



It's that time of Year

December and January are quiet months on the plot – the perfect time for getting organised: planning, and housekeeping.

It's a good time to sort through any leftover seeds and decide which ones to keep and which to throw out – seeds typically have a life of around two years and results deteriorate over time. You may also wish to discard any seeds that you didn't enjoy growing (or eating!).

And, while you're at it, think about what to plant and where in the year ahead. A good crop rotation plan will help to limit pests and diseases. Here are some common cycles (in order of planting):

Three year: legumes and fruiting vegetables, brassicas, roots and onions and leaves

Four year: roots, potatoes, legumes, brassicas

Five year: brassicas, peas and beans, potatoes and fruiting vegetables, onion family, root and stem vegetables

It's OK to switch from one system to another, and vegetables that don't match a category (e.g. squash, sweetcorn, spinach) can be fitted in wherever convenient).

Also those cold/rainy days when there's little incentive to visit the plot are an opportunity to ensure your garden tools are clean, sharp or otherwise in good condition.

Check the condition of any crops that are in storage – fruit, potatoes, onions and squashes are the main candidates.

Jobs

December: Prune hard fruit trees (apples, pears). Remove faded leaves from winter brassicas. Clean pots, store produce, and plan for the year ahead. Cover beds.

January: Spread manure over empty beds. Start to chit potatoes. Winter prune fruit bushes (currants, gooseberries and autumn raspberries.). Check the condition of stored fruit.

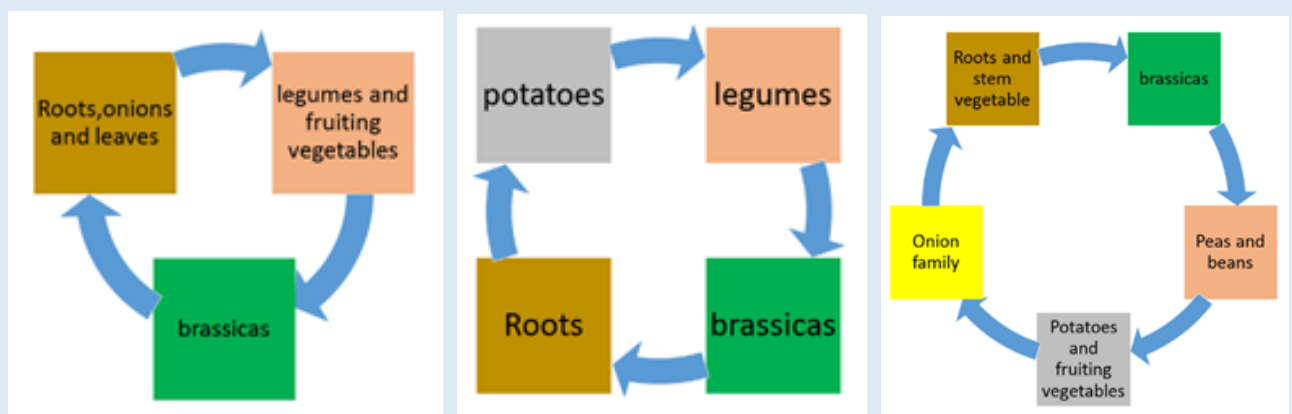
Plant

December/January: trees and fruit bushes. Garlic sets, shallots, hardy peas and broad beans (Aquadulce varieties), winter salad leaves.

Harvest

December: Leeks, root vegetables, cabbage, kale, Brussels sprouts), late salad crops.

January: Leeks, parsnips, swedes, hardy winter brassicas.





LAA Update

Web-site - after a long absence we have set-up a new website: Our thanks go to Paul Davis for investigating options and getting it started. We hope to continue to develop it over the coming months so please email any suggestions you have for improvements or additions. www.longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk.

Broadwater - We now have a barbecue in the shed which all members are welcome to use - gas bottles will be provided early in the New Year so that it will be ready to use from the spring.

Digswell - The kitchen has been refreshed over the autumn. There are currently no work parties scheduled but the numbers of helpers has fallen off so please keep an eye out for futures dates.

