops is the 2nd/3rd week in May.

Plant asparagus crowns.

Seedy Sunday

Despite the still cold weather, a number of seed enthusiasts turned out for our first Seedy Sunday. Thanks to donations from present and past members, we had plenty of seeds to sell and give away, and fellow allotmenters were on hand to give advice. Realising that some of us had already sorted out last year's seeds and ordered fresh supplies, we thought we might hold Seedy Sunday earlier next year.



What do you think? Let us know.

Things to look forward to this year.



From 1st April the SRAA will join the RHS Affiliated Society scheme, Britain's largest network of gardening clubs and horticultural societies, gaining access to a wealth of benefits, knowledge and resources made available to group such as ourselves.

These include:

An annual **free visit to an RHS Garden** can be made for up to 55 members,

Discounted rates for further visits, and to the RHS Flower Shows.

A speaker or speakers for an organised event is available free of charge. Many of you will remember the inspirational visit by Charles Dowding several seasons ago and we hope to build on that experience with a qualified RHS speaker.

A wide range of support and resources to help us get the most out of our membership and enhance all our members' enjoyment of the allotment experience, including access to Grass Roots, the RHS Community Gardens Magazine.

In addition, the SRAA has purchased **two reduced price entry cards** for use when visiting any of the five gardens. Each entry card admits two people with a reduction of 30% on the normal entry price. To borrow these cards, or for further information and suggestions, please contact members@sraa.org.uk

Dates for your calendar

1st April: Food Bank Collections start

Monday, 9th May: AGM

Sunday 3rd July: Great Allotment Bake Off and Strawberry Tea (or BBQ)

Sunday 25th September: Autumn Family Event



Sunday, 22nd May Plant sale

The association will be growing plants for our annual plant sale and will send you out a list of plants in the next few weeks. We will concentrate on those plants difficult for those to raise early without a greenhouse, so tender plants such as runner beans, courgettes and squashes, sweetcorn, and blight resistant tomatoes, as well as some staples such as cut and come again lettuce.



News from the committee

Over the past year, we have been meeting regularly with local councillor Helen Campbell, who has been very supportive of our aim to improve the site and make it more accessible to the community. Through Helen, we have successfully applied to Herts County Council for funding for several projects. Thanks to the hard work of volunteers this month, these are starting to take shape.



We have been given the opportunity to create some small-sized plots which we hope will help to reduce the waiting list and get more people growing fruit and veg. We felt it would help newcomers if they could have a taste of what it is like to look after some growing space for a year. So, with the approval of SADC, we are creating some starter plots alongside our communal plot for this purpose.

As part of the arrangement, the SRAA is responsible for clearing the designated plot and building the beds. On a blustery and drizzly day early in March, a group of lovely volunteers turned up for a workday, beginning the process of dismantling an old shed, packed to the gills with debris and rubbish, cutting back brambles, digging over and weeding the ground. Other volunteers provided some very welcome sustenance in the form of tea and cake.

The preparation is ongoing and we still

have the paths to lay and the starter beds to build.

If you would like to help out with the next stage, do let us know.



Starter plots started

Like a tardis, the shed seemed to have infinite capacity and an enormous quantity of rubbish and discarded goods were taken out: from a computer printer to tables and chairs, and curious items such as boxes of bottles and a box of keys. A bonfire disposed of what could be burnt. John O'Connor, courtesy of the council, will remove the rest.



On your bike...

We are improving our facilities for cyclists so we can help to reduce emissions and promote sustainable forms of transport. Herts CC agreed to fund the installation of two bike racks where you can park and secure your bikes: one is on the left of the gate, just beyond the carpark, and the second is at the top of the Camphill site. This will help reduce car use and enable plottolders and visitors to benefit by having a safe place to secure their bicycles and keep them upright while they are loading or unloading panniers, baskets, racks and trailers. Thanks to Martyn and Richard for installing the racks.



Coming soon... new benches on the communal plot

On the Wild Side with Tricia



As you sort out your seeds and plan your beds for 2022 don't forget to make space for some companion planting on your plot. This way you will work with nature rather than against it and help to increase local biodiversity. Choose the right companion to plant alongside a row of vegetables and it will attract the pests and get eaten itself rather than the veg, or choose one to deter pests with its scent or one that encourages beneficial predators. For instance dill and fennel attract lacewings and ladybirds

which feast on aphids and growing alliums alongside carrots can help deter carrot fly. Planting nasturtiums alongside brassicas helps to protect them from cabbage white caterpillars.

Do make sure you include marigolds and tagetes too which are particularly helpful at deterring aphids and whitefly.



Before you get too distracted by weeding, watering and hoeing why not tidy up the nets on your plot and secure them for the weeks ahead. Loose nets are a wildlife hazard, particularly for birds and hedgehogs.

Allotment etiquette from Gardeners' World
<https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/grow-plants/allotment-etiquette/>

- Observe the tenancy rules.
- Get to know your neighbours.
- Keep weeds under control.
- Keep your dog tethered.
- Take care when lighting fires.
- Be water wise.
- Be considerate when planting.
- Share your crops.