



It's that time of Year

April is when the growing season really starts. Planting out, growing seedlings under cover and be mindful of late frosts which are common throughout May and early June and can badly damage new growth.

The soil will still be cold from winter so delay seed-sowing out of doors until there are signs of weeds/grass growing indicating that the soil is starting to warm. Keep on top of weeds by hoeing regularly or by keeping seed beds covered if they are not ready for sowing/planting.

Seed potatoes should be planted out by the end of April, and cover early shoots if there is a chance of frost. Make successive sowings of peas, chard, root crops 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.

Good soil structure is vital for plant growth, so avoid compacting the soil by using planks to spread your weight, or creating beds so that you can reach and cultivate all parts of seed beds from paths.

Root crops and legumes should thrive in a well prepared soil without any additional feeding. Fruiting plants, potatoes and brassicas will require feeding and/or a dressing of manure or well-rotted compost.



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



Update from the Committee

Annual General Meeting – Following a two-year lull caused by the pandemic, we are planning to hold the Association's AGM this year. This is planned for 7-9pm on **Wednesday 27th April**, at the Jack Lee Hall, Woodside House, Welwyn Garden City. Light refreshments will be provided. We hope that you will be able to attend.

We will circulate an agenda closer to the date. As usual, it will be a good opportunity to get an update on matters relating to the LAA, to share thoughts on how we can further improve the Association, and to socialise with fellow Members.

Membership Subscriptions – A big thank you to those of you who have renewed their subscriptions. Reminders will be sent out over the next week or two for the few remaining unpaid membership fees.

The Shop – There was a good day of trading when on the shop's first day of the year: Saturday 26th February. A price list was sent to those members who have supplied email addresses in advance so that members were aware of the range available.

Contact Details - If you have changed email address or are not receiving email updates from the Association please send your latest contact details to us at email@longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk.

New Members – Mr. Aaron Gillan, Miss Donna Syrett, Mr Hugo Dolton and Mr Christopher Watts have recently joined the Association - welcome to the Association and we hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.

A Fond Farewell – to Paul and Pauline Canter after maintaining plot 129 at Digswell for 27 years. They send best wishes to fellow plot-holders and leave with happy memories of their time with us.

Preparing Seedbeds



April is too early to plant most crops outdoors, but the perfect time to ensure that beds are ready for planting from early May.

The soil should be broken down into small, evenly sized particles. Any large stones or woody plant material should be removed. Regularly rake the bed so that the soil is level, and hoe the soil to prevent weed growth. Hoeing and raking should be done when the soil is dry, so that it is crumbly in texture – the elusive “tilth”.

Ideally organic matter would have been applied in the autumn, but well-rotted compost/manure can be added and raked in now. There is no need to dig the ground because young seedlings have shallow root systems (and digging risks bringing weed seeds to the surface).

Covering the bed ahead of planting will suppress weeds and also help to warm the soil, allowing seed growth to start earlier and thereby gaining valuable days/weeks.

Avoid treading on the seedbed after it is prepared and allow it to mature for 10-14 days, raking occasional to suppress weeds, before planting seeds or transplanting seedlings.



February Storms: Dudley, Eunice and Franklin

Three named storms affected the UK within a week during February – on the 17th, 18th-19th and 20th-21st February. This is the first time this has occurred since naming was introduced for UK storms and it was the most destructive series of UK storms in decades. Two red warnings were issued for storm Eunice – It was the most damaging single storm to affect England and Wales since February 2014 with winds gusting widely at over 69mph across southern England.

One shed roof was blown off and many sheds were blown over or otherwise damaged. Several plots collected compost bins, parts of polytunnels and other materials from neighbouring plots.

Members showed a true spirit of helpfulness and co-operation as plot holders shared information via the WhatsApp group and help each other to recover items and restore their plots.

The effects can still be seen with plastic sheeting, netting and other debris deposited around the north of each site.



Down at the Shed

The LAA shop will open on the following Saturdays between 09.30 and 12.00:

April 16th, April 30th, May 14th, June 11th, July 16th, August 13th, Sept. 10th, Oct 15th.

The numbers allowed in the shop at a time will be controlled. Preferred payment is via card, ideally touchless.





Crop Planner

	key:					
			sow			
			plant			
			harvest			
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
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						



Epsom Salts

Epsom salts help with:

- Seed germination – a cupful of Epsom salts scattered over 10m² (100sq.ft.)
- Yellow foliage – add 2 tablespoons to 5 litres (1 gallon) of water and spray over affected leaves.
- Fruit growth – water fruit trees and tomato/pepper plants once a month using the same concentration.
- Potting on fruiting plants – apply a tablespoon of salt granules around each plant when transplanted
- Deterring pests – a sprinkling of Epsom salts around plants can deter slugs and snails.



Epsom salts is the common name given to magnesium sulphate. Magnesium enables plants to absorb other nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus. Sulphate/sulphur helps plants to create chlorophyll, which plants use for photosynthesis.

Epsom salts should be applied from spring, as leaves are about to develop.

Early Spring Recipe

Carrot Cake

A moist cake to use up any carrots that you still have in store. This recipe is taken from Andi Clevely's "The Allotment Book".

- 175g (6 oz.) carrots
- 2 free range eggs (medium)
- 100g (4 oz.) brown sugar
- 75ml (3 fl oz.) vegetable oil
- 100g (4 oz.) wholemeal self-raising flour
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 50g (2 oz.) desiccated coconut
- 50g (2 oz.) raisins or sultanas

For the icing

- 40g (1½ oz.) butter or margarine
- 75g (3 oz.) brown sugar
- Grated rind of half an orange



Grease a deep, 18-20cm (7-8") cake tin and pre-heat an oven to 190°C (375°F).

Grate the carrots finely. Whisk the eggs and sugar together until they form a thick, creamy mixture. Gradually combine with the oil.

Add the remaining cake ingredients and mix together until smooth. Spoon into the tin and level the surface. Bake in the oven for 20-25 minutes until golden brown and firm to the touch. Allow to cool on a tray.

Beat the butter/margarine until soft. Blend in the sugar and orange peel and spread evenly over the surface of the cake once it has cooled completely.



Cover Strawberry Plants

During April and early May, placing cloches over strawberry plants will encourage early flowering which, in turn, will result in an earlier start to cropping.

Remove the cloches during warmer days to offer easy access for insects to pollinate flowers.

A sprinkling of sulphate of potash, sulphate of ammonia or liquid tomato fertiliser at this time should help to boost



Comments and Feedback



With thanks to Kate for the photograph of the aubergine/chilli seedlings, and to Kayleigh and Rusty for images of the storm damage to our sites.

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.

