



It's that time of Year

We're halfway through the year and our crops are taking advantage of longer, warmer (and occasionally wetter!) days. It's our last chance to plant some crops, and an opportunity to harvest the first fruit and vegetables of the year.

June and July are months when there are crops to gather and still more to plant out or tend. They are important months for keeping on top of weeds – growing conditions are ideal for these too and they will be competing with crops for light and heat so regularly hoe and hand pick out weeds.



Plants will start to need regular water as we move through the driest parts of the year. It's time to help the soil to retain water by applying mulches and conserve water by harvesting rainwater whenever available. Ventilate greenhouses and polytunnels on warm days, and damp down pathways to maintain moisture levels and discourage mites.

Earth up your spuds – applying earth around the base of potato stems will reduce tubers' exposure to frost as well as keeping them in the dark to stop them turning green. Thin out direct-sown crops such as spinach, carrots and lettuce. Move leeks and brassicas to their final positions.

Onions will be ready from mid-July when they stop growing and the leaves turn yellow – if there are a few days forecast without rain, partially dig them up with a fork and allow to dry out for a few days in-situ before storing.

And there's still time to fill any gaps on our plots with late season seeds. Salad crops – lettuce, endive, radish, mustard and cress - can be planted and harvested within a few short weeks but beware of ants, aphids and slugs/snails.

There should be an abundance of crops so think about how to store any surplus: pickling, drying, freezing and preserving. It's also a good time to share. If you have excess seedlings or an abundance of produce, then why not offer them to neighbouring plot-holders or put them in sharing boxes?

Jobs

June: Pinch out growing tomatoes and broad beans. Inspect plants regularly - water and remove pests whenever necessary. Thin out directly seeded beds.

July: Feed tomatoes and other fruiting vegetables. Thin out hard fruit if there are exceptional numbers of budding fruits.

Plant

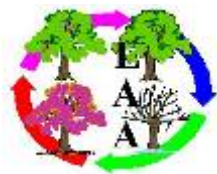
June: Sow salad vegetables, beetroot, carrots, cucumbers, peas, pumpkins and squashes, fruiting plants (peppers, tomatoes, aubergines). Plant out sweetcorn, brassicas and courgette seedlings.

July: Sow beetroot, French beans and peas. Plant out cabbages, cauliflowers and other brassicas for harvesting during autumn/winter.

Harvest

June: Chard, French beans, garlic and onions (if leaves are turning pale), early potatoes.

July: Courgettes, onions, salad vegetables, cherries, strawberries, raspberries, currants and gooseberries.



Update from the Committee

LAA Annual General Meeting – our AGM was held on Wednesday, 27th April 2022 at Jack Lee Hall, Woodside House. Because of restrictions caused by the Covid pandemic, was the first meeting since 2019 and was well attended with 32 members in attendance in addition to those on the Committee.

The Treasurers Report and Chairman's Report were received and those existing Committee members standing for re-election were proposed and seconded, as were new Committee members Bev Kleiser and Kayleigh Tuvey.

Then followed two discussions: the first led by Louise Humphreys, Landscape and Allotment Officer at Welwyn Hatfield Council, who talked about Longcroft Allotment Association's relationship with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and the latter's management of various allotment sites in Welwyn/Hatfield; the second encouraged the No-Dig method of cultivation which was encouraged by Kayleigh Tuvey (Digswell). Other members are using this method and Sam Miller (Broadwater) highlighted a version of the No-Dig method known as Hugelkultur (see article below).

The meeting ended with wide-ranging discussion arising from an invitation to those present to suggest ideas for improving the Association to the benefit of its members.

The minutes of the AGM are available from the members' area of the web-site:
<https://longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk/m/login?r=%2Fagm>

Summer Barbecue – The 2021 Summer BBQ will take place on Sunday 12th September - 1pm, at the Digswell site, Brockwood Lane. Please come along to enjoy the food and drink, meet old friends and make some new ones.

