



It's that time of Year

December is a good time to dig and clear the plot and, because even weeds grow slowly at this time of year, they are likely to stay clear. If it's not too wet or freezing now is the time to prune and plant hard fruit trees - apples, pears and quinces (soft fruits such as cherries and the plum family should be pruned in the spring). Also trim currants, gooseberries and autumn raspberries.



Compost heaps are less active in the colder weather but keep adding vegetable trimmings/peelings material - don't turn/aerate through the winter months. If you have gathered leaves during autumn to make leaf mould then some of these can be added to the compost heap to provide those 'browns'. You can give the microbes a bit of a boost by adding coffee grounds, manure or (if you are feeling extravagant) diluted molasses. All of which should help the composting process so that it provides a useful addition to the soil in the spring.

With so little growing, there's also time to do those little construction jobs: re-stake fruit trees and renew ties, fixing raised beds, clearing out greenhouses, waterproofing and making repairs to sheds, constructing compost heaps, etc.



Jobs

December: Prune hard fruit trees (apples, pears) and currants, gooseberries and autumn raspberries. Remove faded leaves from winter brassicas. Cover beds.

January: Spread manure over empty beds. Clean pots, store produce, and plan for the year ahead. Start to chit potatoes.

Plant

December/ January: Fruit trees, fruit bushes and rhubarb. Garlic sets, shallots, hardy peas and broad beans (Aquadulce varieties), winter salad leaves.

Harvest

December: Leeks, root vegetables, brassicas (cabbage, kale, Brussels sprouts), late salad crops.

January: Parsnips, swedes, hardy winter brassicas: cabbages, kale, Brussels sprouts.



Update from the Committee

Annual General Meeting: Having been forced to cancel for the past two years because of Covid, we are hoping to hold our first AGM during spring 2022. This is an opportunity for all our members to: hear about plans for the Association; to voice your own thoughts on how to enhance our Association; and to socialise with fellow allotment holders. Once a date and venue are arranged further details will be communicated to all our members.

Tree Pruning: A number of fruit trees on individual plots at both of our sites are now excessively large, to the point where they are casting a considerable shadow over neighbouring plots (which is why we insist that all new fruit trees must be on a dwarf root stock).

Also, some of the trees around the car park at Broadwater are now restricting the availability of parking spaces.

As such, we feel that it is necessary to get in tree professionals to conduct a major reduction of selected trees in the next couple of months. Normally, maintenance of fruit trees situated on plots is the responsibility of (and hence cost for) the respective plot-holder. However, as an exception, the bill for this reduction will be met from Association funds.

Once Council permission has been obtained, it is hoped to carry out the work before the end of the year. However, plot-holders having a tree (or trees) on their plot due for reduction will be consulted before any such work is undertaken.

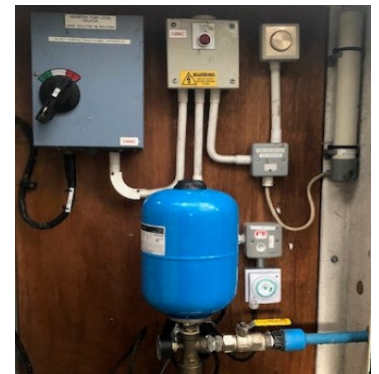
Digswell Water Pump: The pump and its controls have been replaced at the Digswell site so, from the start of the next growing season, tanks should automatically refill as normal.

Water Supplies: These have been turned off at both sites to reduce the risk of frost damage over winter. The water supplies will be restored in the spring, ahead of the next growing season.

Shop at Digswell: The shop is now closed for the winter and will re-open in early spring 2022.

Kings Seed Scheme: Orders have now been placed for the Kings Seeds which has been very well patronised by our Members. As usual, seeds will be with us before Christmas, and potatoes by the end of January. Thanks again to Barbara Wilton for her work in managing the Scheme for us.

New Members: Since the last newsletter was sent out we have been joined by Miss Beverley Squirrell and Mrs. Rose Temblett. Welcome to the Association and we hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.





