



## It's that time of Year

The days are starting to get longer so there's more time to get crops started under cover and tend to the plot. Winter is starting to recede and spring is on its way. It's time to prepare our beds for the year ahead. The days are unpredictable and the ground can be too cold or wet to guarantee plant growth but that shouldn't stop us from taking our chances and start planting crops.



There's not much to harvest until late spring – mostly the last of the winter crops, and very little growing outdoors – so the focus is on planting seedlings indoors/under cover and preparing the soil. Dig over beds, lift any weeds, and add nutrients to the soil. While the soil is soft it is also a good time to erect climbing frames and re-establish borders and edges.

Seed potatoes are ready for chitting early seed potatoes, and you should dig some organic matter in ready for their planting. If you have a soil thermometer, when the reading is above 7°C you can consider whether or not to plant out the chitted potatoes and sow the first seeds of the year.

## Crops to Fill the 'Hungry Gap' (January – May)

**Parsnips, Brussels sprouts, Kale, Chard, Leeks, Cauliflower and Winter Cabbage** – harvest from January.

**Rhubarb** – harvest forced rhubarb from January, outdoor crops from March.

**Purple Sprouting Broccoli** – harvest from March to May.

**Spring Greens, Salad Leaves, Spring Onions** – harvest from March.

**New potatoes, Radishes** – harvest from April.

**Asparagus** – harvest From end April.

## **Jobs**

February: Dig over your plot and add well-rotted organic material, chit seed potatoes. Last chance to prune hard fruit trees.

March: Prune berries, prepare frames/ cloches/ fleece. Weed, remove large stones and rake seedbeds and apply fertilisers. Dig bean trenches.

## **Plant**

February: (outdoors) Garlic and shallots, broad beans, fruit trees and bushes, (under cover) peas, spinach, broccoli, tomatoes

March: Broad beans, peas, early chitted seed potatoes, onions, root and stem vegetable, cabbages and cauliflowers, lettuce and salad crops.

## **Harvest**

February: Winter salads, kale, Brussels sprouts, swedes, cabbage, leeks, parsnips.

March: Early rhubarb, kale, sprouting broccoli, leeks and spring onions.



## Looking Back on 2021

2021 was the second year dominated by COVID. Thankfully, our members have generally remained healthy, and hopefully will continue to do so. Most of our plots have continued to be well tended as other leisure options have been subject to restrictions. Our waiting list for plots continues to grow as others have developed an interest in leisure gardening.

Our AGM was cancelled during 2021 (for the second year in succession) but we are hoping to run this as normal during 2022.

Thankfully, we were able to host the summer barbecue which was well attended. Once again the food, drink and company was appreciated by all – with members bringing a selection of salads and Mediterranean delights to supplement the on-site cooking. Many thanks to Peter, Sue and Dave for stepping up to the grill. Thomas surrendered his crown as Christine Smith won our giant pumpkin competition.

The LAA WhatsApp chat group continues to grow in membership and has become a good way of keeping in touch with fellow gardeners. If you would like to join the group you can ask your site rep to add you to the group or use the following link:

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/KtnsyXg91deAZygPjuDStT>. Please remember to use email (rather than WhatsApp) to contact the Committee and don't share WhatsApp details with non-members.

In terms of facilities, the past year has seen further deliveries of pallets and wood chippings, which have been well received. Major tree pruning work has been undertaken at both sites (which has resulted in further wood chippings being available to members. And the water pump has been replaced at Digswell.

Both the LAA shop and the Kings Seed scheme were well patronised and the move to monthly opening on a Saturday with touchless payment has proved highly successful.

The finances of the Association remain healthy, and we are open to suggestions from all members for any ideas on how we might use some of our funds for the benefit of all. Please get in touch if you have any thoughts.

## Other Updates

**Annual Subscriptions:** invoices for the 2022/23 season's subscriptions and rent will be sent out to Members at the beginning of March together with payment details. The cost of the sub and rent remains unchanged, and that prompt payment would be much appreciated, ideally by bank transfer.

