



It's that time of Year

Winter is starting to recede and spring is on its way. It's time to prepare our beds for the year ahead. The days are unpredictable and the ground can be too cold or wet to guarantee plant growth but that shouldn't stop us from taking our chances and start planting crops.

There's not much to harvest – mostly the last of the winter crops, and very little growing outdoors – so the focus is on planting seedlings indoors/under cover and preparing the soil. Dig over beds, lift any weeds, and add nutrients to the soil. While the soil is soft it is also a good time to erect climbing frames and re-establish borders and edges.

March is not only when most of ramp up our activities on our plots but it's also when plot inspections start. In this newsletter Ann Freimanis and Sam Hayton give an insight into the kinds of things that they consider when they inspect our plots.



Jobs

February: dig over your plot and add well-rotted organic material, chit seed potatoes. Last chance to prune hard fruit trees.

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

Plant

February: (outdoors) garlic and shallots, broad beans, fruit trees and bushes, (under cover) peas, spinach, broccoli, tomatoes

March: broad beans, peas, early chitted seed potatoes, onions, root and stem vegetable, cabbages and cauliflowers, lettuce and salad crops.

Harvest

February: winter salads, kale, Brussels sprouts, swedes, cabbage, leeks, parsnips

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



LAA Update

Annual General Meeting – The AGM will be held on Thursday, 1st May 2018, at 7.30 pm in the Jack Lee Hall, Woodside House, Bridge Road, Welwyn Garden City. It's the perfect opportunity to meet the Committee, understand how the Association operates and an opportunity to have your say. Please make every effort to attend

Broadwater – Almost a year after Storm Doris hit the site we were visited by a storm with no name which caused some disruption.

Digswell - From March the Shed at Digswell will open on Saturday mornings as well as Sunday morning between 11:00 and 12:30 to stock up on canes, compost, fertilisers, grow-bags, slug pellets, seeds and other essentials.



Health and Safety – It is important that we all play our part to ensure that both sites are safe to work on. Please ensure that all plots are maintained in a clean and tidy manner, and that all visitors and children are accompanied at all times. Should you need to call the emergency services they will find the site by its GPS location so it is recommended that you make note of these – **Broadwater GPS: 51.4648, - 0.1217, Digswell: GPS: 51.8061, - 0.2254**

Allotment Inspections

When we inspect the plots every month we're doing it to ensure that they are in good order and being actively worked. We're not looking for the perfect plot but one that is being used and is well maintained. After all, no one wants a plot next to one neglected and covered in weeds.

We start the inspection in March and finish in November. It is very noticeable that those people that winter dig or cover their plot are off to a flying start.

Your tenancy agreement explains the rules about how much of your plot must be cultivated and the structures and trees allowed on the plot. As site inspectors, we're looking to see that the rules are followed in a sensible, practical way. Everyone has an off month, goes on holiday or has other calls on their time. However if after a few months there isn't any activity, or very little work going on, then we'll report it and you may get a letter. That's why it helps us all that if you have a long term problem, you let your site representative know, as there may be help available.



The golden rule is to have a productive plot that you're pleased with, gives you pleasure and is one that makes you a good neighbour.

(by Anne Freimanis -Digswell and Sam Hayton - Broadwater)



Down at the Shed

The Shed is closed for winter but re-opens in March – **the** place for value fertilisers, manures, composts and light gardening equipment. It will be open 11:00-12:30 on Saturdays and Sundays during March April and May (Sundays only from June).

All goods are top quality and are excellent value compared with local garden centres and DIY stores.



'Sparrow Grass'

Asparagus is one of the first crops of the year to emerge, helping to fill the shortage of crops that can be harvested between winter and April. Although takes a while to establish an asparagus bed it requires little maintenance and can produce delicious spears for more than twenty years. Freshly cut asparagus is much sweeter, tenderer and generally superior to that bought in a supermarket.

To plant asparagus, dug a trench 20cm (8") deep with a slight ridge in the middle. Lay asparagus crowns over the mound, at a distance of 45cm (18") with the roots laying over the side. Then cover the crowns with a layer of soil to a depth of 5-10cm (2-4"), and then backfill the trench adding plenty of compost and/or manure – this will act as a mulch, keeping the roots moist and helping to control weeds.