Crop Planner

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
key:						
Broad Bean						
Runner Bean						
Pea						
Potatoes				chit	chit	
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						

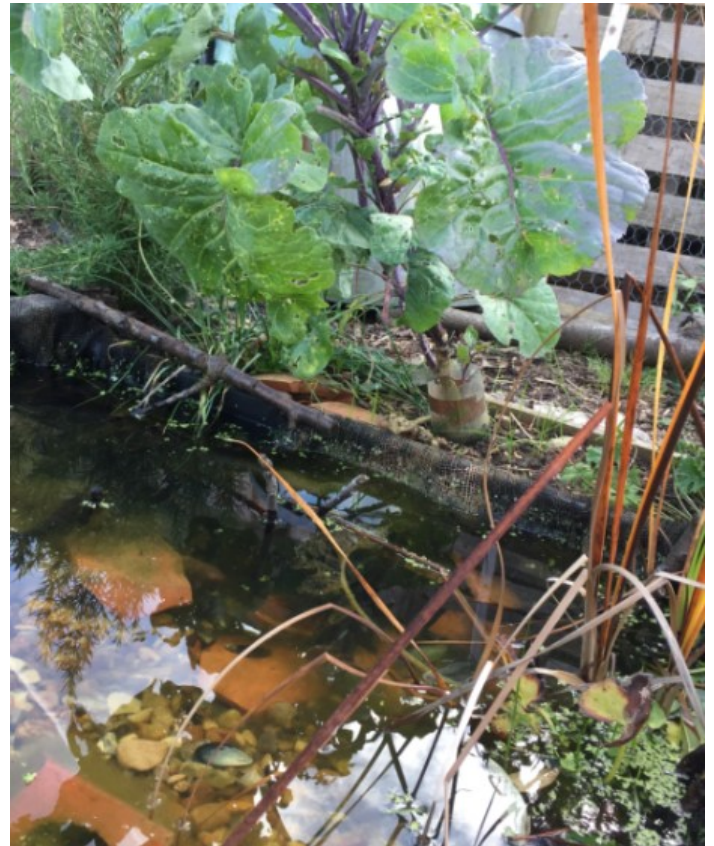


Allotment Ponds

Allotment ponds are an attractive feature and have the potential to help you maximise your growing efforts. They are a retreat for frogs and a feeding ground for hedgehogs and birds – all of which are pest controllers.

The Association is supportive of members introducing wildlife ponds on their allotment plots subject to the following conditions:

- They should be constructed of materials which can easily be removed or relocated (and not concrete or anything that is of a permanent nature). Such as butyl liners, pre-formed ponds or other sunken water containers (such as old sinks or inverted dustbin lids)
- The pond surface area should not exceed one square metre. Also, that the pond should not be closer than two metres from the nearest plot boundary.
- A maximum depth 45cm (18") – this will sustain pond flora required for oxygenation and will ensure that water at the bottom does not freeze throughout winter.
- At least one side should have a shallow slope – either as a feature of the pond's structure or by constructing a ramp of stones/pebbles within the pond - to allow access for wildlife and to create a damp habitat for beneficial insects as the water level changes.
- Their position on the plot, including any bordering features, should not extend beyond the plot boundary.
- They should support only indigenous pond wildlife (not fish which will feed on tadpoles and other wildlife).
- Ponds are well maintained to prevent stagnation/reduced water oxygen levels.

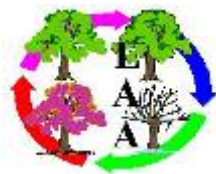


Ponds should initially be filled with rainwater - tap water contains minerals which encourage algal growth.

Plants and animals will naturally colonise the pond but the following plants will help to provide a diverse habitat:

- Underwater oxygenating plants such as hornwort and starwort which also help to protection tadpoles and pond larvae from predators.
- Protruding plants such as water iris for emerging larvae.
- Floating plants such as water hawthorn or water lettuce to provide shade and a habitat for frogs.
- Marginal plants such as lesser spearwort and marsh marigold to encourage pollinating flying insects.

