

## Word from the Secretary

I'm not sure why I do it. Every year around mid November I decide to send out the 'winter' newsletter – so people have something to take their minds of Christmas, so when all the world is loosing their heads in the commercialism, you can read something a bit more 'real'. Then my work place goes crazy, with the supermarkets demanding vegetable and fruit labels like the world is going to end. Then I am too tired when I get in from work to sit down at the computer and give the time that all the hard work from fellow WENnies on the articles that come through my email it deserves. Then, before I know it, I have a whole 10 days off over Christmas to compile the newsletter. Excellent I think. I visit my mom, other halves mom, my sister and her family. I take a day out to take Tommy for a long walk over Epping Forest, stopping off on the way home to catch up with an old friend and her new baby (yes, she is using cotton nappies!). Another day visiting relatives, and then boyfriends' family coming over for lunch. A day to clean out the chickens and clear some of the garden and a days housework. A day in bed with a hangover (oh come on! You knew there would be *one* day). And before you know it, I'm back at work!

So that is why it takes me nearly two months to put together the newsletter. You'll find updates on the DigIn plot, book and product reviews, information on the new 'Keep It Clear' campaign as well as articles on Bumblebees.

### Christmas Cards??

\*\*\* I know they are pretty, but the environment does pay a heavy price - very few greetings card manufacturers are using recycled paper for their cards. One tree needs to be chopped down for every 3000 Christmas cards, and in the UK alone, around 1 billion Christmas cards will be sent this year [source: Defra]. That's over 300,000 trees.

If you still have your Christmas Cards lying around waiting to be recycled, why not pop them down to your local Haven's Hospice shop. They are recycling the cards to raise funds and could earn up to 5p for each card they receive.

Next year, seriously think about sending ecards. There is a huge selection available on line.\*\*\*

### Text Alerts

If you wish to receive information on the next WEN event direct to your mobile, text 'Yes Please' with your name to 07941154166. You will not be charged for any texts you receive, and you can cancel at any time by texting 'no more' to the same number. It's a great way to receive a little reminder in the busy world we live in.



Bumblebees need our Help!

We are all aware that bees are vital to our food production and bumblebees are important also - and aren't they beautiful!

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust is an organisation that aims, in the main, to increase habitats for the UK's rarest bumblebees, the shrill carder and great yellow.

For more information visit; [www.bumblebeeconservation.org](http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org).

They have a beautiful poster for bumblebee identification.

We know that we could help by planting more bee friendly flowers. And it is a lovely idea to create meadow areas in our lawn so that we reduce the amount of mowing we have to do!! The BBCT have lots of information about how to do this and what flowers to plant.

Reading their latest newsletter I came across this information:-

"There is a trend for creating meadows purely from annuals, often of non-native species. The ground is prepared each year to encourage annuals to flourish. Whilst colourful, this is not as good for bumblebees as natural meadow habits and they also require considerably more work. We'd recommend a more sympathetic approach, using good management to encourage the wildflowers that are already in the sward to blossom and produce seeds. Where seed addition is needed, this should be of a local origin using species which are in keeping with the ecology of the area".

So it could be a win-win situation. Less mowing, collecting seeds from local areas for free and helping bumblebees in the process!! At the allotment we have a lovely blue flower growing called Viper's Bugloss which is apparently very attractive to bumblebees so I will collect some of that seed straight away.

Carol Ferrett

### *Waste engine oil*

*If you're changing the oil in your car, dispose of it with care - it's illegal to pour it down the drain, where it can pollute waterways and kill wildlife. Find out, where to dispose of yours at [www.oilbankline.org.uk](http://www.oilbankline.org.uk)*

### Book review by Eileen Peek

"Rarely a day goes by without us being told that in the UK we have an obesity epidemic with a quarter of the population now being considered clinically obese. We aren't exercising enough and we eat all the wrong food. Mums are blamed for giving their children junk food and the NHS is having to pick up the tab of treating the massive health problems which accompany obesity. OK, much of this seems to be common sense but the elephant in the room, never or rarely mentioned, is that we live in a world permeated with synthetic chemicals, the products of the massively profitable petro-chemical industry. Research is gradually building up showing our health is being damaged by many of the chemicals in everyday products such as cosmetics and toiletries, building materials, plastic products, dyes, polyester fabrics, the lining of cans containing food and even some dental resins. It is suggested that some of these chemicals alter the metabolism in the body and essentially stop us losing fat. They also disrupt our hormone system which controls cell growth.

If you'd like to know more we'd recommend Pat Thomas's book "The 21st Century is Making You Fat."

## DigIn News

With the tail end of Autumn, now with a bite in the air, we have been busy generally tidying up and bedding the allotment down ready for winter. We have been amazingly blessed with some glorious Autumn days, especially after last year's headlong pitch into an early winter. Sitting outside the shed with a freshly brewed cuppa looking at our hard work and enjoying the Autumn sunshine who could ask for a more contented group! Due to these balmy days, and with the hindsight of our lack of early preparation for the cold long spell last year, we have done well in getting the DigIn almost up to speed for its "hibernation" period. Beds have been dug over, manured and mulched and some over-winter plants firmly put into their places, next year's crop plan displayed and, following a suggestion by Alma for information "labels/notices" by each crop/bed, Pauline has been busy preparing these ready for laminating by Eileen and hopefully put on posts ready for next year.

