



It's that time of Year

The warmer weather is stimulating the activity of crops, insects, and weeds. It's important to water regularly and to continue to hoe and weed. These are the months of plenty!

It's time to protect plants from the heat. Apply mulches around plants to reduce the amount of moisture escaping from the soil. Consider applying temporary screens where

plants are exposed to directly sunlight for long periods of the day. If you are planting out new seedlings, these can get some protection from the sun if located where they benefit from shading from established nearby plants.

Onions will be ready from mid-July when they stop growing and the leaves turn yellow – if there are a few days forecast without rain, partially dig them up with a fork and allow to dry out for a few days in-situ before storing. There should be an abundance of crops so think about how to store any surplus: pickling, drying, freezing, and preserving.

And there's still time to fill any gaps on our plots with late season seeds. Salad crops – lettuce, endive, radish, mustard and cress - can be planted and harvested within a few short weeks but beware of ants, aphids and slugs/snails.



Jobs

July: regularly water all crops, apply mulches and fertiliser, hoe and hand weed, check for aphids and other pests, thin out fruit crops.

August: keep watering, pick off any pests, dry onions and garlic and prepare other surplus crops for storage. Plant out winter squash and leeks in the spaces vacated by summer crops.

Plant

July: beetroot, French and runner beans, lettuce, radishes, spring cabbages, turnips.

August: carrots, turnips, Japanese onions and spring cabbages.

Harvest

July: French beans, broccoli, carrots, courgettes, onions, potatoes (first and second earlies), tomatoes.

August: Beans, courgettes, tomatoes, chillies, peppers, aubergines, summer fruits, the last broad beans and the first sweetcorn of the year?



LAA Update

Broadwater – The skip delivered for the May working party and gave plot-holders a chance to dispose of their rubbish as well as helping us to clear the shed. The skip filled up quickly so another will be ordered in the future to help us clear any unwanted materials from our plots.

Digswell – The annual barbecue, held at the Digswell site on 9 July, was blessed with good weather and well attended again – our thanks go to Helen McLean for organising, Peter Pillay for cooking the food, and to all those who attended.

The next work party at Digswell will be on Saturday 2 September and Saturday 28 October – so make a note in your diaries.

New members: Since the last newsletter was sent out we have been joined by: Mr Barry Sharpe, Mrs Maddie Gray, Mrs Claire Wood, Miss Mya Lomenova, and Mr Russell Rawle. Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.



Greener Fingers – Mexican Marigolds v Bindweed

Bindweed is one of the allotment gardener's biggest enemies: spreading rapidly above and below ground; strangling plants; extremely difficult to dig out; and delays planting of crops if treated with chemicals. Well, good news is at hand – it has a natural enemy in the Mexican Marigold (*Tagetes Minuta*).

The Mexican Marigold releases chemicals in the soil which are toxic to bindweed and other perennial weeds including couch grass and ground elder, and some pests. The plant derives from Latin America and grows in full sun or shade but only in warm weather – ideally planted from May-July and dug back into the soil late in the year before it self-seeds (it has become an invading weed in some warm countries).

The plant also has other benefits – its dried leaves can be used as a herb (said to taste like apples) and it is used to make tea in parts of South America which is believed to bring health benefits (the contain vitamin C and high levels of anti-oxidants).

The toxins can cause a skin rash (so take care when handling the plant) and the plant is pungent as reflected in one of its common names – “Stinking Roger”.





LAA tribute to Colin Ross

After twenty three years enjoying his allotments at the Digswell site, our good friend Colin Ross has decided to give up his plots. He was one of the pioneers who moved to Digswell from the Broadwater site when part of it was taken over for housing development in 1994. He wasn't, however, new to Digswell having previously worked at the Welwyn Council tree and plant nursery that was there before our Association took it over.

It would be an understatement to just say that all we, his colleagues, in the Association owe a great debt of gratitude to Colin. Without his dedication, optimism and real practical skills it is possible that we wouldn't have much of what we now take for granted. He, along with a smallish team in the nineties, built the wooden compounds that house our group hardware, shop stocks, water pump and, until lately, our cat lodgers. He, almost single-handedly, secured our site boundaries against rabbits with wire netting buried into the ground. He and his chain-saw felled close on twenty poplars along the eastern boundary of the site one Sunday morning in 1995. I must report, that those golfers up early enough to witness the deed were not really amused. But right was on Colin's side. The Council had given us permission along with hundreds of native shrubs and small trees to establish the 'wild life corridor' that now forms the boundary. It resulted in space for ten extra viable allotment plots



It would be wrong not to pay tribute to the unassuming manner that Colin has inspired and influenced so many of us. His skills as a gardener and practical man have been there for us to see and try to emulate. He has over the years generously shared with us so many of his vegetables, fruit and flowers. To clarify the matter of Colin's felling of the poplars growing where there should be allotment plots of spuds, he really has a special affection and knowledge of trees.

I am privileged to have shared so many pleasurable hours with him over the past twenty years or so and I'm sure everyone will join me in wishing him well in the years ahead and join me in assuring him that there will forever be a place and a welcome for him at Digswell.



Down at the Shed

From Sunday 23rd July until Sunday 3rd September the Shed is OPEN ON REQUEST only. To attract attention bang hard on the saucepan beside the door. And look out for the person wearing the high viz waistcoat if you would like to make a purchase.

It will reopen on Sunday 3rd September before closing on Sunday 1st October for the winter.





Summer Recipes

Courgettes are now ripening in abundance, and will continue throughout summer, which is fantastic news for allotment gardeners. Try and pick them at their optimum size: no more than 20cm (8") in length but are more tender and sweet if they are a bit smaller, around 150mm (6") – in the right conditions they can grow from too small to too big in less than a day.

