



It's that time of Year

The weather is getting warmer, the days are getting longer and it is time to plant and sow outdoors. Cropping really gets started as the first potatoes, peas and soft fruits become ready to harvest. But watch out for frost during May, keep plants watered as we move into summer, and keep slugs and other pests at bay.

April and May signal the start of the growing year. They are also very important months for keeping on top of weeds – these will be taking advantage of the longer days and warmer weather and compete with crops for light and heat so regularly hoe and hand pick out weeds.



Earth up your spuds and thin out direct-sown crops such as spinach, carrots and lettuce. Move leeks and brassicas to their final positions.

Keeping grow bags and potting compost in direct sunlight (or even in your greenhouse) will warm them up and give your seeds a head start in the growing cycle.

Keep an eye on your crops for early signs of pests or nutrient deficiency – e.g. if the leaves on your tomato plants turn yellow this is a sign of magnesium deficiency. This can be caused by overstimulating growth by using fertilisers with high content of other nutrients. This can be overcome by adding epsom salts (20g per litre, ½ oz per pint) to water every two weeks.

Remember to ventilate your greenhouse on warm days, and consider using blinds or shades to avoid excessive temperatures, and damping down pathways to maintain moisture levels (and discourage mites).

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

(aubergines, pepper undercover)

Harvest

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

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



Update from the Committee

Waiting Lists – There are currently eighteen people on the waiting list for plots with ten queuing for the Digswell site and eight at Broadwater. No plots are currently available at either site.

AGM Update – In the light of the growing concern and uncertainty over the spread of the Coronavirus, the AGM, due to be held on Wednesday 18th March was postponed. We will look to hold this event later in the year, once the situation has normalised.

Pumpkin Competition - We will be repeating the LAA competition to nurture the largest pumpkin, as judged at our September BBQ. Thomas Markatopoulos has kindly saved seeds from his prize-winning 'Atlantic Giant' pumpkin. These are available from the Digswell shop this Sunday and next. However, as with other items these days, seeds will be limited to a maximum of three per person. If you would like to have a go but cannot make it to the shop, please contact Helen McLean or Andrew Hepher.



The Shop - In view of the Coronavirus spread and out of respect for the health of both customers and helpers, we feel it appropriate to close the LAA Digswell shop until the situation returns to normal. However, we also appreciate that this is approaching peak demand time for supplies of compost, manure etc. Given this, we will open the shop on Sunday 22nd and 29th March, from 09.30 - 12.30. After this, the shop will close for an indefinite period.

Digswell – Thanks are due to Thomas Markatopoulos has erected a wishing well over the cess pit – see article below.

Plot markers needed to be repainted and it was agreed that this could be done at the next work party.

It was noted that the gate to the site requires adjusting, which will be arranged.

Broadwater – The additional water tank at Broadwater was installed in February and is ready to use for the coming growing season. A cover will be fitted over the coming weeks.

A skip will be delivered to the site later this year – watch this space.

If any of our Broadwater members have thoughts on ways to help increase their use of the shop at Digswell please send ideas to Andrew Hepher, LAA Chair, at email@longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk.



Spring Hoeing

You'll notice that weeds love warm, moist weather just as much as our crops do! At this time of year the best way to stem weed growth is by hoeing.

Hoeing cuts through young weeds just below the surface, removing the leafy growth whilst simultaneously damaging their roots. Although it won't remove hardier perennial weeds such as bindweed and dandelion it will check their growth and weaken the plants.

You should hoe when the ground is dry to minimise the chance of weeds re-rooting. If the weather is so obliging hoeing in late spring/early summer should be at least a fortnightly activity, and ideally a weekly one.



Wishing Well at Digswell

Our members at Digswell were delighted when a Wishing Well appeared at the site during February. This wonderful installation covering the soak-away hatch by the shop, was created by Thomas Markatopoulos.

Gardening and construction have been Thomas' hobbies since he was young. The well, which took a day to create, is constructed from timber decking that was left over from other construction projects. The material is designed to be durable so the well is built to last.

Thomas was inspired by a discussion with Helen outside the shop. When he was told that there was a hole which was a potential hazard to children playing at the site he decided to cover it with the Wishing Well. There is a drainage pipe below which needs to be accessible for maintenance so he has designed the well so that it can be temporarily relocated by a few volunteers.

Everyone is delighted with the result and Thomas would like each plot-holder to plant a flower at the beginning of each growing season so that all at the site can participate in this inspiring project.



Early Spring Recipe

Chick Pea and Chorizo Stew

A rich and hearty dish enriched with the last of the seasons kale leaves.

- 2-3 carrots
- 1 onion
- Half garlic bulb
- 3-4 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 chorizo ring (peeled and chopped)
- 1 400g tin chopped tomatoes
- Water (half the volume of tinned tomatoes)
- 1 400g tin chick peas
- Salt, pepper and sugar to taste
- A good handful of tender kale leaves



Gently fry the carrots and onions in the olive oil for 10 minutes. Peel and chop the garlic cloves and cook with the carrots/onions for five minutes. Add the chopped chorizo and cook for a further five minutes.

Add the tinned tomatoes, water and seasoning and simmer gently for one hour.

Add the chick peas, kale leaves, stir in and warm through.

Serve warm with crusty bread.

For extra richness sprinkle with grated cheese (strong cheddar or Spanish

Manchego are both ideal).



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						



Chard

Chard is a member of the beetroot family but with chard it is the leaves that are harvested and not the root.

There are several varieties of chard available which can bring spectacular colour to your plot: ruby chard, yellow chard, Swiss chard being the most common. Chard brings further benefits by attracting hoverflies which prey on greenfly.

Chard is simple to grow and can be started in seed trays or planted directly into prepared beds between March and May. Young plants should not be allowed to dry out and once they are established they are very resilient and will continue to crop into winter, although the leaves suffer damage in freezing conditions.

Young chard can be eaten raw in salad, while established crops are slightly bitter and best steamed/boiled or sautéed (which reduces the bitterness).

Crops should be eaten as soon as possible after harvesting – chard can be kept in sealed bags in a refrigerator but generally does not store well. This is why it is not commonly available in supermarkets, so allotment holders are part of a very select group with access to fresh chard.



Polite Reminder

Trees and structures

Please remember that if you wish to erect a shed or a poly-tunnel then you will need permission from the Association (and there are size limits). The same applies if you intend to plant trees (other than dwarf varieties) on your plot. Normally there won't be an objection unless it is likely to impact on other plot-holders in either the short or long term.

Down at the Shed

In view of the Coronavirus spread and out of respect for the health of both customers and helpers, we feel it appropriate to close the LAA Digswell shop until the situation returns to normal.

However, we also appreciate that this is approaching peak demand time for supplies of compost, manure etc. Given this, we will open the shop on Sunday 22nd and 29th March, from 09.30 - 12.30. After this, the shop will close for an indefinite period.





Encouraging Insects

Allotments are great places for biodiversity and an important element of this is the support they provide to insects, and the contribution that insects make in return.

Insects are essential for pollination, decomposition and pest control. Ladybirds, wasps, hoverflies and lacewings prey on aphids and beetles and centipedes feed on slugs, slugs' eggs and other small insects.

Insects also help work the soil and also play an important part of the food chain. Birds and other animals feed on insects and these animals also control pests, disperse seeds, etc.

We may be guilty of taking for granted the free services that insects provide so we should help them by providing environments which provide shelter, and by planting crops that provide them with nectar during their barren times of year.



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.

Visit the Longcroft Allotment Association website: www.longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk

