

GROUND BREAKING!

SPRING
2020

NEWSLETTER
of THE LOW MOOR ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION
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Welcome to the Spring edition of the newsletter. We usually send this just to association members, but as we had to shut up shop before many people got the chance to join this year we are extending it to all tenants. I think we're all mighty pleased and relieved that allotment gardening is approved as exercise during lockdown and many plots are looking good as a result.

Our AGM has been postponed until at least September, with all current committee members happy to stay on, but we held a virtual committee meeting in March. We'd taken big deliveries of seeds, compost and other stock, which was no use locked away in the shop, so we decided to run a delivery service. Thanks to everyone who ordered (we had over 80 orders) from us and made the enterprise such a success. Thanks especially to everyone who helped, in whatever capacity – we sent out our 'catalogue', produced invoices, made orders up, delivered them and processed all the payments. Everyone had to work solo, which was a shame as this could have been a bit of fun in normal circumstances!

Thanks also to Joe Lyons, who has set up a new Twitter account. And to Chris from plot 131A, who took it upon himself to bag up all the rubbish that had been dumped by the notice board and take it home for collection with his own refuse.



John Gower, one of the 'couriers', ready to set off on his delivery round.

The shop now looks more like a supermarket after a visit by determined panic buyers!

PEAT BASED GROWING MEDIA: SHOULD WE BE USING IT?

What is peat?

Peat is formed by plant matter being laid down century upon century in wet, bog land environments. As the plant matter becomes water logged and sinks below the surface it enters into an environment where atmospheric oxygen is excluded. In the absence of oxygen, the aerobic decomposition of this plant matter ceases and the atmospheric carbon the plants have absorbed and fixed in their structure is locked away from the atmosphere. Over time with the continued deposition of plant matter compression occurs and peat is formed. This takes time, a long time. It takes 1000 years for 1m of peat to be laid down, that's just 1mm a year.

What are the concerns?

A peat bog is a delicate and unique environment, home to

diverse and unique plant and animal life. Many of these peat bogs have been designated as sites of special scientific interest as a result. In order to extract peat these peat bogs are drained and strip mined.

In draining the water from the peat bogs, air and thus oxygen comes into contact with the peat and the process of aerobic decomposition commences once more. As a result, the carbon stored in the peat is released into the atmosphere in the form of carbon dioxide, a gas known to contribute to global warming.

What are we doing?

Alternatives to peat based growing media are available with alternative mixes including materials such as bark, wood fibre, coir, biosoils, bracken, composted green waste and wool. Whilst having different properties, such as water retention, to peat based growing media, studies conducted by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) concluded that most plants grown in peat alternatives are comparable to those grown in peat.

At our Annual General Meeting in 2019 we discussed moving away from peat based growing media towards peat free alternatives, in light of the environmental impact of peat extraction. Whilst there was broad agreement about the need to promote environmentally friendly products, there was concern about being seen to 'dictate' to people and also the relative cost.

In the allotment shop a variety of growing media are available to members including peat free growing media. The specific mix currently on sale is produced by Sylvagrow, and is endorsed by the RHS. This year we've had a good stock of this and priced it as low as we could to make it a more affordable option for those wanting to try the peat free option and for those who have already made the switch.

So, what do you think? It's your shop – should it stock just peat-free products or should we be offering alternatives? And how about other stock – what do you want to see on the shelves? (Thanks to Richard Ward who provided the technical information)

YACIO NEWS

As our landlords, YACIO provide instructions on how government guidelines should be applied to the allotment sites in York that they manage: keep an eye on their website for updates. A recent addition is the Tenant Handbook; it will be especially useful to new tenants, but it's worth everyone having a read, as it sets out their policies and rules on things such as rubbish, fires and hosepipe use, as well as recommendations on the use of pesticides and weed killers. Please note that lettings have been suspended for the time being.

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