Courgette Salad:

Serves 4-8 as a side dish.

- 2 large courgettes
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon lime/lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 2 teaspoons poppy seeds (or sunflower, chia or pumpkin seeds)
- 1 crushed garlic clove
- Salt and pepper

Coarsely grate the courgette and toss with all the other ingredients, adding salt and pepper to taste. Serve quickly, before the moisture is drawn out of the courgettes. Perfect as an accompaniment to all barbecued food. Simple, quick, and delicious!



Courgette, Potato and Cheddar Soup

Serves up to 8.

- 500g (1lb) chopped potatoes (unpeeled)
- 2 vegetable stock cubes
- 1kg (2lb) coarsely chopped courgettes
- 1 bunch spring onions
- 100g (4oz) extra mature cheddar (grated)
- Nutmeg
- Salt and pepper

Put the potatoes in a saucepan and just cover with water. Crumble in the stock cubes and bring to the boil. Cover and cook for 5 minutes. Add the courgettes and cook for a further 5 minutes. Add 90% of the spring onions and cook for a final 5 minutes.

Take off the heat and stir in 90% of the cheddar and season with nutmeg, salt, and pepper. Whizz to a thick soup, adding more hot water to achieve your favoured consistency. Serve scattered with some freshly grated nutmeg and the reserved spring onions and cheese. Alternatively allow to cool and freeze for up to 3 months.

You use a combination of cheddar and a blue cheese for extra flavour.





Gooseberry Cake - serves 10

125 g caster sugar
250 g plain flour
4 tsp baking powder
1 tsp ground cinnamon
50 g butter
350 g gooseberries
1 egg
100 ml milk



Pre-heat the oven to 170°C (Gas mark 3). Mix all ingredients together, making sure all the gooseberries are crushed. Pour into a greased 20-25cm (8-10") cake tin and bake for 45 minutes. Allow to cool and serve - perfect with crème fraîche or a dollop of clotted cream.

Drought-Busting

You can prepare for dry weather by:

Digging - breaking up the ground will help your crops develop deeper roots, providing them with access to soil that is cooler and moister. It can also help to incorporate organic matter into the soil.

Applying organic matter - compost and manure are excellent materials for retaining moisture (along with nutrients and beneficial bacteria).

Weeding - weeds need moisture to grow and so regular weeding will leave more moisture in the ground for the crops we want to grow.

Mulching - applying mulch after heavy rain or heavy water will slow down the rate at which the ground dries up (and has the added benefit of restricting weed growth).



Respect for Mowers

Mowers should be looked after and used by members as they would their own mowers at home. This has not been the case, particularly at Digswell, where recently 4 mowers were out of action at the same time. In the worst case the blade and the fuel tank had to be replaced (cost £90). The blade had been set at a low setting and hit a large stone which damaged the fuel tank.

Mowers are provided only to maintain the paths around our plots and should only be used on paths.

When mowers are being serviced or repaired we now ask the engineer to modify the height adjustment so that only the 2 highest settings can be used. This has already happened on the one mower returned to us. Do not try to force the adjustment to a lower setting.





Dealing with Excess Produce

Even after giving away some of your produce to friends you may still be left with more than you can use - what a lovely problem to have!

Preservation is all about reducing the rate at which our crops decay.

Freezing is the simplest, quickest, and most convenient means of preserving, and it is easy to store crops in small batches as they ripen. Most vegetables can be blanched then drained and frozen. Tomatoes, peppers, and courgettes can be used in pasta sauces and ratatouille that can be frozen. Soft fruits can be open frozen straight after picking or cooked as syrups or purees and then bagged in small or large quantities.



Making jam is probably the most common/popular method for preserving fruit and soft fruits produce some delightful jams/conserves. Add sugar (similar weight to that of the fruit) and a lemon per kg (2 lb) of fruit and heat the mixture until a drop creases when dropped on a chilled saucer. Pour into sterilised jars when hot and seal the lids (these will produce a satisfying 'pop' as the contents cool). Try adding crystallised or powdered ginger to apple or gooseberry (or other tart fruits) to strawberry jam.

Pickling - preserving in vinegar or a vinegar-based sauce - can provide a delightful range of colours and flavours from simple pickled onions and other vegetables through ploughman's pickles to mango chutneys and classics such as piccalilli. They should generally be left for at least one month before use to allow the flavours to combine and mature. Fruits - particularly apples, plums, pears, and gooseberries - can also be cooked with sugar and vinegar to produce chutneys and pickles that are delicious with cheese and cold meats (mix 500g plums with 500g sugar and 250ml of white vinegar for a delicious cheese accompaniment!).

Bottling is less common but not difficult - simply pack fruit or vegetables into bottling jars and cover with syrup, water or brine, then cook and seal them at high temperature to ensure that there are no bacteria present.

Preserving in alcohol is perhaps more costly than other methods but is very simple - for each 500g of fruit add 500g of sugar and 1 litre of spirit and store in sterilised jars. Turn occasionally until the sugar dissolves, then leave for a few months (this summer's fruit will be ready to drink by Christmas, but will improve with age (if you have the will power). Vodka works with most fruits, but you can try gin with plums and damsons, or brandy with plums or cherries.





Crop Planner

	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
	key: sow					
	 plant					
	 harvest					
Broad Bean						
Runner Bean						
Pea						
Potatoes						
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 Helen McLean, Christine Smith and Philip Fotheringham for recipes, John Collins for photographs, Colin Pope for the tribute to Colin Ross, and Simon Chard for information about (or hope of) a natural enemy of bindweed.

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...

Andrew Thorne, Newsletter Editor: LongcroftAllotmentAssociation@email.com

