
Allotment Diary

How things grew in Plot A7

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January

A time for planning

TIME SPENT: 2 HOURS COSTS INCURRED: £262.31 (INC. CONACRE)

The start of a new year at the allotment, and the start of our first full year as allotment holders.

We have spent Christmas and the new year discussing what crops we'd like to plant, see list below

Kale
Broccoli
Peas
French beans
Broad beans
Leeks
Garlic
Red onions
White onions
Runner beans
Carrots
Strawberries

Sweet pea
Cornflowers
Sunflowers.

We are well aware that we know very very little about growing our own, so we are using this year as an 'experimental' year, one to learn from our mistakes, and see how we can do things better next year. So most of January was spent reading about various crops and then buying those seeds that are now available.

February

Hurry up and get warm!

TIME SPENT: 3 HOURS COSTS INCURRED: £16.52

Lots more reading done this month, getting impatient now to get things underway!! A little time has been spent down on the plot, clearing the beds of remaining plants and weeds and putting membrane over them in preparation for the coming year.

We are slowly clearing the plot from the previous owner, and making the space our own, so lots of time spent wondering where to put beds etc.

March

Woohoo. Planting Time

TIME SPENT: 5 HOURS COSTS INCURRED: £15.98

Finally planting season is here. Most of our crops are being started at home in the grow house, this will give the seedlings a better chance to survive slug attacks etc, and allows us to keep them warmer for longer.

Early this month we planted;
15 Kings 'Cayenne' chilli seeds
16 Kings 'Apache' chilli seeds
40 Kings 'Sutton' broad bean seeds
15 Kings 'Gardeners delight' tomato seeds
50 Kings 'Musselburgh' leek seeds.
40 B&Q 'Red Baron' onion sets
40 B&Q 'Stuttgarter Giant' onion sets

These are all planted in trays in the grow house, using B&Q multi-purpose compost.

At the end of March, we went down to the plot and spent some time weed killing, building a raised bed at the front of the plot for flowers, and we're able to transplant some of the onions already to their spot on bed 1.



April

The busy month

TIME SPENT: 20 HOURS COSTS INCURRED: £27.46

The month when it all kicks off!!

A lot of time was spent on the site this month, enabled by a glorious months weather (and very understanding grandparents, who have been enlisted for baby sitting duties!).

Early in the month, in-fact on the 9th, a good morning was spent planting out the broad bean seedlings, red onions and garlic plants. We also began to dig over the back third of the site, and raked as we went, attempting to clear away the weeds. Today marked the first time this year when there were a lot of folks around, so we spent sometime catching up with neighbours, sharing some tips (well to be fair, we were mostly absorbing all the information anyone could give us!) and finding out what fellow gardeners are planting this year. The atmosphere was good, and with the clean air comes a feeling of hope for the season ahead.

At home too, things are progressing. Spent some time today (10th April) planting;

30 Kings 'Streamline' runner beans
15 Kings 'Safari' dwarf french beans.

Again, both planted in the grow house.

Towards the end of the month we started to really pick up our attention to the actual allotment and spent a fair amount of time down there. Amongst the general task of watering and weeding, we filled our new front bed with top soil and planted cornflowers and Alaska nasturtiums, and began to treat our bread beans for an infestation of black fly. We are hoping to grow our crops completely organically, and so, I spoke to Maurice to ask his advise on how to treat. He suggested soapy water, and often, sprayed direct onto the leaves. A little bit of Internet research confirmed this (not that I would doubt Maurice, but I like to check these things for myself!) and so we have started this rather laborious task, every time we are down!



May

Always time for a chat.

TIME SPENT: 20 HOURS COSTS INCURRED: £25.50

We are now down most evenings (even if it's only briefly) to treat the broad beans. They seem to be thanking us for this and have certainly rooted well and even begun to grow a bit. Growth is slow, but I'm hopeful that they are taking the sure but steady path!

All the chillis that we are growing have now been transplanted into their bigger, final pots and most of the plants seem to be doing very well.

