

# ARDS ALLOTMENTS



**A DAIRY ON THE UPS AND DOWNS OF AN  
ALLOTMENT HOLDER IN THE YEAR  
2008/2009**

## **What is an allotment?**

**The definition of an allotment is a small piece of land to till, for a small portion of rent.**

**I think it is much more than that, to most it would mean a pleasant and relaxing place to work, on your own, or with others, after a hard days work. If retired, a place away from the house. It is also taking pleasure in seeing your hard work mature and grow, food harvested when at its best, and to know it has been done by yourself. This gives a feeling of great satisfaction.**

**The other aspect is the social side, if you do not know how to grow, or use something, there is always someone who will show, or try to tell you what to do.**

**Putting the world to rights is another pastime to be indulged, this is known in the business as social chit chat and could last a couple of hours of more.**

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## **JANUARY**

This picture was taken at the beginning of the year when work started, it has been double dug, to prepare the beds for the potato/onion sets and seeds.



This is the time when you need to work out where, vegetable, fruit etc., should be planted it is now ideal to make a plotter plan so a three year rotation plan can be put into place.

### **A Basic Guide would be as follows:-**

**Group 1.** Onions, Leeks, Marrows, Peas, all Beans, Sweetcorn, Lettuce.

**Group 2.** Brussels Sprouts, Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Swede, Turnips, Radishes

**Group 3.** Potatoes, Carrots, Parsnips, Beetroot, Tomatoes.

Rotating the crops in these groups should increase yields and combat disease.

## **FEBRUARY**

The beginning of February saw a few good days of reasonable

**weather so was able to rake, and prepare the ground.**

**The Compost has matured well during the winter months, and will be ready to spread when needed in the coming months.**

**As the weather was hit or miss over the winter months the days being able to work on the allotment were spasmodic, approximately 3 to 5 hours at a time,**



**Starting on the allotment has been hard, before you can do any decent work the ground has to be reasonably dry, and not boggy, or turning over is very heavy and hard work.**

**This is the time to check you compost bins, or arrange for manure to be brought in.**

**Not many people are down on the allotment to have a chat, even though there is blue sky's, the weather is still very cold.**

### **MARCH**

**At the start of the month weather has improved and the ground is ready for hard graft.**

**The time has arrived, the plot holders can have a cup of coffee and the odd cigarette, and chat over the fences, and try to put the world to rights.**

### **Happy Days**



**The different seed varieties, potato and onion sets should have now been purchased ready to take down to the plot. Hopefully it won't be too long before the weather gives us a decent break so planting can begin.**

**If onions/potato's were good the previous year, try two or three different varieties. This way you will get to know the type of ground which is best for certain types. If harvest was bad last year, hope for the best this. A lot of preparation is now being done on the allotment so hope the weather will last.**

### **APRIL**

**The rain has eased over the last few days, so more allotment holders have ventured down, starting in earnest to get going before the next shower.**



**As you can see by the photo the weather has taken it's toll. One minute it is rain, then sun, not enough hours to do the tilling that you want to do, or any other jobs, like keeping the paths free. Managed to plant a few rows of onions.**

**If everything grew as good as the weeds.**

**The hours able to work January to March were minimal approximately 18 hours in total, but this is average over the first few winter months.**

## **MAY**

**The planting has started to show, and the onion are beginning to show above ground at long last. Lets hope the weather improves, it's been high winds, and driving rain at the beginning of this month.**

**Managed to get some weeding done, and the grass cut on the paths in between the cold showery weather, also a few rows of potato's have been planted.**



**Allotment holders are now filtering down, looking to do some serious work.**

**The compost is now ready for the beds, it pays dividends to look after it even over the cold winter months, this will save you money if you do it correctly. (See end of Dairy for a short guide to composting)**

**The last few days of May have been very hot, and managed to till Sweet corn, Sugar snaps, Peas, Beetroot and Carrots.**

**Plenty of weeding done, cutting grass, and also feeding with Phosphorus.**

## **JUNE**

**The 1<sup>st</sup> of the month was blistering heat, 24 degrees, the hottest day of the year up to date. Some people on the allotment had their shirts off for a little while, but soon put them back on when the hot sun burnt their backs.**



**The ground has been very dry, watering has been a must, even though it has rained. Everything that has been sown is coming on great. With a little bit of T.L.C hopefully this will carry on throughout the summer months.**

**Most of the work this month has been to tidy, this makes gardening easier to manage. The last planting of beetroot, and carrots are now finished, spraying, putting up canes for peas/beans have also been done.**

**Keeping a record/dairy as you finish each day, makes it easier to look back on later in the year, to check if work you wanted to do is finished, or still to be done.**

