Results of Gardening Consultation - 2010

Background

One of the Public Weather Service milestones for 2010/11 was to review the provision of weather information for gardeners. For the purpose of the review ‘gardeners’ was assumed to include people who grow crops on a small scale such as horticulturalists, allotment holders and people with small holdings.

Desk research conducted at the initial stage of the review confirmed that there is an abundance of weather information available which is labelled for gardeners however very little of the information is tailored specifically for the needs of gardeners.

Methodology

Consultation with the general public was carried out via a questionnaire on the Met Office website. The link to this questionnaire was also emailed to all members of www.allotment.org.uk by their webmaster.

The PWSCG Secretariat tried on a number of occasions to engage with the Royal Horticultural Society. However this was unsuccessful and due to the consultation timescales the efforts were abandoned.

Results

Desk Research – Key Findings

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) is the UK’s leading garden charity dedicated to advancing horticulture and promoting good gardening. The RHS membership from June 2008 to May 2009 was 3.8m unique site users.

In April 2010 the RHS launched an iPhone app called “Grow Your Own”. The Grow You Own app is available to download for free from the iTunes store for anyone with an iPhone, iPod Touch or iPad. Future updates will be available in the coming months and is scheduled to include weather warnings.

The RHS website includes information on how different weather events (drought, sun flooding, etc) affect gardens. It also has links to the BBC Weather Centre, Met office, Netweather and Skylink. Skylink has an area for gardening and agriculture, and includes articles about climate change and links to the Tyndall Centre\(^1\) and the Hadley Centre\(^2\).

www.allotment.org.uk started as an online diary and is now the most popular UK allotment website. The site gives a choice of other sites to use for weather forecasts and information; these are ranked online by the users. The webmaster from this site

\(^1\) The Tyndall Centre brings together scientists, economists, engineers and social scientists who are working to develop sustainable responses to climate change. They work with the research community, business leaders, policy advisors, the media and the public in general.

\(^2\) The Met Office Hadley Centre is the UK’s foremost climate change research centre. Producing world-class guidance on the science of climate change and providing a focus in the UK for the scientific issues associated with climate change.
agreed to promote the public questionnaire by emailing the link to it to all sites members.

www.safegardening.co.uk was established to offer information on keeping safe when gardening. Safe Gardening’s team of experts provide advice on issues of concern and offer practical advice on safety. This includes details on the impact weather conditions have on gardening.

**Public Questionnaire Results**

The questionnaire was available to the public on the Met office website from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} to the 21\textsuperscript{st} of June 2010 and 400 replies were received.

The majority of respondents described themselves as home gardeners or allotment holders, (60% allotment holders & 36% home gardeners). 43% mainly grew fruit and vegetables with the others focusing on hardy & half hardy perennials, shrubs & trees and annuals.

216 people (54%) saw or heard a weather forecast daily and 160 people (40%) more than once a day.

As with previous consultation exercises, a large majority of people (83%) currently use the television or internet to access weather information and that these two options will still be in very high demand in the future with 62% of the answers for future use being given to television and internet. However interestingly 20% of people would like more radio broadcasts, 8% would like more information in newspapers and 10% would like a mobile option (3% iPhone).

The BBC is used by 43% of the respondents for weather information with 24% using the Met office, 9% using Google and 8% using Metcheck. Other providers mentioned included The Weather Channel, Yahoo, MSN and Accuweather.

When asked what information is important when gardening over 300 respondents asked for minimum temperature, maximum temperature, rainfall and ground frost. Over 200 asked for wind speed and soil temperature and over 100 asked for wind direction and humidity.

However when asked to give the three most important pieces of weather information for gardening minimum temperature, rain fall, ground frost and maximum temperature ranked the highest.

When asked about the duration of weather forecasts, 28%, 20%, 16% and 14% respectively asked for a five day forecast, a one day forecast, a forecast longer than five days and the latest observations.

92% of the respondents would like to be able to customise their weather information on the Met Office website with 49% requiring the gardening forecast to be in it own specific area. However 39% of the respondents said they didn’t mind if the forecast had its own area or sat with the general forecast information.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the Met Office online questionnaire (June 2010).
1. The provision of a gardening specific weather forecast to include:
   a. Ground frost, minimum & maximum temperatures and rainfall data.
   b. Latest observations, a one day and a five day forecast.
   c. A forecast longer than five days (gardening information only).
2. The ability for people to customise the information to their own specific needs.

Next steps

To ensure that professionals are consulted within this review a meeting with the BBC Gardeners Question Time Team and the PWSCG Secretariat is to be arranged to discuss the current findings.

The Met Office is to investigate the provision of recommendations. Detailed proposals including costs and feasibility should be provided by 30th September 2010.