

Jump On the Veg Wagon!

Local residents Jill Barnes and Michael Burt explain the benefits of home allotments in this first of a regular gardening column

These days it's hard to escape from the media talking about one of two things - the credit crunch or green issues. Both affect us all, so wouldn't it be great to have a hobby which distracted us from the depressing news whilst directly tackled both issues? Well, now you can with a home allotment.

You may have always dreamt of a vegetable patch but thought you didn't have the space or didn't want to ruin the look of your lovely garden.



Or maybe you would love your own allotment but waiting lists are just way too long.

A home allotment could be the answer to all your problems. First of all, a home allotment doesn't need to be a dreary patch tucked into a corner of your garden. Forget rectangles of earth with row after row of vegetable.

Yes, they may provide some beautiful home-grown produce, but aesthetically they're far from inspiring.

Home allotments can be designed to suit your needs. Perhaps you want to

incorporate trendy raised beds made from chunky timber sleepers. Not only are they pleasant to look at, they are also easy to use. They are at a height, which means you don't have to bend so much, and the sleeper edges give you somewhere to sit whilst you tend to your plants, or simply to sit, relax and enjoy. The beds are easy to build and can be designed to fit whatever space you have. Consider adding a bespoke compost heap alongside and a water butt for easy (and eco-friendly) watering.

If you don't want a dedicated area for vegetables, why not consider incorporating vegetables into your borders? Swiss chard, chives and courgettes can be grown purely for ornamental purposes. And how lovely to find a cabbage popping up amongst your perennials!



But don't despair if you have limited space, as your home allotment can be incorporated into almost anywhere. Vegetables and herbs can be planted in containers, compost bags, troughs - pretty much whatever space you have available. Indeed, this can be an even better way to grow vegetables as you can ensure the growing conditions are perfect for the plant you are



growing. Whatever your space or aspiration, local residents Jill Barnes and Michael Burt from Vialii Garden Services can advise, design, build and even maintain your home allotment. Leaving you with tasty, home-grown vegetables, fresh from your back garden so you can do your bit for the environment as well as saving some money.

Make it the vegetable crunch this year not the credit crunch!

Bridge of Allan 100 Years Ago

The Old Brigade

Mr Angus Drummond, Cousin's Buildings, who in the ranks of the Black Watch, took part in the Crimean Campaign, was present at the annual dinner and re-union of the regiment, held in Glasgow, on Saturday last. The veteran is still hale and hearty, and retains vivid recollections of the stirring campaign.

(Stirling and Bridge of Allan Reporter, October 2, 1909)

The National Minimum Wage

BY ROY G. HOGG

The National Minimum Wage Act 1998 came into force on 1 April 1999 and is now in its 11th year. The legislation when first proposed was viewed as contentious, if not economy threatening, by many whilst for others it heralded the arrival of long overdue fairness for all. The aims of the Act were simple; namely to prevent employees being unfairly low paid, close the gap between men and women's pay and to set a level of pay between employers. In addition, it is worth noting all employers have a statutory obligation to pay the National Minimum Wage (NMW) regardless of their size or type with penalties awaiting those employers who choose to breach the legislation.

The NMW is a minimum rate of pay per hour which applies to employees from the school leaving age of 16. The rate is reviewed annually and any changes take effect from 1 October each year. The latest rates to be applied from October 2009 comprise an adult rate for those aged 22 and above of £5.80 per

hour. Youth development rate for those aged 18 to 21 inclusive of £4.83 per hour, whilst 16 and 17 year olds must be paid a minimum of £3.57 per hour. From its inception in 1999, the NMW has seen a steady increase, in some years as much as 40 pence per hour. The latest annual increase for all age categories of less than 10 pence per hour is yet another unwelcome indicator of the current state of the economy.

Whilst the UK Government ultimately decide and thereafter implement each annual increment, the decision is taken based upon recommendations from the Low Pay Commission (LPC). Since its establishment in 1998, the LPC has been charged with independently advising the Government on the NMW. These recommendations are normally reported by February each year, however due to the effects of the current recession, this year's report was delayed until May to allow the LPC to amass an additional two months' worth of economic data, including the Bank of England's inflation report, employee job figures for December, GDP figures for the fourth quarter of 2008 and updates on average earnings.

The LPC have also recommended that people aged 21 years should be entitled to the adult

rate of minimum wage and the Government now accepts this. However, as employment for young people is particularly vulnerable in an economic downturn, this change will be implemented from October 2010.

If as an employee you consider your rate of pay is below the NMW, you should in the first instance make representations to your employer reminding them if necessary of their statutory obligations. If the matter remains unaddressed, the next step should be to seek guidance from public organisations such as ACAS or the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

As an employer, please be aware any routine compliance review of your business payroll records by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) will include testing to determine whether the NMW is being applied correctly. Prevention remains as ever better than cure and as such, perhaps the time is now right to undertake a review of your payroll records and implement corrective action if necessary before HMRC are only too happy to become involved on your behalf.

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