

Associate Membership

You may have seen a recent note from Ian regarding the proposal for an 'Associate' category within our membership. This provides an opportunity for family & friends, who regularly help us on the plots and who volunteer their energy, time and commitment, to formally join our association. The motion was passed at the AGM so we're now delighted to welcome applications for Associate Membership. Associates will now be formally recognised as part of the membership and can take a greater roll in how the Association runs. They can also now participate in Council events including horticultural training workshops which were previously limited to full plot members only. If you haven't done so, please consider proposing the co-workers who are part of your 'team'. Further details are in Ian's email - 12th Jan. The Associate Membership initiative is another great way to strengthen our community, making Merrylee plots a great place to grow

SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS

Our Bio-Diversity and Sustainability Group have convened a few times now to begin shaping the future plans for MPA's sustainability policy. Lesley Swift gave a brief outline of their plans at the AGM and she and others met members and visitors at the Open Day in September to discuss what first steps would be worth getting involved with. There are some BIG concerns which are highlighting the devastating effects of climate change around the globe so we must all try to do our bit, no matter how small. The team have suggested some very simple plans which will easily improve our sustainability credentials.



Crockery and Cutlery amnesty

We should stop using disposable plates, knives or cups at events. Instead, please donate your unwanted mugs, crockery and cutlery which can be washed and re-used at our gatherings. Leave them in the Members' Shed as soon as you can.

Compost everything

Don't remove any green or brown organic material from the site. Throwing away to landfill is discouraged because nature already has a wonderful way to keep recycling – if we offer a helping hand. Do not put roots of perennial weeds such as dock, dandelion, bindweed, ground elder, couch grass directly into your compost bin - they will simply multiply in the bin. Instead, steep the roots under the surface of a large bucket or drum of water for a couple of months. This kills them so they can be added to your compost safely. N.B. (Nature's Bonus) the weed water will become a nutritious liquid fertiliser for your vegetables.

Avoid Food Waste

We don't want to see good fruit and veg rotting on trees or in the ground. We will be encouraging all members to carefully think about how they wish to use any surplus yields. Later in the year we will be supporting charities to provide unwanted produce from across the site to ensure nothing is wasted.

GROWING PAINS



A bit of normality feels good after the festivities are finished and many of us are keen to get back down to the plot as soon as the conditions improve.

A lot of members have already been hard at it and a quick wander tells us that lots of

heavy work has been done on some plots, which is great... However, it's a good idea to take more care at this time of year, especially when you're doing any heavy digging or lifting. Naturally, the soil is denser and heavier and many of us are shifting barrows of compost and manure in lower temperatures which can add to the risk of aches and pains. Here are some hints to help you stay fit and healthy while you prepare for the coming season.

- Warm up. Do some simple stretching exercises to loosen up before starting any heavy lifting or digging
- Make sure you keep the shovel in front of you when digging and **ABSOLUTELY AVOID** twisting motions
- Maintain the natural curves of the spine as you work
- Use big muscles for lifting and carrying - better still... ask for help
- Keep objects close to your body when lifting
- Bend your knees and squat or kneel to get to ground level instead of bending over if you can
- Take regular breaks by walking around
- And stay hydrated.

STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN*



We're delighted with our latest construction. The new ramp and steps at the Members' Shed is a terrific addition giving us improved access and is so much safer than three slabs and a couple of breeze blocks! The build is a really super, long term improvement for our Association.

The construction was completed in just one day in early November by local joiners and friends of the plots, D & J joinery who also built the shed and raised beds at 61b in 2013. The ramp project was paid for by recent fundraising efforts and the remaining Skipton Building Society Grassroots Community grant awarded to MPA in 2018.



**if your idea of heaven is the inside of the Members' Shed*

DATES FOR THE DIARY 2020

Picture Perfect



As another year of Newsletters begins, we'd like to thank everyone who sent us their pictures throughout 2019. We've managed to use many in the newsletters and our end of year video at the

AGM was bursting with great snaps of planting, growing, smiling and fun. A really great way to see all the efforts our members go to on their plots across the year. Please send your best plot related pictures to:

merrylee.photos@yahoo.co.uk



Work party time again

We're making good progress on the plans for the winter work parties. These are an important part of keeping the site tidy, safe and attractive - bringing members together, getting things done, building friendships and having a right good natter too. Getting everyone to join in provides incentive for members to do a little more on their plot too, or help a neighbour get on top of theirs. Before you can say 'hand me a hoe, I can see a weed on the path' we'll have 100% cultivation and a site we can proudly show off to guests and visitors. Look out for email alerts & sign up.

Plant Sale

It's prep time again and we're hoping to get as many herbaceous perennials from members for the 2nd of May. The Plant Sale is the first open event of the year and has been an increasingly important part of our fundraising. Members are very generous with their donations of plants and seedlings and there are always rare & interesting varieties to choose from. Last year's Garden Scheme charity Plant Sale was a huge success but was also a huge amount of work. The committee have decided to return to a smaller, more traditional event where family, friends and neighbours are welcomed. Entry is free and we'll have the courtyard cafe up and running so we'd love to receive donations of tray bakes, cakes and scones to sell. The sale begins at 11am. There will be a 'May Day, May Day' request for Friday night help nearer the time.

Weeding the paths

A Merrylee newsletter wouldn't be complete without a mention of the gravel paths. This edition has a simple message:



Please weed them !!!

