



# Newsletter Spring 2015

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Group. Alton Local Food Initiative



## ALFI Annual Seedy Saturday

We had our annual Seedy Saturday Seed Swap on Saturday morning, 7 February, in the Methodist Hall. The event was well attended and buzzy. There were some unusual seeds available, including purple brussel sprouts, a first for me, and various species of potato set, all for swapping or taking away for a donation.

The display boards showed some of our pots, plots and planters, and also the plans submitted by the individual pupil winners of the schools competition 2014. We also had a poster announcing our 2015 theme, which is 'Useful flowers in the vegetable garden'.

Visitors had the chance to sit down and have refreshments and find out more about ALFI 2015 from the committee or catch up with other gardening enthusiasts who supported the event. We were all learning from each other.



Ellis arrived with some cooked New Zealand yam (*Oxalis tuberosa*) for sampling. This was popular though the taste met with a mixed reception, judging by the expressions of the samplers.

We were pleased to see visitors of all ages and sign up new supporters.

The leftover seeds will be used in the pots, plots and planters or grown up for the Seedling Swap, so please put the date in your diary (Saturday 9 May)!

## PLOTS AND PLANTERS

**Station Plot** The next Station Plot working party dates are Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> March and Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> April.

**Vicarage plot.** Planting with soft fruit has been started, with both red and black-currants, gooseberries, early and later fruiting raspberry canes, and some alpine strawberries, already in place. We plan to add some blueberry bushes, and step-over apples in due course

**Westbrooke plot** There are more cabbages and leeks to come. The broad beans are a bit battered, more were started in February to fill the gaps. The next working party will be Friday March 27<sup>th</sup> from 2pm. Please note the date and come and help if you can so that we can get the plot ready for a glorious spring.

**Community Orchard** The 15 fruit trees at Jubilee Field have been pruned, are looking healthy, with plenty of swelling buds.

### Dates for your diary

**Weds 18<sup>th</sup> March Energy Alton AGM + film**  
Community Centre 7.30pm

**Sat 9<sup>th</sup> May**  
**ALFI Seedling Swap**  
Cross and Pillory Lane, Alton  
10am -3pm

**Alton Farmers' Markets**  
7<sup>th</sup> March, 11<sup>th</sup> April, 9<sup>th</sup> May, 13<sup>th</sup> June

**ALFI Harvest Feast**  
Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October, Alton Methodist Church



Our Theme for 2015 is 'Useful Flowers in the Vegetable Garden'

The following sections on **pollinator friendly flowers, edible flowers, companion planting and useful wildflowers** gives a starting-point to be thinking about this theme.



You may want to think about starting to grow some of these plants now to add to your vegetable plots later, (of course many vegetable, herb and fruit plants are in themselves very good at attracting pollinating insects including bees).

**Pollinator friendly flowers** include :- borage, clarkia, cornflower, cosmos, icelandic poppy, nigella and zinnia, most of which can also be used as cut flowers.

**Edible flowers** :- borage, chives, nasturtium, pansy/violas. Some vegetable plants have edible flowers too, so make sure that you grow enough to harvest some flowers for eating while leaving enough to go on to fruiting, eg broad bean, runner bean and courgette.

**Companion Planting**



Many flowering plants contain natural chemicals that encourage growth in other plants or protect them from pests and diseases.

plants or protect them

- (a) Plant sage, thyme or rosemary around cabbages.
- (b) Borage helps strawberry plants.
- (c) Pot marigolds (calendula) secrete a natural insect repellent. They are useful growing among most vegetables, particularly potatoes, tomatoes, peas and brassicas.
- (d) Parsley encourages bees and protects asparagus, beans and carrots.
- (e) Foxgloves help to keep plant diseases at bay (though remember, of course, that every part of this plant is poisonous).
- (f) Lavender has many uses. Muslin bags kept in drawers and wardrobes keep moths and insects away and in the garden it deters harmful insects whilst attracting bees..
- (g) Nasturtiums are another extremely useful plant which are easy to grow (they like poor soil) and seed themselves each year once established. They are good grown around fruit trees to repel harmful insects; their flowers are very attractive and edible; they attract blackfly away from other plants such as peas and beans; their seeds can be pickled and used in place of capers.

**Some wildflowers** that you may think of as weeds can be useful, but make sure that you are certain as to their identity before using any plant parts. If you have any of the following plants (weeds) in your veg plot you may like to make use of them early in the season...

**Dandelion** (*Taraxacum officinale*). Fresh leaves can be used in salads. The roots (cleaned, dried, roasted and ground) make a caffeine free coffee substitute.

**Wild Garlic** (*Allium ursinum*). Fresh chopped leaves can be used to add flavour to many dishes or used to make a pesto.

**Goosegrass** (*Gallium aparine*). **Daisy** (*Bellis perennis*), **Red Clover** (*Trifolium pratense*). Young shoots can be picked in spring and added to soups.

**Stinging nettle** (*Urtica dioica*). Young shoots can be cooked like spinach or added to soups (They are rich in Vitamin C)

**Looking ahead**

Please consider sowing a few extra seeds, and bringing any spare seedlings produced to our 'Seedling Swap' event on May 9<sup>th</sup>, where you can swap them for something new for your garden. Seedlings can also be taken for a small donation even if you have nothing to swap!

**ALSO**

Keep your eyes open for our new signs at the plots and planters around the town.