Some of the runner beans are now being transplanted to the site and roped to teepee style frames, which were constructed with some bamboo, donated by Maurice!

More time is being spent digging over the back third of the plot and trying to level it out, our intention is to give Eve (our 10 month old daughter) a space to play in when she's a little older. So we are trying to level this ground and de-weed as much as possible before sowing grass seed.

And of course, we always have time for a good chat with our neighbours, and those further afield (John and Dennis being the main culprits!)



June

Forgot about the peas

TIME SPENT: 26 HOURS COSTS INCURRED: £15.99

Yet again this year, it was the end of June before I remembered to sow my peas, so as at home in previous years, I probably won't expect to get too much from them.

Also transplanted the Dwarf French beans to their spot against the trellis on bed one this month. I've actually only grown a small number of these, in-fact I started off with just 15 seeds at home and am only transplanting 6 of these.



July

Silly onions

TIME SPENT: 15 HOURS COSTS INCURRED: £7.25

We've been on holiday for a couple of weeks, and by the time we returned to the allotment in the middle of July, it seemed that things had gone crazy! The hot hot months of April, May and June are gone, and have been replaced by wet weather. The onions seem to have taken this change as some sort of license to do whatever they feel like, and out of approx. 40 onions, well over half of them have gone to seed. Well folks, this is when hind sight would be great. We now know that if we had caught the seed heads before they really had a chance to bolt, we could have chopped them off and probably saved the onions. Instead, as beginners, we had no clue what to do with them, so figured we'd leave them be and harvest all the onions together and see what the effect had been. At least they gave our plot a bit of height and certainly caused a talking point for people!

Our runner beans are suffering from having been transplanted too early, and unfortunately we have lost 3 of 9 plants to slugs. Again, a lesson learnt.

However, our broad beans have all survived the black fly infestation, and are starting to flower, perhaps a little later than last year, but I suspect that might be the weather.

And our cornflowers are just incredible, they are tall and all starting to open out now with a beautiful bright blue flower head. We planted these, not only because they are one of my favourite wild flowers, but also because of the number of bees, and other insects that will thrive around them.



August

Open day

TIME SPENT: 20 HOURS COSTS INCURRED: £0.00

The month of the open day. Unfortunately the weather has been no better this month, which has hindered our efforts to get to the allotment (can anyone say fair weather gardeners!). However, we've made the most of the time we could get down, and Stuart (my own personal digger!) has got the back third as flat as we want it and has started to make some raised beds for back there!

The strawberries we planted don't look like they are going to take at all, and are certainly suffering for the rain. Ah well, they didn't cost us anything (having been rescued from the clearing of beds last year), so it's no great loss. The runner beans are slowly climbing up the teepees, and have a few wee red flowers starting to show. The French beans sadly, have been completely destroyed by slugs - again with the hindsight!

The sweet pea, that was planted from seed this year, is much further behind than the plants from last year - maybe planted too late, and also too much rain and not enough sun I'm guessing.

On a positive note though, the cornflowers are spectacular, and it looks like we have enough broad beans to last us all through the winter! Started to cut a few of these today, the lovely big juicy pods, and the beans are a good size inside.

Lovely day for the open day, was a little showery, but a good turn out and lots of chat, from old and new friends!



September

Harvesting

TIME SPENT: 11 HOURS COSTS INCURRED: £0.00

This is really the month when most of our produce should be ready to harvest. Sadly, it looks as though we haven't done as well as we'd have liked. The onions have indeed, mostly gone to seed, and those that didn't are pretty tiny! We got a handful of runner beans, and, as expected, no peas. However, we are coming down with broad beans!!! We have easily collected 1kg of these, which I have brought home, podded and frozen. We'll not be short of broad beans for the winter months! The leeks are still growing, so we are leaving the where they are so we can harvest them over the winter months.