Everyone is responsible for keeping the gravel path that runs along the front of their plot weed free and if you see a weed **ANYWHERE** on your wanders - just pull it out - simple. That way everyone helps everyone!

FEBRUARY

Sat 15th or Sun 16th
Work Party tasks TBC

MARCH

Sat 14th or Sun 15th
Work Party tasks TBC

APRIL

Saturday 4th April
Coffee Morning from 10.30

Sunday 26th April
New members' afternoon tea
from 2.00pm

MAY

Saturday 2nd May
PLANT SALE

JUNE

Saturday 6th June
Coffee Morning from 10.30
includes Masterclass Session TBC

Saturday 20th June
Mid-Summer Social from 5.00pm
All Family and Friends Welcome

JULY

Saturday 4th July
Coffee Morning from 10.30

Saturday 18th / Sunday 19th July
Plot Judging weekend (tbc)

Sunday - late July (date tbc)
Plum tree pruning masterclass 10.30

AUGUST

Saturday 1st August
Coffee Morning from 10.30

Saturday 26th August
OPEN DAY
12pm - 3.00pm
A Public Event. All welcome!

SEPTEMBER

work party TBC

OCTOBER

Saturday 3rd October
Final Coffee Morning from 10.30

NOVEMBER

Sat 7th & Sun 8th
Work Party days - tasks TBC

DECEMBER

Thursday 3rd
AGM & Review of the Year

The View from Plot 65



Happy New Year! And what a year it's going to be... A year of eye popping surprises, of far sighted planning and sharply focussed innovation. Yes folks, down at Merrylee, we've got 20/20 vision!

And that's the last 2020 joke of the year. I hope!

There hasn't been a newsletter for a while. Not because there's been nothing to say but because, like most folk, even the keenest of mustard can run out of steam towards the end of the year. When the daily grind just gets too grindy and the long and winding road just gets too windy something has to give. But I'll tell you what, the plot is a salvation. When you need a breather, a refuge and a safe place to recharge the batteries the plot's the place! And that's the least of its rewards - fresh food, fresh air, friendship and the piquant whiff of farm manure form a heady concoction - feeding both the soil and the soul. (I should warn new readers that this kind of crafted prose and philosophical insight is as rare as a BBC Scotland Channel viewer, and has fewer repeats too !

Not many people read the newsletters - not because they don't like them (I hope) but because they've got better things to do - like dig their plots... However, I ask everybody to read their emails and take a look at the newsletters - even if it is just the *Diary of events* page. The committee goes to some length to arrange events as modest as the coffee mornings and important as the Open Day and it's frustrating when members complain they didn't know this or that was happening. We'll get the diary page and reminders onto the notice boards earlier too.

I wish to see our association develop as a community and I hope that in time, all members will take part in much of what we do - and to make that work we all need to engage in what is happening. (Rant over)

I thoroughly enjoyed the AGM back in December. There was a terrific turnout and we got all the usual financial and committee business done pretty quickly - to everyone's relief! That allowed time to introduce two additional constitutional points - the first clarified an existing article concerning the use, care and responsibilities for greenhouses and plot structures and the other was the introduction of Associate Membership which allows partners, friends and family of named plot holders to become members of the Association, giving those who currently support the Association but have no say in its development, a voice and to be recognised for all the work they do. I'd like to thank Ian, Sheila and Ronnie for their support in developing this initiative.

We're also saying cheerio to some retiring members and "hello!" to new ones. I'm pleased to say we have a bumper crop of the freshest newbies arriving (perhaps as many as 15) and once all the plots have been allocated we'll be welcoming them officially. Please look out for them on your wanders and say hello.

And finally, we enjoyed an informative morning in January, learning much about the pruning and care of Apple trees. More on that across the page. We hope to set up a plum tree care and pruning morning in mid July too.

I look forward to seeing you all soon and best wishes for 2020. Happy gardening!
DL

To prune or not to prune, that is the question...



up. It was an interactive morning - Andrew quizzed us and gave us the tools to do some of our own cutting - very stressful being studied by the master. Sheila at Plot 49 has an apple tree she's has been trying to keep under control for some time, so it was with some trepidation that she suggested Andrew have a look... It was wonderful watching him eyeing up the work - prowling around - getting a full view and his narration of this thought process was fascinating. A really interesting visit.



Too ginger with the secateurs and you're not really helping. Too gallous with the loppers and you might as well have taken an axe to it! And what about the when? A cut in Winter or is it Summer - is it espalier or spur bearing? Turns out... it can be all of that, or none - it just depends... Pruning fruit trees is all a bit of a dark art and no mistake.

Pruning fruit trees is no laughing matter!

So it was a great relief to get a lesson or three from the great man himself, Andrew Lear - *The Appletreeman*. 17 of us enjoyed a fun and fascinating masterclass on a cold but bright January morning, when we got some great hints and tips on how to approach the pruning and general care of our apple and pear trees - from spotting and correcting over-lap, identifying diseased and dead wood to understanding the growing habits to improve our fruit yield. And by removing shading branches and training others to grow horizontally, not

2020 COMMITTEE CONTACTS

Please get in touch with any of the committee if you have questions or concerns about your plot or want further information regarding events or work parties.

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Lesley Swift	(51)		
Eric Livingstone	(21A)		
Sally Packer	(53B)		
Heather McEwen	(54A)		
John Copland	(45B)		

Correspondence & general enquiries should be emailed to:

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volunteer for events and workparties using this address

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