



## **It's that time of Year**

The days will certainly be getting longer, offering a bit more time to tend our plots. It's time to prepare our seed beds for the coming year and grow seedlings under cover. In April there's not much to harvest and the focus is on growing seedlings and digging/weeding beds; applying organic matter (compost/manure) and apply fertilisers and/or plant feed.

the first seedlings start to appear and established plants will need feeding and watering. Seeds need to be sewn, and young seedlings will need potting on and, finally, planting out. But be wary of frosts, pests, weeds, and forthcoming plot inspections.

It's a good time to think about how to prepare beds so that they can retain moisture and require less frequent watering throughout the coming summer months.

There is also a chance to erecting climbing frames while the ground is still soft. Or preparing cloches and cold frames to extend the growing season and grow more exotic crops. It's also time to re-establish borders and undertake regular mowing – the grass clippings provide valuable nitrogen to revitalise our compost heaps.

Late spring is the time to make successive outdoor sowings of peas, chard, root and salad crops – they won't all be successful but at least some will get a chance to grow when the soil is not too cold/wet/dry and there are fewer pests.

There are some important dates on the horizon with work parties at both sites on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> April and the LAA's Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April.

Finally, the allotment shop at the Digswell site has re-opened between 09:30 and 12:30 for one Saturday each month until October – the place to stock up on canes, compost, fertilisers, grow-bags, slug pellets, and other essentials.



## **Jobs**

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

May: Harden off plants by leaving them outside during the day and under cover at night.

Ensure that plants do not dry up – remember that occasional thorough watering is often better than more frequent light watering.

## **Plant**

April (outdoors) - second earlies and maincrop potatoes, carrots, beetroot, parsnips, squashes, French & runner beans, sweetcorn.

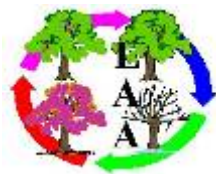
(under cover) - tomatoes, aubergine, and other fruiting veg.

May: (outdoors) Basil, beetroot, Brussels sprouts, cabbages, carrots, courgette, squash, pumpkin, cucumber (under cover), French and runner beans, lettuce, peas, sweetcorn, cauliflower, sprouting broccoli, aubergines, pepper.

## **Harvest**

April: (more) rhubarb, spinach and chard, spring cabbages, asparagus

May: Broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, spinach, spring cabbage, asparagus



## The LAA Shop



It is currently planned to open the LAA shop at Digswell from 09.30 to 12.00 on the following Saturdays: Apr 18th, May 16th, Jun 20th, Jul 18th, Aug 22nd, Sept 19th, Oct 24<sup>th</sup>.

If any of these dates are rescheduled they will be updated on the LAA web-site at - <https://longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk/events-and-news>

**THE** place to stock up with compost, garden equipment, fleece, weed suppressant fabric, compost, and other items. All payments are now contactless.

## Update from the Committee

**Annual General Meeting** – The Association will hold its 50<sup>th</sup> AGM on Wednesday April 22<sup>nd</sup> from 7-9pm at the Jack Lee Hall. Our Guest Speaker will be Kate Sheard of the Herts & Middlesex Kate Sheard. Kate has been sharing on how to improve biodiversity at our sites.

**Work Parties** – These will be held on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> April at both our sites – please come along and help if you can.

**LAA WhatsApp group** – This group has grown to ninety-five members of the Association, covering around 3/4 of our plots, who share information, availability of surplus plants, etc. If you are currently not a member and would like to join, please contact us at: [email@longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk](mailto:email@longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk)



**Digswell Site** – The burning pile has been relocated, and a dead hedge has been constructed to provide shelter for pond wildlife and insects. Bird boxes have been installed at various locations to encourage tits and robins (which feed on aphid, caterpillars, and other allotment pests). And, last but not least, the bee enclosure has been cleared and improved.

**Broadwater Site** – A bench (as requested at the last AGM) has been introduced at the site for the use of all members.

Also, to enhance wildlife, bird boxes erected around the site and a rainwater collection IBC has been installed in the vicinity of the pond so that it can be topped up with natural water during dry weather.

**Mowers** – The mowers have been serviced ahead of the growing season.

Please take care when using the mowers and inform your site rep or email the association if there are problems with the mowers or if the petrol is running low.

**New Members** – Since the last newsletter was issued, we have been joined by Emma and Mandy (D151), and Paul and Elahe (D177). Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.