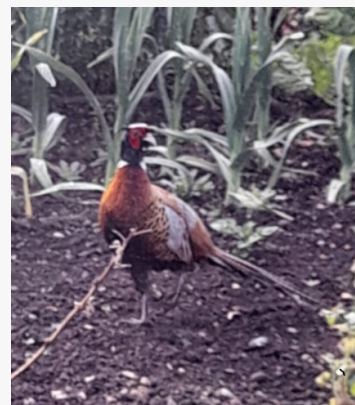
LAA WhatsApp Group: The WhatsApp group continues to be well used for exchanging seeds/plants, weather updates, sharing success stories, welcoming new members and various other purposes

If you haven't joined yet and would like to then ask your site rep to add you to the group.

Digswell – There will be a work party on Saturday 11 June from 09:30-12:00. Please lend a hand if you can.

Broadwater – There will be a work party on Saturday 21 May from 09:30-12:00. The initial focus is the car park area (clearing the tarmac and redefining the area) and cutting back the shrubbery along the southern boundary and across the back of the houses on Broadwater Crescent.

New Members – Since the last newsletter was issued we have been joined by Miss Hayley Byrne, Ms. Nicky Plaskitt and Mr. Paul Goddard, Mr Nico Simone, Mr Liviu Sotirca, Mr Mike Wodcke, Mr James Aldred, Mrs Gina Haynes, Mr Alec Bright and Mr Taylan Sazdili. Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.





Crop Planner

	key:	sow					
		plant					
		harvest					
	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Broad Bean	harvest	harvest	harvest		sow	sow	
Runner Bean	sow	harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest		
Pea	harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest		
Potatoes	harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest		
Leek			harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest
Onion / Shallot		harvest	harvest	harvest			
Garlic	harvest	harvest	harvest		plant	plant	plant
Beetroot	sow	sow	harvest	harvest	harvest		
Carrot	sow	sow	harvest	harvest	harvest		
Swede / Turnip	sow			harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest
Courgette		harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest		
Pumpkin / Winter Squash			harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest	
Tomatoes		harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest		
Chilli / Aubergine		harvest	harvest	harvest			
Chard/Leaf Beet	sow	sow	harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest	
Cabbage	sow	sow	sow	sow		harvest	harvest
Kale	sow				harvest	harvest	harvest
Black/Redcurrants	harvest	harvest	harvest		plant	plant	plant
Raspberries	harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest	plant	plant
Strawberries		harvest	harvest		plant		
Fruit Trees			harvest	harvest	harvest	plant	plant



Down at the Shed

The LAA shop will open on the following Saturdays between 09.30 and 12.00: May 21st, June 11th, July 16th, August 13th, Sept. 10th, and Oct 15th.

Preferred payment is via card, ideally touchless.

If members are available and willing to help unloading supplies to the shop (the deliveries are made during weekdays) then please let us know: either by email or through a committee member.



Hugelkultur (“No-Dig Cultivation on Steroids”)



Hugelkultur (a German word meaning hill culture) is a method of growing crops by constructing a mound of organic matter, topped with soil. It is an extreme version of the No-Dig method of cultivation and applies the same principles as raised beds. The structure includes logs and branches (most types of soft and hard wood are suitable) plus a mixture of leaves, wood-chip, grass clippings, straw (sometimes straw bales are used), manure, compost and other organic matter. Over the years they naturally break down to produce a rich soil/compost.

The advantages of hugelkultur include:

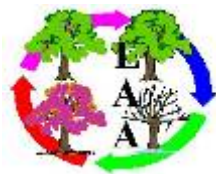
- The slow decay of wood provides long-term source of nutrients for the plants (typically for more than 10 years).
- The decomposition of the mound generates heat within the soil which aids plant growth.
- The coarse nature of the underground structure (logs and sticks) facilitates soil aeration without the need to dig.
- The logs and branches retain moisture, reducing the need to water plants – a particular advantage over dry summer spells.
- The high proportion of organic matter in the growing medium means that weeds are easily removed.
- The curve of the mound provides a greater surface area than level ground allowing more crops to be grown.

