



It's that time of Year

March is a crucial month for allotment gardening: it's starting to warm up, making it the perfect time to prepare soil, plant early crops outdoors and under cover, and prepare for the months ahead.

Key jobs include weeding, sowing seeds and planting out. Only plant out when it is warm, and the ground is not waterlogged. Ensure any indoor seedlings have been hardened off by exposing them to outside conditions for a week or two before planting them outside. Pre-warming the soil with cloches or clear plastic sheeting can enable you to plant crops sooner.

Dealing with perennial weeds now will help you to keep on top of them later in the year, and it's time to hoe regularly to slow down the growth of any new weeds.

Slugs and snails can be a problem in warm, wet weather, so protect your plants by applying grit, broken eggshells, copper tape and slug pellets around vulnerable seedlings (but don't expect to beat them!).



Jobs

March: prune berries, prepare frames, cloches and fleece covers. Weed, remove large stones, rake seedbeds, and apply fertilisers. Dig bean trenches.

April: erect pea-sticks and bean supports, prune cherry and plum trees. Keep an eye on pests – slugs/snails, aphids.

Plant

Under cover

March: root and stem vegetable, cabbages and cauliflowers, lettuce and salad crops

April: tomatoes, aubergine and other fruiting veg

Outdoors

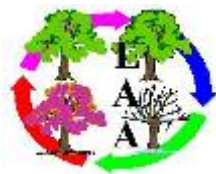
March: bare root trees, broad beans, peas, early chitted seed potatoes, onions, shallots and garlic.

April: second earlies and maincrop potatoes, carrots, beetroot, parsnips, squashes, French & runner beans, sweetcorn.

Harvest

March: early rhubarb, kale, sprouting broccoli, leeks and spring onions.

April: rhubarb, spinach and chard, spring cabbages, asparagus



Update from the Committee

LAA AGM: The LAA Annual General Meeting will be held on 23rd April at the Jack Lee Hall, Woodside House. This is a great opportunity to hear what is going on with the Association, to provide your input and to meet other Members. This enjoyable and informative evening includes complimentary refreshments and a free raffle!

Shop: We are now looking for a volunteer to take over the running of the Shop.

Principal responsibilities are;

- Opening up the Shop and taking payment using the card reader
- Managing the level of stock and replenishing as necessary
- Organising help for deliveries of manure and compost
- Adjusting the number of saleable items, if required
- Providing input to finalising the LAA accounts at the end of our financial year

If you would be interested in contributing to the Association by taking on this important role, please email Andrew Hepher to discuss.

Email issue: We are continuing to experience periodic problems sending group emails which affects our members with “gmail” addresses. When such issues we will update members via the WhatsApp group and web-site updates.

Annual Plot Rent: Invoices for the period April 1st 2025 to October 31st 2025 have now been emailed to all members. We would be grateful if this can be paid promptly, with bank transfer the preferred method of payment.

This charge for a unique period of seven months has risen because of the 10-year extension to the Management Agreement between our Association and WHBC: we have requested that the start date of the LAA year is November 1st, rather than April 1st. This means that if tenants decide *not* to renew, the new incumbents will have a full planting season to get the best from their plots. Future invoices will be for the full twelve-month period commencing November 1st of each year.

Digswell: Many thanks to those who made donations for the bench at Digswell – the bench is now located adjacent to the wildlife pond in fond memory of Ian Cocksedge – a long-serving member of the committee who sadly died shortly before Christmas.

On Friday 11th April contractors will be on-site to cut back the overhanging trees on the south boundary.

Broadwater: An IBC (intermediate bulk container) has been located adjacent to the mower shed and is now collecting rainwater from its roof. This will soon be connected to the nearby water trough.



A ‘dead hedge’ has been constructed on site from tree prunings and other foliage – dead hedges provide a natural habitat for insects, birds and small mammals.

Work party: These will be held on Saturday 26 April at Broadwater (creating a communal compost heap) and Saturday 10th May at Digswell – please come along and help out if you can.