New members: Since the last newsletter was sent out we have been joined by Ms Agnieszka Krzyzanouskwa and Mrs Marion Cleveland. Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.



Enrich the Soil

Winter is a good time to think about which nutrients your soil might need to enhance next year's crops or any deficiencies that you may have noticed over previous years. The key elements are nitrogen, phosphates and potassium, but there are other elements which some plants need during their growth.

The following table can help you identify which type of fertiliser is needed by which plant (or where symptoms of poor plant development have previously arisen), together with how it can be provided both organically and inorganically.

Element	Nitrogen	Phosphates	Potassium/Potash
Plants	<u>Leafs and Stems</u> Cabbages, celery, leeks, lettuce, onions	<u>Roots</u> Carrots, swedes, parsnips, turnips	<u>Starch and sugary plants</u> Soft fruit, potatoes, sweetcorn, beetroot
Symptom	Yellow leaf / small tubors or fruit	Poor root development,	Dull foliage, brown at edges, stunted growth and/or vulnerability to disease
Organic Fertiliser	Hoof and horn, dried blood (30g/sq.m or 1oz per sq yard), manures	Bonemeal (120g/sq.m or 4oz per sq yard)	Seaweed (kelp-based products), hardwood ash
Inorganic Fertiliser	Sulphate of Ammonia 30g/sq.m (1oz per sq yard)	Superphosphate 60-120g/sq.m (2-4oz per sq yard)	Sulphate of Potash, Potato Fertiliser 30-60g/sq.m (1-2oz per sq yard)

Alternatively you can mix your own general purpose fertiliser by thoroughly mixing four parts sulphate of ammonia with five parts superphosphate and two parts sulphate of potash.

All fertilisers will be available from the shed in the spring.



Digging in for Winter

Autumn and winter are the traditional time to dig over vegetable plots for planting in spring. Work methodically in trenches across your plot so that you only tread on undug ground.



During the autumn/winter period, significant benefits can be obtained through a programme of autumn/winter digging as this is the best time to get the plot ready for spring and early crops. This is particularly beneficial for heavy soil before the frosts, when the soil is neither too wet nor too dry (and the frosts further break down the soil). Even covering the soil with mulch or black membrane really helps improve soil quality and means the plot can quickly return to productive form in the spring.

The other big advantage is that when the growing season starts the ground is immediately ready and waiting for sowing and planting.

Adding some organic matter in the form of compost, leaf mould or well-rotted manure will improve the soil by releasing nutrients, allowing oxygen to penetrate the soil, allowing excess moisture to be released, and by encouraging worms, centipedes and other beneficial life forms. Raking in some general purpose fertiliser will also help prepare the soil for next year's crops.

Compost trenches (sometimes called bean trenches) are a more direct way of getting kitchen waste into the soil than via compost heaps. Simply dig a whole or trench at least 30cm (1 foot) below the surface and add the kitchen waste in layers. Cover with cardboard or soil to keep vermin out and replace the soil to form a slight mound – this will settle as the compost rots. If started over winter it will be ready for direct planting in the spring, and the subterranean compost will provide a moist and nutritious base for thirsty plants such as pulses and courgettes.

Some people like to keep the ground planted over winter using green manures while others prefer to leave it unplanted and cover to suppress weed growth. Whatever approach you adopt, try and provide a habitat for helpful wildlife such as hedgehogs, frogs and insects – piles of logs, branches and leaves are ideal.

Storing Crops

Some crops can be picked in December and stored in a cool dry place over winter:

Carrots/parsnips – in shallow boxes above a thin layer of soil covered with sand.

Cabbages – suspended in nets

Squash – in well ventilated spaces

Garlic/onions – suspended in plants after drying

Potatoes – in paper or hessian sacks with no sources of light

Apples/pears – stored in single layers wrapped individually in paper



Where possible vegetables should not be in contact with each other to prevent any spread of diseases/pests.



Down at the Shed

The Shed is closed for the winter and will re-open in the spring for great value fertilisers, manures, compost and light gardening equipment.

During 2018 the shop will open: Saturday & Sunday mornings: **11.00-12.30** during March, April and May. Thereafter only Sunday mornings: **11.00-12.30** until mid-October.