In October we had our Open Shed Meeting and gave ourselves a well-deserved pat on the back for the success of most of our crops. We were blighted-yes, literally- in the potato and tomato areas and the strawberries showed their disdain of the long periods of dry weather and their sitting too near the shade of "ye olde oak tree" by producing hardly any tempting morsels. Boohoo!! However we all enjoyed the lovely crop of raspberries -delishus! They were so popular that we have now put in an extra row of canes for next year. Carol and Bill have made a fruitful border to the end of the plots by installing a blackberry and supports. Having rescued a grape vine from the bottom of the compost(!) this plant is now recovering in a pot in Pauline's garden ready to join the blackberry in the border and hopefully give us some future grapes.(DigIn Home-made wine anyone???)

After a dismal Friday, and a poor weather forecast for Saturday, we still managed to hold the bonfire party. This was the third year we have held the party and each year they just get better and better! We had a good gathering of diggers and their friends and families and some non-digging WENnies. The bonfire went up a treat and the fireworks donated by our Friday digger, Jack and his family, were enjoyed by everyone. Lots of lovely food and drink was brought along and for the first time we roasted chestnuts along with marsh mallows on the fire - everyone tucked in. We held the event a little earlier than previous years and it was agreed that it was better as we didn't get so cold. Unfortunately we didn't take any photos of the event as we were too busy enjoying ourselves. We have put the ash around the fruit bushes – so, hopefully they will give a bumper crop next year.

The next big job in hand is to attempt levelling the hills and dales of plot 181 , our second plot, which is going to keep us busy for a while. Until the winter really sets in Diggers are still able to reward their hard work by helping themselves to the kale, spinach and lettuce which are still flourishing and to look forward to another year at the DigIn.

## Life On Our Pond

The small wildlife pond we have at our community allotment 'DIG IN' is now well established and looking rather attractive. The edges of the pond liner are almost covered with water plants and we are leaving the 'native' plants from the neighbouring area to colonise as they will! Around the borders the only intruders we have introduced are a few primroses which we hope will make their home in a damp corner.

John Longhurst has kindly offered to monitor the pond wildlife as creatures begin to take up residence, and in mid November he reported counting 25 pond skaters basking in the late Autumn sunshine. John says that the pond skaters are evidence that the pond is healthy and the clear water is also evidence of that.

I'm thinking that next year it would be good to top up from our water butts instead of the mains water – seems to make sense if we hope to keep the pond relatively 'pollution' free

## Community Matters at Waitrose

For those of you who are not yet aware, back in September, Pauline proposed our community allotment as one of the charities at her local (Leigh) Waitrose which has their Community Matters green tokens scheme. Pauline has received the call to say we had been chosen to be one of the three charities in January. This means that we will get a percentage of £1,000. It will depend on how many tokens our charity gets so, if you have friends or family who live in Leigh-on-Sea, please ask them to shop at Waitrose as frequently as possible in January and put a token in for the Manchester Drive Allotment Project each time they visit Waitrose.

### *Sparkly taps*

*Remove limescale from taps by taking half a lemon and rub around the end of your taps, or leave slices around the base. Leave for an hour, or overnight, if they're bad, then rub with an old toothbrush or cloth and rinse. Lemon juice shouldn't be used on plated taps.*

Product review by Lisa Wood

'What's that?' asked one of my work colleagues in the same tone of voice that I'd asked my mom exactly the same question not less than 48 hours before. 'It's an Onya lunch' I said confidently, in the same tone that my mom had replied to me. My mom had proudly produced the said item, and its sister, two days before. One in a nice shade of blue with purple Velcro, the other in a chilli red colour with purple Velcro. I seriously thought she'd lost the plot and asked her what is it for. 'For your lunch silly, there's one for Mick too. "Mick buys his lunch mom'. 'Well, take it home anyway, you may find it useful'. I'm not really one for making sandwiches for work. I bring fruit in from home but I rarely have time in the morning to make them and if you make them the night before, they tend to be soggy by lunchtime. And then there's the Clingfilm or foil to wrap it in... I think that is where my mom was coming from with the Onya lunch – to cut back on cling film or foil, but anyway.

The first day I used it, I only had two slices of bread in it. These were for toast. It survived a day in the fridge and the bread was just as fresh as if I'd wrapped it in cling film. Being over-run with eggs, the next day I tried an egg mayo sandwich. Again, by lunch the sandwich was still fresh and not soggy like I'd been dreading. A quick wipe over with a dishcloth when I got in was all it needed. I was beginning to like my Onya. It went on, this sandwich, that sandwich, the occasional wrap. My Onya was proving very versatile. One of the good things about it is that you can fold it round any shape, so whether the sandwich is thick or thin sliced, a cob or round roll or a wrap, it can accept them all. I've used them for cookies when picnicking, as well as scotch eggs or cold sausages – when opened it makes a good sized picnic mat. I have even braved the making sandwich previous evening and tucked in my Onya overnight in the fridge, it has been fine the following lunch time (as long as I haven't gone too silly with the mayo or relish).

