

# RAA Newsletter

## January 14<sup>th</sup> 2022

*Happy New Year!*

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*The paths are wet, muddy and slippery (again) – so please TAKE CARE!!!*

### 1. RAA Stores News

Thank you to all our volunteers and plot holders who have supported the stores during the past year. During our winter closure, we've been busy preparing for re-opening on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2022. We're once again going to have online ordering for the first few busy weeks. Please see this link for [Stores Ordering overview](#) and this link for our [2022 stock list](#). We look forward to seeing you soon.



*Delivery to the RAA Stores*

### 2. Protecting the Soil over the Winter

To get the best from our heavy clay soil we need to incorporate lots of organic material that will encourage many forms of microbial, fungal and other life in the soil such as earthworms and help create a good soil structure. A good soil structure will contain air, absorb and retain moisture and hold and release nutrients slowly to feed plants. Increasingly it is realised that the once traditional digging of soils and leaving soil bare over the winter, will lead to a loss of soil life, soil carbon, fertility and structure.

Ideally, winter soils should be covered with plants such as green manures and cover crops sown in the autumn or at least mulched with rotten leaves or compost. Cover weedy areas

with cardboard first before mulching, avoid walking on the soil as much as possible and wait till the soil warms in the Spring.

We strongly suggest that patches of weeds and grass are not dug out in the cold months and new ploholders tackling an overgrown plot should resist trying to dig up couch grass or bindweed in the cold months. You are very likely to remove some of the most fertile topsoil with the roots and leave lots of broken roots behind in the soil which will actually multiply the weed problem.

There are lots of winter allotment activities you could be doing – see January Tasks below.

If you want to read up on soil health and fertility, then have a look at the downloadable guide at: <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/soil-information-pack>

### 3. Bob Dixon

The RAA is saddened to learn that one of our long-time members Bob Dixon passed away last month. His funeral will take place on 1st February 2022 at 11am West Norwood Crematorium. A full obituary and memories of Bob will appear in the next newsletter.

### 4. Tree Maintenance

Last year the committee got our landlords The Dulwich Estate to survey the mature trees on site, which our lease states we must not damage or cut in any way. Some £6000 of work was identified including several trees to be felled. However no work has started because we are in dispute with Dulwich Estate who insist the RAA must pay the entire bill. The committee feels we must deal with any urgent safety issues so we will pay for the more urgent work to be done early in 2022. As a result, lot of logs and other wood will be available for use on site.



### 5. Rosendale Path Improvements

#### Major Path Works

The Rosendale paths between plots need constant maintenance by all ploholders. There are some areas which have been neglected and are now so dangerous that major work is urgently required to shore up and level the paths. The Committee have surveyed most areas and are working with TCV (The Conservation Volunteers) to tackle some particularly unsafe and difficult path areas. This work is taking place between January 13<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>. Please watch out for hazard tape which will identify the areas to avoid during the work.

Keeping the paths safe will become a major drain on RAA finances if ploholders continue to leave path maintenance to the committee.

**Path Care:** Members can help look after the paths between their plots by:

1. Keeping them grass covered (as required by our lease) so **do not use wood chippings to level paths** because it will kill the grass underneath.
2. **Avoiding the muddiest** path areas – especially if using a heavy wheelbarrow and ideally not overloading your barrow.

3. The ploholders on either side of each path are **jointly responsible** for tying back vegetation, trimming any long grass and keep the path level across the width. It is not sensible or fair to just trim one side of the path – because that causes paths to narrow and develop dangerous slopes to one side.
4. Health & Safety Advice is to wear sensible boots which have a good grip - especially after heavy rain when the site is extremely slippery
5. For advice on slippery or unlevel paths contact the Site Officer or Membership for advice ([site.rosendaleallotments@btconnect.com](mailto:site.rosendaleallotments@btconnect.com)) ([membership.rosendaleallotments@btconnect.com](mailto:membership.rosendaleallotments@btconnect.com)).

## 6. Rubbish & Skips

The committee are arranging for more rubbish skips to be at the Peabody Gate and the main gate towards the end of January/early February for unwanted materials that cannot be recycled, including painted or treated wood e.g. old sheds, old carpets, plastic sheets, bags etc. So please bag up your rubbish ready and please remember that these skips are very expensive £300+ each and so should only be used for real rubbish and not for recyclable items, plant waste or woody prunings.