Winter Recipes

Squash Chutney

Makes 6-8 jars

1.5 kg (3lb) of squash/pumpkin flesh	2 garlic cloves
450g (1lb) tomatoes (or tomatillos)	2 teaspoons of pickling spice
450g (1lb) onions	1 red chilli (optional)
50g (2oz) sultanas/raisins	2 tablespoons salt
750g (1½lb) soft brown sugar	600ml (1 pint) cider vinegar



Roast the pickling spice with the salt for 15 minutes, then crush in a mortar and pestle.

Chop the pumpkin, tomatoes and onions, and cook in a pan with the vinegar sugar, raisins/sultanas, chopped garlic and chopped chilli. Bring to the boil and add the ground spices and salt. Simmer until the mixture thickens and then pot in sterilised jars. Allow to ferment for at least two weeks before use.

The squash chunks should retain some of their firmness and provide a 'nutty' texture. - perfect with a strong cheddar or to accompany a curry.

Tuscan Black Kale (Cavolo Nero) Salad

An unusual accompaniment to grilled meat, fish or chicken. Serves 4.

450g (1lb) of cavolo nero leaves
2-3 tablespoons olive oil
2 crushed garlic cloves
White wine or cider vinegar (optional)
Herbs/spices to taste
Good pinch sea salt

Remove the kale leaves from the rib, chop into 50mm (2") lengths and blanch in salted water for 5 minutes. Drain thoroughly and allow to cool.





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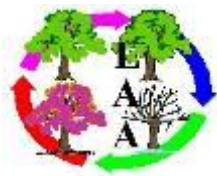


Green manure at the Broadwater site on a frosty November morning.

Getting Fruity

It's the perfect time to prune and plant bare root fruit trees and bushes as they are dormant – but hold back if the ground is frozen or water logged.

It's the time to prune hard fruit trees: apples, pears and quinces (soft fruits such as cherries and the plum family should be pruned in the spring). Also trim currants, gooseberries and autumn raspberries.

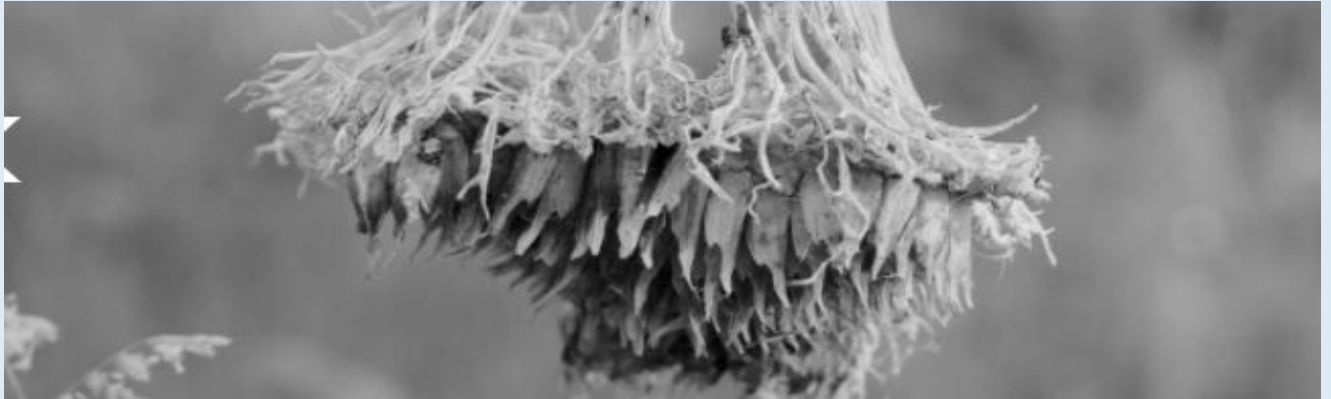


Crop Planner

	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
	key: sow					
	 plant					
	 harvest					
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						
Kale						
Black/Redcurrants						
Raspberries						
Strawberries						
Fruit Trees						



Comments and feedback



Many thanks to Paul Davis for developing the web-site and establishing our new email address, and to Sam Hayton and John Collins for photographs. 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