## **JULY**

**As you can see by the photo taken on the 1<sup>st</sup> July everything is growing really well.**



**Allotment growers are down on their plots now as the weather and the produce is growing really well. Keeping the weeds and grass cut is a full time job.**

**Jobs that were done this month were spraying, feeding, adding more canes to the pea rows, and thinning out beetroot, the small ones were taken home, and pickled ready for the winter. The peas and potato's are doing well, and managed to take some home as they were ready to eat.**

**This was a busy but productive month, and a lot of basic work was done.**

**Several more hours have been worked this month lets hope it can be kept up.**

## **AUGUST**

**As the picture shows everything that has been tilled has come along with excellent results. A friend stopped by for a few words and to admire the allotment, she has been a keen gardener in her time.**



**The first few days were the worst yet for wet and windy weather.**

**The beginning of the month beetroot was thinned out again, feeding the plants, and tidying up has been a priority. Most of the time has been making the most of any fine spells to do as much as you can. Towards the middle of the month a good feed again for the crops was a must as we had a few fine days.**

**The end of the month saw the start of the harvesting from the allotment. Now is the time to sort out how you are going to store your produce over the winter months. If you are not sure how to store, go to the library, garden centre, or the internet, these are a source of good information.**

**AUGUST**



**Above is some of the produce that has been picked and brought back from the allotment. The onions are a reasonable size, as are the beetroot and potato's. The runner beans could have been a lot longer, but are still tasty and so are the sugar snaps. The green tomato's grown at home will have to be made into chutney as the sun never seemed to ripen them.**

**The open day on the 10th of the month was a lovely day, not like last year when it pelted with rain. Several people came to look around and were quite impressed with the layout and facilities of the allotments.**

**The Bank Holiday was high winds and torrential rain, but managed to thin out beetroot/carrots, and picked peas/sugar snaps, also cutting down the stems on sugar snaps, as these are now finished.**

## **SEPTEMBER**

**The corn is growing well and has started to go brown which means it is starting to ripen. This is the first time growing it, so this year it**

will be trial and error. Next year will give them a little longer to ripen. You only learn by trying new things out, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

At home plenty of chutney and preserves etc., have been made, this will keep us going till next season, also the peas, carrots and green beans have been frozen down for the winter months.



This has been a good year for onions, and the corn as you can see is nearly ready for harvesting.

The weather has been good, so managed to do quite a few hours over the month, like weeding, feeding, keeping the paths clear and sorting out the compost bins, getting them ready for next year.

### OCTOBER

The first few days have been really good so have had the chance to get the rest of our produce off the allotment. A friend comes down to

**help take home the last very heavy bags of potato's and onions and for her trouble she gets some of the produce for the family.**



**As there is only the sweet corn left to harvest, now is the best time to sort out the compost bins for next year. Compost bins are usually better on a 3 bin rotation, making sure that plenty of air gets through, taking out any large twigs that might have gone in by mistake, and putting in old crushed up newspapers. If you find any worms put these in the bins, as they help to break down debris. Adding Garrotte to the compost bins will also help to break down onion/potato tops, peelings, egg shells, and also tea bags(break these open).**

**Half of the ground has now been turned over the once, ready for next year.**

### **NOVEMBER**

**This is the last photo from the allotment as it has now gone full circle. All the produce has now been harvested and stored, or made into pickles and jams for the next year.**

**At the latter part of this year it will be starting again, hopefully with the same good results that were recorded this year.**



**Before you leave the allotment for any length of time always make sure that your tools for the gardening are well cleaned, this will stop any rust etc., getting on them.**

**Over the next few months the allotment will be dug over again, keeping on top of the soil, adding any manure will ensure easier digging in 2010.**

**Now you can relax a little and enjoy the fruits of all that hard work.**

## **Was it worth it?**

**Fresh air, meeting people, being alone with your thoughts, and something to show at the end of**

**all that work, that money can't buy.**

**I would say a big YES.**

**Below is the approximate hours worked for 2008-2009**

<b><u>MONTH</u></b>	<b><u>HOURS</u></b>	<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>
<b>January</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>February</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>March</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>April</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>May</b>	<b>41 ½</b>	<b>95 ½</b>
<b>June</b>	<b>63 ¾</b>	<b>159 ¼</b>
<b>July</b>	<b>55 ½</b>	<b>214 ¾</b>
<b>August</b>	<b>72 ¼</b>	<b>287</b>
<b>September</b>	<b>80 ¼</b>	<b>367 ¼</b>
<b>October</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>432 ¼</b>
<b>November</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>452 ¼</b>
<b>December</b>	<b>5 hours approx</b>	<b>502 ¼</b>