October

Cleaning up

TIME SPENT: 7 HOURS COSTS INCURRED: £0.00

So with not much harvesting to do, we haven't spent a lot of time at the allotment this month. After collecting all the broad beans, we cut 3/4 of the plants down and added them to the compost bin, and left the other 1/4 to rot back into the ground. The onion bed has now been cleared, and the onions and discarded. What we did get out of the garlic plants, has been brought home to to hung and dried. The cornflowers have all stopped flowering and have returned to their 'weedy' look. They will be dug up and the bed dug over, in preparation for next year.

November

Coming to the end

TIME SPENT: 3 HOURS COSTS INCURRED: £0.00

So here we are, back full circle. We find we don't have a huge lot of time to spend at the allotment this month, with the nights turning, so we are trying to squeeze time into a seemingly hectic weekend schedule! However, when we do make it there we plan to clear the plot in preparation for the winter, pulling out plants that won't produce again, and spraying a little weed killer. We are leaving our leeks in the ground, to be harvested, just as and when we need them. Also, most importantly, we have made a final note of where all the crops were, so as not to plant the same seeds in the same spot again next year - using the principle of crop rotation.

The year in review

A lesson learnt....

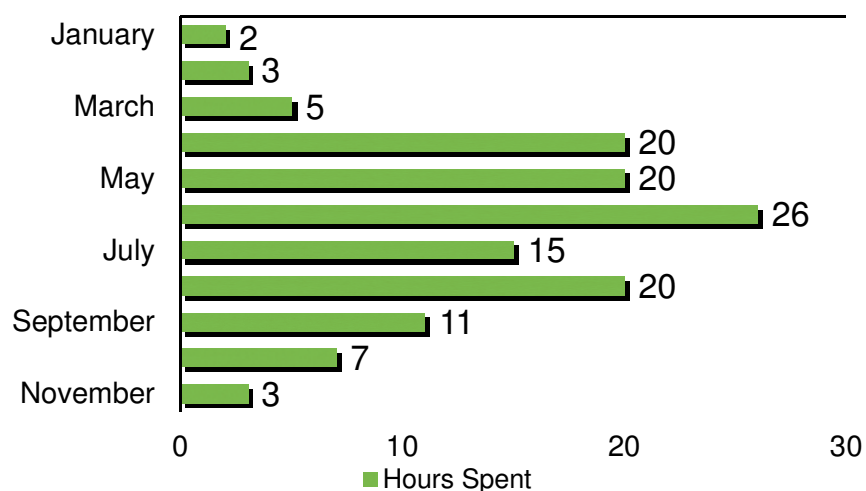
TOTAL TIME SPENT: 132 HOURS TOTAL COSTS INCURRED: £352.92

I think the one thing we learnt this year is just how much work there is in running an allotment and that with a newborn baby, we perhaps bit off more than we could chew. In retrospect, we should have been more modest in both the range of crops and the number of each we planted. However, we haven't been put off, and with our little lady now on her feet, it will be much easier for us to spend more time at the allotment, and therefore stay on top of the growth. I would always have worked under the principle of planting almost twice as many as you think you want, so that 50% of them can fail and you still have a good crop. However, I think I learnt this year, that this is quite wasteful, and perhaps better to only plant a few more than you think you want.

The other main thing we have learnt, is to allow the crops to become quite a bit bigger before transplanting to the allotment. I think the main difference between a 'kitchen' garden and the allotment is that its very hard to keep on top of the slugs etc at the allotment (particularly when taking the non-chemical path), and so to give your crops the best chance it's better to nurse them at home until they are really pretty big and therefore hardy.

But there really isn't any better way to spend a day, lots of fresh air, catching up with neighbours, getting new tips and advice, and a bit of hard work, brilliant!

Looking forward to next year already!



Produce	Spent	Market Value
Chilli	£2.37	£2.00
Broad Beans	£1.32	£8.00
Tomato	£0.54	£1.50
Leeks	£0.13	£10.00
Red Onion	£0.99	nil
White Onion	£0.99	nil
Potato	£3.00	£2.00
Runner Beans	£1.17	nil
Dwarf French Beans	£0.24	nil