

Last Spring saw a good start to the growing season with prolonged dry spells allowing good conditions for seeds to germinate and crops begin to grow well. The sun shone. Evidence of hedgehogs gave hope that the slug population would be kept in check. Cllr Knapp approached her new role as Chair of Allotments with enthusiasm and efficiency; neglected plots were licked into shape and both sites again entered Erewash in Bloom 'Best Allotments' category.

Then sadly in July we lost two long-standing gardeners, one from each site, while sunshine yielded to grey, overcast skies. But the gardening year progressed, crops flourished regardless, fruit ripened, flowers bloomed, making a final push towards our year's highlight: the Annual Show. There is nothing like a productive, busy allotment site on a high summer's evening when golden sunlight casts long shadows, the mood is relaxed and friendships are forged in a spirit of warmth and co-operation. Help is offered, advice given (whether requested or not), spare produce and plants exchanged: earth and mankind working in harmony.

For the third consecutive year, Elmcross held its Annual Show at Collyer's. On an early September's afternoon, warm and sunny with just enough breeze to ruffle the bunting, tables were dripping with apples, runner beans and flowers, the three most popular classes in a range of 29. As fruit and vegetable entries were assessed, Claire from Collyer's café judged bakes, preserves and alcohol and tried *everything*. The calorie content must have been enormous! A display of gardening tools and magazines both old and new illustrated how much easier gardening is today – a moot point! Local businesses supported the event, donating raffle prizes, members of the public moseyed in and out, looking faintly curious, and the event was wound up with the auction of exhibits. Totals were totted and this proved to be the most successful show ever, with 26 exhibitors, and 161 entries in 29 classes. This would be Ian's last as Show Secretary after 12 years; he has taken it from gazebo in a gale to prestigious polytunnel, so it was gratifying knowing he would go out on a high.

Both sites won placings in the Erewash in Bloom awards with representatives attending the awards ceremony at Morley Hayes. After three years, Elm Street and Shacklecross are currently on equal footing in the competition, but there is a definite sense of good-natured rivalry between us!

As the season slowed and Autumn crept in, the Royal Oak hosted our AGM. After the usual annual reports and election of officers, the year's successes were celebrated. Tony Hallam of Shacklecross was presented with the Elijah Highton trophy – a massive silver cup, plus keepsake – for the overall best kept allotment, while certificates were awarded to the runners up. A buffet supper was served, seed catalogues and membership cards distributed and the evening rounded up with a quirky gardening quiz, provoking much humour, debate and stirring of brain cells.

Winter dragged on, making a late start to this year's season. But Mother Nature has her own way of catching up, while the Parish Council's contribution to tidying up the sites has made the prospect of another gardening season perennially attractive.

Julie Smith
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