



A new web-site ... a blog.



Thanks to 'MDDA' who have funded and assisted us in getting a new and improved web-site up on the net.

They have put us in touch with 'eConnected' who have produced a blog which certainly has the WOW factor.

What's a blog?

Think of it as an electronic roll of paper on which stories—with pictures—are pasted. The stories fall into categories—Growing, Allotments, Bio-diversity, Organics, Unclassified and Links.

Comments!

Anyone can comment on the stories— they just have to register first, then they can have their say below the story.

Writing Stories!

To post the stories, then one can become an Author and then you can put your work on the net.

Google Maps!

Added to the blog is an amazing mapping blog. It is found under 'Finding a Plot'. All sites are divided into 3— based on the chances of getting a plot. The sites are set out on a map, and on selecting one, its details can be displayed. An added feature is the site can be seen from space.

Forum!

Finally, there is a forum where anyone can post questions, set topics, gossip, etc.

A fantastic tool for all allotment sites in Manchester—and the North-west!

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A New Web—site

- INVOLVEMENT WANTED
- Aids Communication
- Sites are easier to find
- Help and guidance just a click away
- Links with other sites and organizations.

www.amas.org.uk : We need Authors

For this site to be a success, we need a regular supply of stories—about growing something, about your allotment site, about those useful tips that every site abounds with, about growing organically, about encouraging wildlife on your plot..... etc.

Don't worry about putting it on the net—we'll show you how.

We run an Allotment Competition

Those who are new to Allotment Gardening might not realise that the Council runs a competition for best plots.

This is an annual event run by the council for plot holders to compete against each other for a number of trophies and Certificates. The competition is open to all plot holders in the city.

The judges tour each site to assess each plot entered. They mark each plot according to the set rules and the trophies and certificates are then awarded.

A Presentation Evening is then held at the Oasis Suite on the Platt Lane complex in November.

Starting seeds off

With the weather getting warmer and the days longer, now is the time to start with the wonderful job of sowing seeds and starting the year off.

However, it is not wise to start sowing if the conditions aren't right. Cold, wet soil with low air temperatures do not give good germinating and growing conditions. There are ways round this which do not involve greenhouse.

As a result of many years of growing in cold wet clay soils I started sowing all my seeds in trays and/or modules, except for root crops which I sow direct.

The method is to sow seeds in ½ size trays (these are big enough), and then when the seeds have produced their first leaves they are transplanted into modules (I use 24's.) These allow the seedlings to grow on until they have produced their first true leaves.

I transplant them into 5cm pots. If the weather or ground is still not suitable I then transplant again into even bigger pots when the roots reach the edge of the pots.

This method can be used to start plants off

At this event there is a speaker and a buffet is provided.

Be part of it—it is a bench-mark of how you are going with your plot and it helps encourage the Allotment Community.

Find out more from your site Secretary, The Allotment Officer or from our web-site -

www.amas.org.uk



Mr & Mrs Brandsheidt (Broadhurst) John Richards (Frenchbarn Lane) and Fiona Procter (Tonbridge Rd) - Winners of the Jack Bennett Rose Bowl

early inside greenhouses or polytunnels or I have used it outside with just a frame of timber covered in clear plastic to keep off the wind. This will give several weeks more preparation time for the land to be ready and give you an early crop.

Frost!

This is the real enemy to early plants and you have to watch the weather forecast for frost warnings—a good guide is 'Country File' on BBC1 on Sundays—the programme gives a 5 day weather forecast.

Be prepared to cover your plants with newspaper—or better still, horticultural fleece may save your plants. The idea is that the plants defrost slowly, thus coming to less damage.

Slugs & Snails!

Wet weather and tasty new plants means these pests are keen to dine on them. Use slug pellets if you must but in moderation please—and don't forget to read the instructions.





So You want an Allotment!

Having an allotment is a new way of life for many people, not so at first, but once they are hooked then they can't spend enough time on their plot.

So how do you go about it? There are, as always, several ways.

You can ring the Allotment Manager who will give you the phone number of the nearest site secretary and advise you where there are empty plots or there is a waiting list.