The basis of the mound is a 30cm (1ft) deep trench filled with logs and branches covered by either inverted turf or a layer of soil. Vertical logs which extend above ground level will give the bed extra height.

During the first year of the bed, the decomposition of the logs draws nitrogen from the surrounding material. This can be abated by covering the logs with nitrogen rich lawn clippings and/or growing legumes in the first year which fix nitrogen in the soil.

For more information see <https://www.permaculture.co.uk/articles/many-benefits-hugelkultur>.

(with thanks to Sam Miller, Broadwater)



Edible Flowers

One of the Association's recent WhatsApp group exchanges (initiated by Tanya Thomas') highlighted the benefits of the dandelion. Dandelions are often regarded as an unwanted weed but we can look upon them more favourably having been alerted to their capacity to help restore the balance of some nutrients in the soil and their potential culinary value (to humans, and not just tortoises!) – a quick internet search produced a diverse selection of dandelion recipes ranging from cajun fritters to pickled buds and various syrups, jams and infusions.

Many other flowers are also edible and nutritious. Courgette leaves can be stuffed and fried, nasturtiums can be added to leaf salads (they are surprisingly peppery) and the flowers of numerous herbs can

For details of other varieties of edible flowers and their uses in cooking: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/herbs/edible-flowers>.



Summer Recipe

Lavender Shortbread/Lavendar Sugar

A distinctive biscuit which can be eaten alone or as an ideal accompaniment for a rich vanilla ice cream. Ideally the lavender flowers should be added to the sugar at least two weeks in advance so it may be useful to make a large batch that you can re-use.

- 125g (5 oz.) sugar or castor sugar
- 200g (8oz) butter, softened
- ½ teaspoon lavender flowers
- 250g (10oz.) plain flour
- (or scale up the above in proportion if making a larger batch for storing)
- 50g (2oz.) rice flour or semolina



Makes 12-20 biscuits.

At least two weeks in advance, finely chop the lavender, mix with the sugar and store in an air tight container.

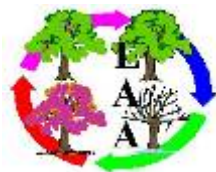
Separate the flowers from the sugar immediately before making the biscuits. Put the butter and sugar in a mixing bowl and combine until the mixture is smooth.

Add the flour, rice flour/semolina and lavender flowers seeds and mix with a spoon until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Pour onto a floured worktop and knead to form a smooth dough. Chill the dough for 15 minutes.

Roll the dough out to a 5mm/¼in thickness, and cut into your preferred shape. Chill for a further 30 minutes.

Place on baking paper on top of baking trays and sprinkle with a little extra lavender sugar.

Cook at 180°C/ 350°F for 15-20 minutes, until pale golden-brown. Place the biscuits onto a rack, sprinkle with sugar and allow to cool completely.



Happy Gardening!

Did you know that there is a natural antidepressant in the soil?

Mycobacterium vaccae bacteria are found in soil and are ingested and inhaled when we are outdoors or spend time gardening. This bacteria stimulates the brain part responsible for producing serotonin, a chemical which helps to reduce feelings of anxiety and improve cognition.



Mycobacterium vaccae was originally isolated in Uganda where it was used in vaccinations which were shown to be effective against leprosy. Mycobacterium vaccae anti-inflammatory and immunoregulatory properties and may help to reduce the symptoms of other medical conditions.

So, if we think our allotments reduce stress and lift our moods we have scientific backing. The natural effects of these antidepressant bacteria in the soil can be felt for up to 3 weeks.

Comments and Feedback



With grateful thanks to Eddie for the image of the "surprise visitor" (the pheasant at Digswell).

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