The asparagus tips should begin to emerge quite quickly but resist the urge to pick them for the first two years which would weaken the plant and reduce future crops. In the first autumn cut the ferns back to a height of 5cm (2") the ferns when they turn yellow-brown, and cover with a good layer of mulch.

In the meantime keep the ground weed free but do not hoe (this can damage the tender roots just below the surface). Also remove and destroy any asparagus beetles from the plants – these tend to emerge in warm weather.

Repeat this the following autumn and begin harvest the following spring. To harvest cut the asparagus spears below the surface when they are no more than 20cm (8") tall.





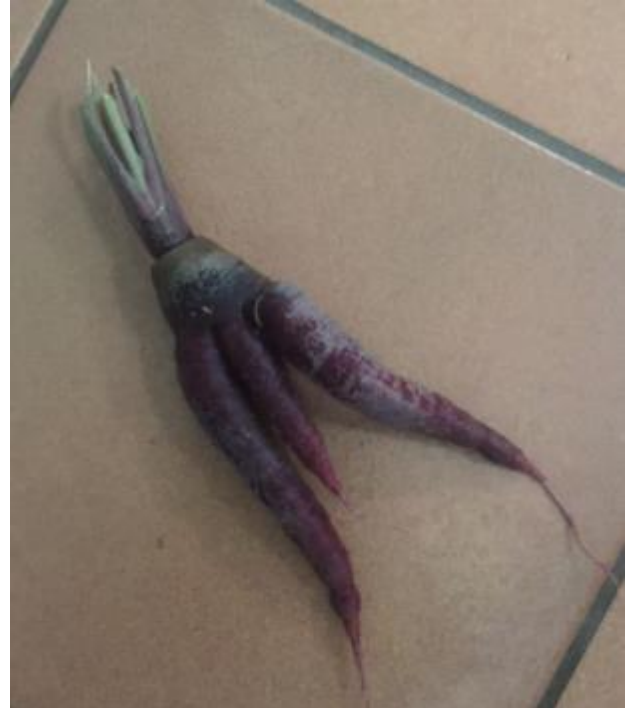
Planning for root crops

Early spring is the time to plant root crops, and carrots can even be planted outdoors under cover during February. And a little preparation before they are planted can make a big difference to crop.

Carrots naturally grow in well drained sandy soil. They are not well suited to heavier clay soils where their development is hindered by solid clay or stones and the wet ground can increase the likelihood roots rotting. This can be overcome by growing them on raised beds and/or by selected short root varieties.

Whilst root vegetable take nutrients from the soil, too much goodness can cause them to fork. Carrots, for example, tend to have greatest success when grown in a bed that was well manured for the preceding crop.

I'd not had great success with roots and was told that they are sometimes grown for competition in plastic tubes containing a soil/sand mixture. So I made some 'V-shaped' channels in a bed to the depth of a spade head which I then filled with a mixture of sand, coffee grounds and spent soil from grow bags. This ensured that there were no obstructions to root growth, and seemed to result in a better crop with larger roots and less forking.



Polite reminder

Subscription letters are on their way and our rents are due on 1 April. Please make every effort to pay these promptly (and remember that those of us above pension age are entitled to a 50% discount).

Late Winter Recipe

Sprouting Broccoli with chilli and anchovies

An unusual accompaniment to simply grilled meat or chicken. Enough for 4-6 portions.

- 1kg (2lb) purple sprouting or long stem broccoli
- Half garlic bulb
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- Pinch dried chilli seeds
- Half tin anchovy fillets
- Squeeze of lemon (optional)

Trim the broccoli, blanch in salted water until tender and drain.

Roughly chop the garlic and fry gently in the olive until soft. Add the chilli flakes and anchovies and cook until the anchovies have broken down and thickened the olive oil. Add the broccoli and warm through.



Comments and feedback

Many thanks to Anne Freimanis and Sam Hayton for the article on plot inspections. 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