If you know where the nearest site is, you could call round when it is open to ask about getting a plot

You try the Web Page: www.amas.org.uk

There is a shortage of plots in some areas of the city, but large numbers of plots available in others so you will have to decide if you want to travel. Travelling is not ideal and certainly adds to your 'Plot-time' but may be unavoidable.

There is one fact that you must consider if you do take on an allotment and this is that it will take a lot of time on a regular basis to prepare the site and to keep it in good condition so that your crops grow well.

Healthy exercise producing fresh tasty vegetables where you can exploit reducing your 'carbon footprint' to your heart's content.

Jobs to be getting on with!

This is the time of year that is one of the most demanding of all. It is when the final ground preparations are carried out, seeds are sown, weeding is continued and all the last minute jobs completed that should have been done months ago.

It is also the time when many mistakes can be made that will affect the way the growing year produces. The first mistake many people make is to sow too early, this can be for one of several reasons.

1. The ground is too cold or wet – later sowings in better conditions soon catch up
2. The dates given on seed packets are based on sowing times for the south – we are at least, two weeks later.
3. Root crop seeds sown direct in cold, wet ground will rot – in the case of parsnips with a long germination period a crop can be lost.
4. Don't sow too many seeds at one time, you only want to have enough plants for the ground you have. In the case of lettuce and other similar crops only sow a

few seeds on a regular basis to give you a continual crop.

Pruning of fruit trees and bushes should be completed if not already done before they start to grow.

Work in greenhouse and polytunnels should be well under way – but there is still time to sow early carrots or lettuce which will crop before the main crops go in.

Covering your plot with an old carpet has to be viewed with caution especially for the organic gardener—who wants their crops tainted with 'Shake & Vac' - consider black plastic (warms up the soil underneath) or landscape fabric.

If you have not already done so—get your compost bin(s) set up so that your vegetable matter (NO meat products).

Add rain-water collecting guttering to collect water off your shed or greenhouse.

Room for a bird-box?



AMAS association of manchester allotment societies

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Helping Manchester grow

For those interested in Wildlife,
look up:

<http://www.wildaboutmanchester.info/site/>

Haven't got network facilities—
then visit your local library. You
should be offered help to get
online.

The Association of Manchester Allotment Societies was formed in 1993 with thirty of the city's larger allotment sites affiliated to AMAS, the district federation of the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG). The remaining ten sites, mostly too small to support a society, are managed directly by Manchester Leisure, with a dedicated Allotments Manager based in Alexandra Park.

AMAS affiliated societies enjoy a large degree of self-management on their sites, taking on new plot holders, collecting rents, supplying keys, organising shop facilities and shows, holding regular meetings, and electing officers and committees to carry out these services. Societies usually send delegates to the bi-monthly AMAS conferences (and also to the Annual General Meeting in March each year. It is at these meetings that the problems common to all Manchester's allotment sites can be discussed. At the AGM, officers of AMAS are elected, and these individuals form the nucleus of the group which meets regularly with ML officers as an Allotments Consultation Group (ACG). While the main business of this group each year is concerned with requests from societies for Priority work on their sites, all aspects of allotment management in the city are up for discussion, in particular the implementation of the recommendations in the 'Best Value Review' of Outdoor Leisure.

Since its formation, AMAS has been instrumental in negotiating with ML many items of benefit to Manchester's plot-holders, for example:

- Re-instatement of the Annual Allotments Competition and Presentation Evening
- Revision of the criteria for judging plots in the competition
- No increase in plot rental charges since 1997
- An annual package of priority works for allotment sites
- The production and distribution of a newsletter
- An agreed skip allocation for regular removal of rubbish
- Communal compost bays erected on a number of sites
- An updated web site—www.amas.org.uk

AMAS changes

AMAS is hoping to bring about some real changes at their AGM on 13th March

Besides the usual President, Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, we see the posts of:

Assistant Secretary—to act as 'Minutes Secretary' for the of meeting we attend.

Editor—to oversee the newsletter and web-page.

Logistics Officer—to oversee the vast number of facts and figures that we need.

Trust Officer—to look at the possibility of Manchester City Council letting us manage all of the City's Allotments

Press Officer—to liaise with the Press and promote allotments.

It is doubtful that these places will be filled at the AGM but will form a basis of 'working towards'.....