



## It's that time of Year

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.

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 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.

February and March are in the middle of that 'Hungry Gap' between January and late spring/early summer, so there's not much to harvest – 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 weed, erect climbing frames and re-establish borders and edges.

And as we move into March, when most of us ramp up activities on our plots, the Association's site inspections start!



## 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 2020

2020 was the year that was dominated by COVID. Thankfully, the great majority of our members have remained healthy, and hopefully will continue to do so. Most of us have also been able to enjoy our allotments to the full - a great source of comfort, especially during the lock-down periods. This can be seen in both our sites, which have never been so well tended, and in our waiting list for plots, which has never been so long!



Two casualties of the pandemic for our Association were the cancellation of both the AGM and the summer barbecue. We look forward to being able to run these as normal in the coming year. In terms of virtual 'getting together,' we launched the LAA WhatsApp chat group and encourage all Members to join - 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.

Thomas Markatopoulos again won our giant pumpkin competition with his winning specimen weighing in at a hefty 200 kg, something that made the local newspaper! He has plans for even bigger and better in 2021, so we hope that other Members are able to step up and provide some healthy competition.

In terms of facilities, the past year has seen quite some improvements at the Broadwater site, with work carried out on the front gate and perimeter fencing, as well as the addition of a fourth water tank. Most recently, the mower shed has been strengthened and received a new roof, all funded by the Council. We have also arranged more regular deliveries of pallets and wood chippings, which has been well received. At the Digswell site, work-parties cleared several badly overgrown areas. In addition, we have sub-divided several large (7 pole) plots, creating three new allotments for people on the waiting list.

The LAA shop was well patronised, despite lock-down constraints. Moving to a monthly opening on a Saturday has concentrated demand from our Members and helped us with stock management. The new touchless payment facility has also been welcomed, with very few transactions now made using cash.

The finances of the Association remain in good shape, despite spending money this year on the new water tank, as well as skip hire, mower upkeep etc. If you have ideas for how we might use some of our funds for the benefit of our Members, please get in touch.

## A Special Thank You to Helen

Helen McLean decided to relinquish the roles of Shop Manager and Digswell site representative during 2020. In both roles Helen has made a major contribution to the Association and we all owe her a great debt of gratitude. Thank you, Helen, for your contributions to the Association over the years.





## Update from the Committee

We encourage members work their allotments during the lockdown, either alone or with members of their families/household, observing social distancing and good hand hygiene when working plots and when using the locks when entering/ leaving the site.

Coronavirus continues to affect us all but, with the rollout of the vaccination programme, although unable to yet confirm dates, we are optimistic about the prospect of holding an Annual General Meeting later in the year along with our main social event - the summer barbecue.

The existing committee members have confirmed that they are all willing to continue to perform their roles.

## Other Updates

**Annual Subscriptions:** invoices for the 2021/22 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.

**Digswell:** Pruning has been undertaken at the site over the winter.

**Broadwater:** The replacement roof has been fitted to the shed.

**Woodchip Deliveries:** there have been deliveries of woodchip to both sites over recent week with further deliveries expected in February.

**New Members:** Since the last newsletter was sent out we have been joined by Victor Buga, Rebecca Lavender, John Lavelli and Crina Petrea. Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.

## Five Reasons to Visit the Plot When it's too Early to Plant or Pick

Many plotholders prepare their plots for winter soon after the clocks go back, covering their plots to keep the soil warm and free from weeds until it's ready for planting. Indeed, there is nothing wrong with this seemingly sensible approach. However, there are many real advantages (well, five at least!) to attending the plot throughout the winter months...

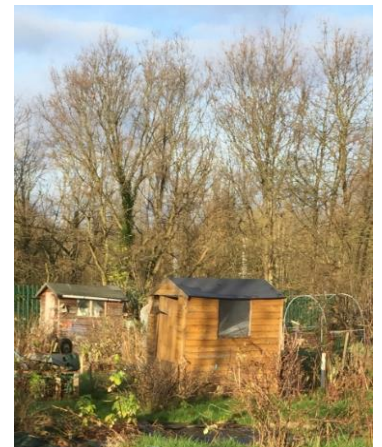
**It is a productive time of year** – leeks, parsnips and fresh brassicas – kale and Brussels sprouts in particular – are in their prime at the coldest time of year.

**It's perfect for weeding** – once the crops have been harvested or died back it's easier to identify any weed growth and once removed they grow back much more slowly than other times of year.

**Get assistance with winter digging** – the frost and rain help to break down the soil and kill pests while worms can get an early start drawing organic matter into the soil ready for planting.

**Buy some time** – any preparation carried out during the lean months will free up time when it comes to preparing seed beds and sowing.

**For the sheer beauty of it!** - Whether due to frost, mist, clear blue skies or something else, there is something special about the winter light. The reduced cover allows you to enjoy the wildlife more and the sharpness of the air keeps you alert to make sure you can enjoy it!





## Crop Planner

		key:					
			sow				
			plant				
			harvest				
		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							



### Polite Reminder – Polytunnels and Greenhouses

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 the short or long term.

### Protecting Plants from Frost

Protection from frost is essential for year-round crops and can help you to get an early start in the spring, and as an intermediate stage when hardening off seedlings. Whilst polytunnels and greenhouses are ideal there are other ways of caring for your plants.

Cold frames and cloches protect your plants from extreme temperatures when they are young and at their most vulnerable. They also have the advantage that they can keep out pests such as birds, mice and some insects. Cloches and cold frames are relatively mobile and so can be relocated to warm the soil before sowing.

Cheap alternatives can be improvised by cutting plastic bottles and using the upper parts to protect individual or small clusters of plants. Not replacing the lids provides ventilation without losing too much heat.

To provide protection over a larger area, you can stretch transparent plastic sheeting or horticultural fleece over hoops or a framework. You should pin or weigh down the material so that it does not blow away.

However you choose to protect your plants from the cold, ensure they are ventilated – although there is some trade off in terms of heat loss, ventilation will prevent plants from damage from mould.





## Allotment Jokes

Q. Why are allotment keepers so rich?

A. Because they are always raking it in!

Q. What do you call a cauliflower at the edge of your plot?

A. A border cauli!

If you know any allotment jokes that you think we'd like to hear please lettuce know!



## Down at the Shed

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

March 20th, April 10th, April 24th, May 15th, June 12th, July 17th, August 14th, Sept. 11th, Oct 16th.

The numbers allowed in the shop at a time will be controlled and usual distancing rules will apply.

Preferred payment is via a 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)