A few ploholders are continuing to dump rubbish and unwanted items near the metal recycling depot at the Peabody Gate. This fly tipping costs a lot to remove and complicates metal recycling collections.



+ does anyone want to take (or take back) the children's slide that appeared recently?

## 7. Bonfires – not after January 31<sup>st</sup> please



As outlined in the October newsletter, we are trying to reduce the air pollution and complaints caused by our bonfires. The committee was asked to review the rules at the 2021 AGM. So this is a reminder that the permitted bonfire season will end earlier this year on 31<sup>st</sup> January and no bonfires will be allowed after that date.

*[Previously the permitted bonfire period ran for 5 months - November to March. There will be a further consultation with members over the summer period on this issue].*

**Your Help Needed:** we are asking members to reduce the bonfires they have and be more careful about what is burnt. Some of our bonfires sadly still involve the burning of banned materials such as treated, painted or composite wood and anything containing plastic. Fresh plant waste, should be composted to add to soil fertility, not burnt. Click: for the [RAA Bonfire Guidelines](#)

## 8. Composting – Priority

This winter is the ideal time to sort out or create compost bins on your plot. Good quality compost is at the heart of creating and maintaining soil fertility and getting more carbon back into our soils. Did you know that when material is fully composted, the nutrients are locked into the compost and won't wash out? Composting is both an art and a science!!

The committee is trying to increase the supply of wooden pallets that are ideal for constructing large bins (large bins work much more effectively). We already offer advice/help on construction and troubleshooting any composting problems but more offers of help from experienced composters are needed.

See the RAA Composting Guidelines [HERE](#).

### Shredding Woody Prunings?

The committee are exploring how we can best arrange communal shredding sessions to allow thicker, woody prunings to be turned into woodchips for composting. Remember that prunings can be used to create wildlife patches or "dead hedges" such as those on the Centenary Wildlife garden (Plot 138)

### Log Deliveries to restart

Last year we suspended the delivery of logs from the tree surgeons who deliver wood chippings to us. This was to free up the boundary for the new Peabody fence installation. Log deliveries will be reinstated shortly.

## 9. The Art of Winter Pruning: Guide

January is a good time to be pruning apples, pears, quinces. Fruit with stones e.g. plums or cherries should **not be pruned** now – but in the early to mid-summer. If you don't have an apple tree to prune, then this is a good time to plant new bare-rooted trees (if you do, they must be M9 "dwarfing" root stock or smaller).

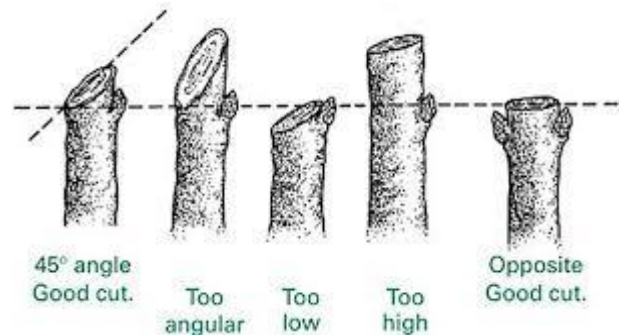
Pruning is a skill/art best learnt through experience, but reading, watching someone else or looking at videos can help. Pruning can be one of the most enjoyable tasks on an allotment but there are challenges, and every tree is different. Here is a reminder list of the basics of winter pruning plus links to a few videos on the subject.

### Pruning Guidelines:

1. Choose a dry frost-free day in January or February
2. Ensure tools are very sharp; secateurs and pruning saw are the basics though you might need long-arm pruners. Loppers can damage the wood so minimize their use.
3. Distinguish between flower buds (that will become fruit) and growth buds and also check whether your tree is spur-bearing or tip-bearing
4. Aim for a goblet shaped tree with an open centre.
5. Remove any rotten twigs/branches back to healthy wood and reduce very high branches – always cutting back to a vigorous outward and upward facing branch



6. "Water sprouts" – caused by previous heavy pruning – only keep some, remove the excess in stages, some by summer pruning.
7. Try to keep the tree balanced with branches all round.
8. Reduce growth that is crossing/touching other branches.
9. Cut large branches in 3 stages, so the final cut, close to the trunk, won't tear off bark
10. Cut new growth by approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{2}{3}$  to encourage new fruit buds.
11. Encourage branches to go out and up by cutting 2-3 mm above a bud growing in the direction you want.
12. Do not leave a stump of wood without a bud or branch at the end (it can rot).
13. Make cuts so that rainwater will drain away from the bud below.
14. If a tree has been neglected and has become very overgrown, don't reduce by more than 25% per annum.