**New Members:** Since the last newsletter Graham Hesketh has joined the Association - welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.





## Crop Planner

	key:					
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
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						





## Helen McLean

Helen McLean, a long-standing member of the LAA, has decided to give up her plot. During her time, Helen has made a great contribution to the Association, both as representative for the Digswell site, as well as shop manager for many years. In appreciation for this, Helen was presented with an engraved bronze trowel at the recent Committee meeting. Helen will now become an Associate member and so retain her contact with us.



## Improve the Soil

The cold dark months provide the perfect opportunity to improve the composition of soil and give crops a better chance to flourish in the spring. Adding plenty of organic matter – either dug into the soil or applied to the surface as a mulch for worms to draw into the soil – will encourage beneficial soil fauna, improve drainage, aerate the soil and provide valuable nutrients. Add some or all of the following:

Any of the below will be perfect, and you can mix and match:

- Homemade compost, from kitchen and/or garden waste, that has rotted for at least six months is ideal
- Commercial compost which is either peat-free or from a renewable source of peat
- Well-rotted manure, available from local stables and farms
- Leaf mould, rotted down for at least a year (leaves decompose more slowly than general compost so are best recycled separately, although the nitrogen content can be increased by adding grass clippings).
- Nutrients: e.g. banana skins contain potassium and phosphorus, coffee grains are high in nitrogen, eggshells are high in calcium and Epsom salts contain magnesium molasses encourage healthy bacteria/microbe activity



For new beds add a 5-10cm layer of organic matter if you can, with further layers of 3-5cm in subsequent years.



## February Recipe

### Love Cake

Valentine's day coincides with the Hungry Gap so this newsletter's recipe makes use of stock cupboard supplies.

- 150g butter
- 250g white sugar
- 6 large eggs
- 250g Semolina
- 250g chopped nuts (Cashews are best)
- 2 tablespoons rose water
- 2 tablespoons runny honey
- Zest of one lemon and one orange
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper (optional)
- 1-2 ground cloves
- 100-150g candied peel/stem ginger/glaze cherries (optional)

Preheat oven to 150°C. Grease a shallow 25 X 30cm (10" X 12") cake tin and line with baking paper.

Beat the butter with the sugar until smooth and then combine the eggs to form a creamy and light mixture.

Stir in the semolina and chopped nuts, then gradually combine the other ingredients.

Pour the mixture into the lined cake tin and place on a middle shelf in the oven for 1 hour or until golden brown.

The final cake should be golden brown and soft, so check after 30 minutes to ensure the cake is not browning too quickly and cover with foil if it has started to go brown or if it is developing a crust.

Transfer to a tin after removing from the oven, place the lid on the tin and allow to cool.

## Productivity: Allotments versus Farms

The University of Sussex has found that allotment gardeners and other urban growers can be as productive as conventional farming.

Annual yields of around 1kg per square metre were achieved with limited pesticide use whilst creating diverse habitats for insects and other wildlife. That translates to approximately 125kg each year for a typical five pole plot.

On average, crops worth £950-£1,000 can be grown on a five pole plot, of which £650-£700 were pollinated by insects. Over a two-year period more than 2,000 pollinating insects were observed to visit crops across a sample of 30 sites. Bees (43%) were the most common group of pollinating visitors, but followed very closely by flies (34%).



Urban growers were found to use fewer pesticides compared to traditional farming and the most common urban crop pests were slugs, snails and aphids. Soft fruit and beans being the worst affected.

Whilst urban farming may be productive and can help improve the security of local food supplies it may not be scalable because it is so labour intensive. However, it does seem to be less damaging than traditional agriculture and is estimated to be capable of providing up to 20% of food demand.

For further information see: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/lifesci/newsandevents?id=56961>.





## Down at the Shed

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

March 19th, 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 and usual distancing rules will apply.

Preferred payment is via card, ideally touchless.



## 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)