## Guide to Fertilisers

The main elements (available in various forms from the LAA Shop) are:

- **Nitrogen**, which promotes the growth of leaves and stems (ideal for brassica, leeks, onions, and leaf salads).
- **Phosphates**, for root growth, flowers, and seeds (carrots, parsnips, swedes, and turnips).
- **Potassium/Potash**, which helps plants to develop resistance to disease and build up sugar/starch (potatoes, beetroot, sweetcorn, and soft fruits).
- **Trace elements**, including magnesium, zinc, iron and copper, are taken up in minute quantities by all plants.

Crop rotation is important because different types of plant draw different nutrients from the soil.

### **Organic Fertilisers**

- **Manure** – an excellent source of nitrogen but use well-rotted manure or pellets as fresh manure can damage plant roots.
- **Bonemeal** – high in phosphates, ideal preparation for planting perennials
- **Fish, blood and bone** – a general fertiliser to stimulate growth during spring/early summer.
- **Hoof and horn** – a slow-release fertiliser that is high in nitrogen.
- **Liquid feeds** – soak comfrey or stinging nettles in a water butt to make a 'tea' (some people use old pillowcases for tea bags!) and add (5-10%) when watering plants.
- **Gypsum** – ground calcium-based rocks which 'lighten' clay soils.
- **Wood ash (bonfire residue)** – a source of potassium for applying directly to soil or adding to the compost heap.
- **Seaweed** – increases pH of soil (reduces acidity) and contains calcium and magnesium

## Sowing Outdoors

By mid-April, some seeds are ready to sow directly outdoors if beds have been prepared over winter (i.e. if well-rotted organic matter has been added and beds have been weeded and raked). Depending on the crop, this is the time to add natural fertilisers such as hoof and horn or blood fish and bone meal.

Conditions vary from year to year, but the state of the soil is more important than the weather, and if weed seedlings can germinate in a bed then there is a good chance that hardy vegetables can too. The combination of winter rain and frost helps to break down the soil, making it easier to fork and rake beds to provide a level growing surface and a finer grade of soil.

Form drills (with or without a line) to the depth appropriate to the type of crop, and sprinkle seeds evenly along their length. Once the seeds are sown, fill each drill with a trowel or rake and add a label (this can be a useful reminder if the seeds fail to develop and require replanting).





## **Spring Recipe**

### **Purple Sprouting Broccoli and Cajun Salmon with Pasta**

A quick and nutritious meals that the whole family will love. As an alternataive to salmon and Cajun spices you can use a chopped Italian sausage and chilli flakes.

- A good handful of purple sprouting broccoli stems, freshly picked
- 2 tablespoons of olive oil
- 2No. fresh salmon steaks, skinned
- 1 tablespoon of toasted pine nuts (optional)
- 2 teaspoons of Cajun spice
- 500g (1 lb) dried pasta (penne or rigatoni are ideal)
- 2-4 garlic cloves, crushed and chopped
- Salt/pepper to taste
- Grated pecorino or parmesan cheese (optional)

Boil the broccoli stems in salted water until just tender. Drain, chop into 50mm (2") lengths and put aside.

Heat a large pan of salted water water and add the pasta when it reaches the boil and cook for 8-10 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat some oil in a large frying pan. Sprinkle the Cajun spice over the salmon and gently fry (with the pine nuts if you are using them) while the pasta is cooking.

When the pasta is cooked, drain and reserve a cup or so of the cooking water. Flake the salmon, and stir in the crushed garlic cloves. Then add the pasta while still hot together with the chopped broccoli stems . Add enough of the pasta water (2-4 tablespoons) so that the pan doesn't dry up and continue to heat gently until warmed through, adding more water, little by little, if necessary.



Add salt and pepper to taste and serve with the grated cheese (or without!)

### **Salted (& Spicy?) Kale Chips**

A tasty and nutritious snack – with salt and spices or just salt - that takes no more than fifteen minutes to prepare.

- 200g (8oz.) large whole kale leaves
- 3 tablespoons cooking oil
- Half teaspoon finely ground salt
- One teaspoon spice – e.g. paprika, cinnamon, chilli (optional)

Pre-heat the oven to 200°C.

Wash and dry the kale leaves before removing most of the centre stalk, and chop into bite sized pieces. Toss the kale in the oil, and mix in the salt and spices. Spread in a thin layer on a baking trays and bake for 5-10 minutes until crisp.

Transfer to a rack and eat as soon as possible after they have cooled.



## Comments and Feedback



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](mailto:email@longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk).

Visit the Longcroft Allotment Association website: [www.longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk](http://www.longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk)