**If you had a good harvest now is the time to make Jams or Chutneys for the following year.**

### **Just a few tips and recipes**

**The usual proportion for JAM is 454g/1lb Sugar to 454g/1lb Fruit.**

**Too much sugar may cause crystallisation. Too little may prevent setting.**

**Covers should be put on when either hot or cold, never when tepid, as this can cause mould growth. Make sure jars are always clean and sterilized, and store in a cool., dark, dry, well ventilated area.**

**There are several ways to sterilize jars, but I find below is the easiest,**

**To sterilize jars Oven Method - make sure that the jars are cleaned and dried before putting them spaced slightly apart on a baking sheet, or kitchen paper on a firm tray. Rest lids on top or to the sides. Place in a cold oven then heat to 110C/225F Electric, Gas ¼ and bring to heat and leave for 30mins. Leave to cool slightly before filling. If not to be used immediately, cover with clean cloth and warm again before using.**

### **ONIONS TIP**

When stringing onions, use old tights/pop soxs this makes it quick and easy, and saves a lot of time. Make sure they are properly dried out. You can open freeze onions, but they will have to be sliced and can only be used for soups, as when defrosted will become soft.

### **POTATO'S**

Use washing baskets, with alternate rows of potato's and Hessian, this is easier to store if you do not have much space.

## **A few of my favourite recipes**

### **APPLE OR APPLE/BEETROOT CHUTNEY**

4 lbs Apples (½ the quantity of Apples and use 2lbs Beetroot)

1 ½ lbs Onions

3 lbs Demerara Sugar

1 pint Vinegar

¼ oz Pepper

2lb Raisons

1oz Ground Ginger

Pinch of salt to taste

### **Method**

Boil together for ½ hr Apples, Onion, and Sugar

Then add Ginger, Raisons, Vinegar and pepper and boil for a further 1 hr, add salt to taste, at the end.

Put into sterilized jars when nearly cold.

Can be stored for up to one year.

## **BEETROOT AND ORANGE PRESERVE**

**This is a must with Cheddar, Stilton and strong cheese for a great taste.**

**350g/12oz raw Beetroot**

**350g/12oz eating Apples**

**300ml/1/2 pt Malt Vinegar**

**200g/7oz Granulated Sugar**

**225g/8oz Red Onions finely chopped**

**1 Garlic Clove**

**2 Oranges finely grated rind and juice**

**5ml/1 tsp ground allspice**

**5ml/1 tsp salt**

### **Method**

**Scrub, thinly peel beetroot, cut into 1cm/1/2 in pieces.**

**Peel, core Apples to same, (or us a coarse blade or food processor).**

**Put Vinegar And Sugar in pan, heat and stir until sugar has dissolved.**

**Add all other ingredients, bring to boil, reduce heat then simmer for 40 mins.**

**Increase the heat again stir constantly to stop the bottom of the pan from burning for about 10mins or until chutney has gone thick.**

**Spoon the chutney into sterilized jars, check for air bubbles, cover, and store for at least 2 weeks before eating. Use within 6 moths.**

**A good Christmas Drink is**

**DAMSON /PLUM GIN.**

**What you need is a large Onion Jar (Sterilized)  
or Sweets Jar**

**4 lb Damsons (No need to stone)or plums**

**4 lb White Sugar**

**1 ½ Litres Gin (Cheapest)**

**Method**

**Layer Damsons and Sugar about 4/5 times in the  
jar**

**Pour on the Gin to neck of the jar.**

**Seal the jar securely and then roll the contents  
every day for 1 week, after that about twice a  
week till all the sugar is dissolved.**

**Keep for two months or more to let juice  
ferment, rolling occasionally.**

**Strain off into smaller bottles, or the same that  
the gin came in. This can be filled with any gin  
that is left over. The Damsons can be eaten but  
take care they are very alcoholic.**

**Don't Drink and Drive**

## **BEETROOT JELLY**

**Beetroot enough to fill the pots  
Blackcurrant Jelly 1 packet  
Dark Vinegar 1pt**

### **Method**

**Boil the beetroot, (do not skin or take the root off, this will make them bleed), for approx 20mins. When cooked, let cool, skin and dice into small chunks.**

**Put beetroot into warm sterilized jars.**

**Make up the jelly with hot vinegar (not water) let to cool slightly then fill jars. Make sure all air bubbles are released.**

**When cool put on wax top, and seal in the usual way.**

**HAPPY JAM/CHUTNEY MAKING**

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**This dairy has been interesting to write, and hopefully it will be a little bit informative to anyone who reads it, and also encourage some to take the plunge and become a person who likes a challenge, enjoys his own company and is known as the**

**HAPPY ALLOTMENT GARDENER.**

**This dairy was written by Maggie Comer on behalf of John Comer  
2008/2009**

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