For further info see <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-create-mini-pond>



Christmas Leftovers (of a different kind)

Wondering what to do with the remains of the Christmas vegetables? Why not use them to make compost trenches for next year's bean, peas or squashes?

The cut up stalks of Brussels sprouts, carrot parings, onion skins, leek trimmings and broccoli/cauliflower stems are perfect materials to form the base of a new compost heap or to start a compost trench. As they decompose over the coming months they will provide nutrients for growing crops and retain water throughout dry spells.

And, at this time of year, you should have planned your beds for the coming season so the timing is perfect.

"Winter-hardy" Crops

Whilst many of our plots will be mostly either bare or covered over the winter months, this is an opportunity lost. Several crops that were planted over recent months can be left to continue to grow throughout winter, improving the productivity of our plots.

And the colder weather actually improves the flavour of many vegetables (e.g. Brussels sprouts, Savoy cabbage and leeks), increasing the sugar content of growing crops. Brassicas planted over summer months will thrive throughout winter and robust root crops such as celeriac - which may be sown as early as March - are an ideal mid-winter crop. Others include...

Chard (sown from mid-July) an easy crop to grow (and which will self-seed), available in a spectacular variety of colours.

Kale (sown in May to early June) another easy crop and rich in nutrients – dwarf varieties are available for smaller plots.

Leek (sown outdoors from April) very hardy and can be planted to follow early harvested broad beans.

Spinach (sown in mid-summer) hardy enough to withstand frosts.

Swede (sown from June) an underrated vegetable which can transform a hot-pot or pie.



If you've already harvested all of your crops (or didn't plant many of the hardy varieties above), the winter weather can help in other ways: repeated freeze-thaw cycles loosens the soil, making it easier to remove weeds by their roots or to rake over the plot; and any activity on the plot can improve wellbeing through physical activity and exposure to daylight during those shorter winter days.



Polite Reminder

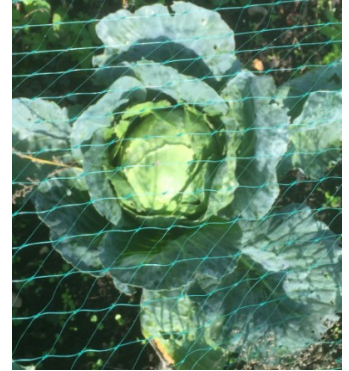
Site Security - Please ensure that the padlock on the front gate is always left locked and scrambled whenever you enter or exit the site.

Winter Recipe

Spiced Red Cabbage with Apple

A simple sweet/ savoury accompaniment to hot or cold roast meats:

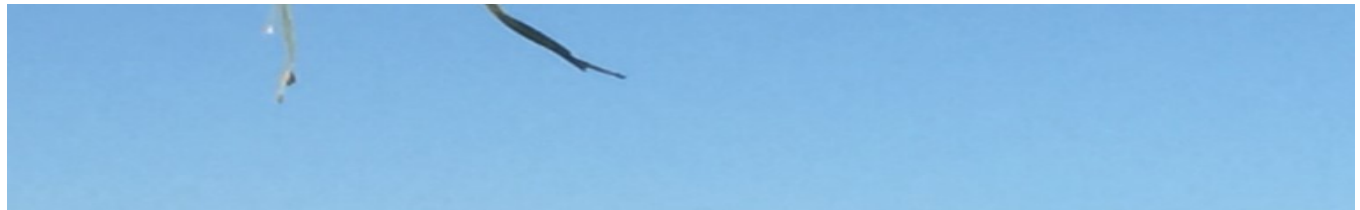
- One medium red cabbage, 450-600 g (1 – 1½lbs)
- 4-5 star anise
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 200ml (½ pint) water or stock
- 50g (2oz) brown sugar
- 100ml (¼ pint) cider or wine vinegar
- 2-3 cooking apples
- Salt and pepper to taste



Finely shred the cabbage and simmer with all the ingredients other than the apples in a saucepan for approximately 30 minutes.

Peel and core the apple and chop into slices. Add to the pan and simmer for a further 15 minutes until the mixture is thick.

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