**Videos:** there are hundreds of videos on this subject – some much better than others! Try the following from YouTube as they all have something worth watching or see what else you can find.

1. [How To: Prune Apple Trees \(3 mins\)](#)
2. [Winter Pruning of Fruit \(7 mins\)](#)
3. [How to Prune Established Apple Trees \(7 mins\)](#)
4. [Winter Pruning – a Step by Step Guide \(3 mins\)](#)
5. [Pruning Apple Trees : what NOT to do in Winter \(2 mins\)](#)

Can you offer pruning help and advice? Or do you need some? We would like to match offers to requests for help with pruning. Email [RosendaleAllotments@btconnect.com](mailto:RosendaleAllotments@btconnect.com)

## 10. Peabody Fence Safety Reminder

The installation of the new fence along the open stretch of Peabody Hill has left some large mounds made up from materials dumped by ploholders over the years. They contain a mixture of soil, stones, broken glass and rubbish including some small pieces of asbestos bonded cement (from old shed roofs).

The committee is exploring the cost/safety implications of different options, including re-landscaping, rewilding, removal and/or reusing some of the earth/stones on site. So, in the meantime:

- Please don't dump anything extra in this area (or anywhere else on site!)
- Please don't disturb the mounds of material

## 11. January Gardening Tips:

- Planning the allotment year ahead
- Building and Repairing Compost Heaps; RAA Composting Guidelines [HERE](#)
- Pruning Apples, Pears, Quinces and planting bare-root fruit trees and bushes NB these must be on dwarfing rootstock or smaller i.e. M26, M9 or M27
- Checking that your sheds/greenhouses collect and store water
- Cover bare soil with mulch, cardboard etc.
- Make a dead hedge with prunings; put up bird feeders and bird boxes and review how your plot could provide better support for biodiversity/wildlife

And follow these useful links:

- [Your Organic Garden in December/January](#)
- [Gardeners World – January Tasks](#)
- [Wildlife Gardening on Allotments](#)
- [Gardening in January \(RHS\)](#)

## 12. Volunteers Needed

Your very small volunteer RAA committee is struggling to manage this large site on your behalf –and we certainly could do with more of you offering a little of your time– so the work can be shared out and we can benefit from your ideas and enthusiasm. Just reply to the newsletter email at [RosendaleAllotments@btconnect.com](mailto:RosendaleAllotments@btconnect.com) and we will be happy to have a chat about how you can help.

## 13. Web no More!!



You may have noticed that our website is no longer functioning. After many years of dedicated support from Stuart Russell, our website has suffered from various software problems/hacking and needs a redesign. The committee is first planning to undertake a review of the internal and external communication needs before a new website is built.

## 14. Useful Links and Reminders

- Peabody Gate Opening: to bring in/remove larger or heavier items. The gate is opened 10am -12pm on the 1<sup>st</sup> + 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturdays each month and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday. Next Opening Dates: January 20<sup>th</sup> February 5<sup>th</sup> ,12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> If you want to bring in or remove heavier items on other dates, there is a £10 fee for special request openings.
- Facebook: the Rosendale group is just for our ploholders and sharers. So please join in – just go to the [Rosendale Allotment Association](#) and click the Join Group button on the menu. There will be a delay before you can join while we check you are a member.
- Dung Ho! – is a WhatsApp group to let RAA members know when manure has been delivered to the Peabody Gate. Deliveries are not predictable so the idea is that whoever first spots a delivery first, will let others know through the app. If you have WhatsApp and want to join the group – please reply to this newsletter email
- Don't forget: we welcome constructive feedback on newsletter contents.