

Hi everyone,

Here are my (very) brief notes from the BOGs meeting we held on Wednesday 19th September - please let me know if I've missed anything:

Present: Jan L. (Chair), Gail, Jac, Paul, Judith, Cyn, Steve R, Ash. (sorry if I've missed anyone).

Review of the year:

Jan kicked off the obituary for 2012 by saying that Medwyn Williams (the sad guy who wins all the national prizes for the most amazing vegetables) said that 2012 had been the worst growing year he could remember in 50 years. He lives in Angelsey but no-one disagreed that this was true for us too - everyone agreed that it had been a disaster because of the cold and rain but also because of the low light levels. Jan commented that, generally, the plants in the greenhouse had done OK.

Stawberries had been a write-off but other soft fruit such as currants and raspberries had done well for most people.

Jan's garlic had been the worst ever and potatoes had been a disaster. Runner beans had been OK, but late. Any plants that needed sun and warmth had really suffered.

Topics for discussion:

Asparagus

Judith wondered if it was worth trying to grow asparagus. Jan commented that he had prepared a raised bed (according to the textbook) and planted this with established crowns but gradually, year by year, these had died out - over the course of about six years, these had pretty much disappeared. Co-incidentally, this month's Kitchen Garden magazine had a special offer of crowns of a new extra-hardy variety from Canada called Guelph Millenium - Judith said she might consider trying it.

Improving beds/preventing leaching

It was agreed that the prolonged rain would impoverish the soil (especially raised beds) by leaching out soluble nutrients from the soil. Jan said that he had not covered his raised beds over last winter and was wondering if this was partly why productivity was low this year. Covering beds with black plastic will obviously prevent leaching by rain but green manures as an alternative were discussed. They are not practical because they tend not to rot down quickly enough for the beds to be used in spring unless they are being used for crops such as potatoes or beans. It makes sense to manure beds before covering if this is consistent with the rotation plan.

Cyn had quite a few questions:

How to store carrots?

Damp sand was considered to be the best but it might be easiest to leave them in the soil until ready to use.

What to do about potato blight?

The best thing is to just grow varieties of potatoes that mature before blight becomes a problem (e.g. first earlies and early maincrops) or maincrop potatoes that are known to blight-resistant such as the Sarpo varieties.

How to protect brassicas from caterpillars?

To avoid spending hours picking off caterpillars, brassicas should be netted to prevent the butterflies laying their eggs. The nets should be held away from the plants.

Where have all the tadpoles gone?

Ash suggested that the poor growing season had a detrimental effect on tadpoles this year because they have had very little pond vegetation to eat.

Ideas for future meeting topics:

- Each meeting focus on one of the crop rotations e.g beans, brassicas, roots
- A talk from Slack Top Nurseries
- A talk about growing soft fruit
- A talk about biodynamics
- Talks from other groups such as BEAT
- Speakers who give talks to groups such as CVOG
- Invite Ben Campbell to talk about his garden before visiting it
- Leeds City Council's Chelsea flower show garden

Other business:

Steve said that the community orchard at Frank's was becoming badly overgrown (with Cotton Grass and reeds) and badly needs to be weeded. A working party was planned for the coming weekend but more work would probably need to be done to give the trees a fighting chance.

It is time to order garlic. Jan will send around an email to see who might be interested in sharing an order from the garlic farm (since picked up by Phil).

If I've missed anything, please let me know. Sorry about the lateness of these notes.

Cheers,

Jan