The product itself is made from recycled PET bottles and food safe PEVA lining. I have since checked out the Onya website, and was disappointed to note that they are 'responsibly manufactured' in China. It took me back to the film 'China Blue' which exposes the sweat shop culture in China, I am hoping that such an ethically focused product, which claims to be responsibly manufactured is not produced in such an environment.

I have used my Onya lunch for about 3 months now. At least 4 times a week. In the words of another lunch time product, I'm lovin it.

### *Scour power*

*Make scourers for greasy pans, muddy garden tools etc. Get some nylon mesh bags (the kind that oranges come in) and stuff them inside each other, then tie up. Or tie up old strips of net, curtain.*

S'me again!

This is fascinating and shows how clever bumblebees are. Recent research into their foraging behaviour has shown that they move to a new patch of flowers when they have visited two empty flowers in a row. By counting to two and using this simple rule, bees waste very little time and their flower-visiting behaviour is almost perfect! Nature is fantastic isn't it?!?

Carol Ferret

### 'Keep it Clear'

SAV's recently had a presentation called "Keep it Clear". This is an initiative by Anglian Water that aims to reduce the amount of blockages and smells in the sewers. You may live in one of the three areas that are being targeted for this. Not all of the Borough is included, but the areas included do have large amounts of restaurants. Their reasoning for this is that a focussed campaign is more cost effective than a large media campaign. They have vans and bikes circulating around the town centre advertising the campaign and a big stand was erected at Victoria Plaza on 26th November. They are keen to reach women in the 18 to 45 age bracket - obviously they are thinking of what "ladies" flush down the toilet!! None of those things should be flushed. It was interesting that they had not heard of the Mooncup - they have now!!

At the presentation there were pictures of sewer pipes clogged with "FOG" - **F**ats, **O**ils and **G**reases - that have solidified and then block and trap all the other objects that get flushed and poured down the sink. It is mostly common sense I guess but it made me think more about what I do allow to go down the kitchen sink. I am guilty of letting fat from the frying pan go down. We should be scraping that out on to paper and putting it in our blue bins for recycling.

At our December meeting we watched the PowerPoint presentation that Dan Turpin sent to us. General discussion followed about how we each deal with waste fats and had a renewed understanding of how we can help keep the sewers free flowing. We each went home clutching a cotton bag and 2 sink strainers to help catch "stuff" that shouldn't be entering the sewers.

### *Lap of honour*

*Laptops use significantly less energy than desktop computers and fewer resources are used in their construction. The latest generation of laptops are compact and highly specified, so if you need a new computer consider buying one instead of a desktop machine.*

### **The Unfinishable**

**Gwen went to the Knitting and Stitching show and met with these very interesting ladies. Who are setting up this project. People may have a piece that was their mothers or grandmothers and would like to contribute? See [www.theunfinishable.com](http://www.theunfinishable.com) for more details.**

### The **Free Shop**

Opens on the first Saturday of each month to enable people to bring things they no longer need or to take things that are of benefit to them. It has been running since March last year at the Chase Road Community Project.

The Project provides space for a local sewing group to meet on the first & third Monday of the month. It is a very friendly and informal group with members always willing to give help or advice. They welcome both those with existing sewing skills as well as complete novices. Some of the group are busy making things while others are learning how to sew for the very first time. It next meets on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> February between 7pm & 9pm. Why not pop along & see what goes on. All will be most welcome.

Around the net...

Age UK Essex writing competition entry form / info can be found at <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/essex/Activities--events/2012-Essay-and-Poetry-Competition/>

This is an interesting free publication.... [http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/support\\_us/RC\\_Recipe-Booklet.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/support_us/RC_Recipe-Booklet.pdf)

Finally SEEWEN members might like to visit the following websites

<http://www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread/>

<http://www.welovethisbook.com/>

<http://www.readinggroups.org/news/history-or-womens-writing-with-mariella-frostrup/>

[http://www.voicesforthelibrary.org.uk/wordpress/?page\\_id=1798](http://www.voicesforthelibrary.org.uk/wordpress/?page_id=1798)

**Dairy Dates –**

**Third Thursday of every month – WEN meeting. Normally held at Fresh Horizons, Ditton Court Road, Southend-on-Sea. January meeting, planning our focus for the year ahead. February meeting, AGM.**

**Fourth Thursday of every month – Transitional Towns meeting in Cricketers Pub, London Road, Westcliff-on-Sea.**

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February – SEEORG Seed Potato Day. Growing Together Community Gardens, 47 Fairfax Drive, Southend-on-Sea 10-2. £1 admission**

**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> April – Earth Day.**

*The year ahead...*

*As if we haven't had enough food recently! Our main focus for this year will be food - how to grow it, how to preserve it, what to look out for when you go shopping and how we can make eating it a 'guilt' free pleasure by reducing it's carbon foot print. I hope you can join us in this adventure!*