New Members – Since the last newsletter was issued, we have been joined by Catherine and James (D156), Jonquil (D164A), and Mike, June and Sam (D172), Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.



The LAA Shop

Future shop opening dates are as follows:

April 12th, May 10th (note this has been moved from May 17th),
June 21st, July 26th, August 23rd, September 20th, October 25th.

The dates are available (and updated if necessary) on the “news and events” page of our web-site:

<https://longcroftallotmentassociation.godaddysites.com/news-and-events>

“Dead Hedge” at Broadwater

A dead hedge is a structure of woody cuttings woven between vertical stakes. They provide a provide a natural habitat for insects, birds and small mammals, and can incorporate hedgehog houses or open fronted nest boxes. The insects they harbour can help to control pests so dead hedges have a role in organic farming and sustainable agriculture.

The material within the dead hedge crumbles and rots away naturally but this takes several years as most of the structure is away from the ground. As they age, dead hedges require topping up with branches and foliage, becoming an ongoing feature which can be added to whenever a tree is pruned or cut back (without the need to burn the waste or remove it from site).





Crop Planner

	key:			
		sow		
		plant		
		harvest		
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Broad Bean				
Runner Bean				
Pea				
Potatoes	chit	chit		
Leek				
Onion / Shallot				
Garlic				
Beetroot				
Carrot				
Swede / Turnip				
Courgette				
Pumpkin / Winter Squash				
Tomatoes				
Chilli / Aubergine				
Chard/Leaf Beet				
Cabbage				



Preparing Seed Beds

While waiting for seeds to germinate under cover, early spring is the time to prepare the beds where our crops will spend most of their lives. Preparing seed beds comprises three main activities:

Feeding the soil: Ideally organic material would be added to the surface of beds, allowing it to rot down and become incorporated in the soil over winter. Alternatively, well rotted compost and/or manure can be applied now and thoroughly dug into the soil.

Warming the soil: Plants need both warm air and warm soil to grow. You can extend the growing season by either covering whole beds with plastic sheets and fleece or by warming the ground around individual plants using cloches. Different plants require different temperatures*: cool weather vegetables (such as peas, brassicas, garlic and onions) require soil temperatures of up to 10-24°C and warm weather vegetables (such as sweet corn, beans and tomatoes) require temperatures of 15-30°C

(*see <https://homefortheharvest.com/soil-temperature-for-planting-vegetables-chart/>)



Breaking down the soil: Plants have a greater chance of germinating if the soil is broken down into small, even-sized particles. This helps the roots to form by allowing rainwater and air to penetrate the soil, improving drainage and the flow of nutrients, and reducing the rate of water evaporation from the surface. This is best achieved through regular raking, hoeing (to restrict weed growth) and manual removal of large stones and woody plant material.

Early Spring Recipe

Purple Sprouting Broccoli with Anchovy and (maybe?) Chilli

This dish is full of flavour and works well as a vegetable side dish or tossed with cooked pasta for lunch or dinner.

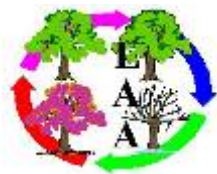
- A good handful of broccoli florets
- Half teaspoon salt
- One small tin of anchovies in olive oil
- 3-4 cloves of garlic, crushed and chopped
- Juice of half a lemon
- Pinch of either crushed black pepper or chilli flakes



Boil the broccoli in salted water for 5-10 minutes.

Meanwhile, pour the olive oil from the tin of anchovies into a large frying pan and gently cook the garlic and black pepper or pepper/chilli flakes. Once the broccoli is cooked to your liking, drain and stir in to the frying pan with the anchovies.

Warm through and the squeezed lemon juice when serving.



Comments and Feedback



With thanks to Geoff for the image of the new bench at Digswell.

If you have any news, tips, features, recipes or photographs that you would like to submit for future issues of the Newsletter please send them to...

Newsletter Editor: email@longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk.

Visit the Longcroft Allotment Association website: www.longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk

