



It's that time of Year

It's that exciting time of year when the first seedlings start to appear and we can work our plots in the evenings as well as the daytime. Established plants will need feeding, seeds need to be sown, and young seedlings will require potting on.

April is when the growing season really starts: planting out, growing seedlings, potting on, preparing beds under cover, controlling weeds and keeping an eye out for frosts. The soil will still

be cold from winter so delay seed-sowing out of doors until there are signs of natural plant growth (i.e. weeds and grass). Keep on top of weeds by hoeing regularly, covering beds or hand-weeding. And May brings the warmer weather when our crops really start to grow.

April and May are important months for keeping on top of weeds – these will be taking advantage of the longer days and warmer weather and are generally better suited to ground and weather conditions than our crops.

Good soil structure is vital for plant growth, so avoid compacting the soil by using planks to spread your weight, or creating beds so that you can reach and cultivate all parts of seed beds from paths. It's a good time to think about how to prepare beds so that they can retain moisture and require less frequent watering throughout the coming summer months.

Make successive sowings of peas, chard, root crops and salad crops – they won't all be successful but at least some will get a chance to grow when the soil is not too cold/wet/dry and there are fewer pests.

Root crops and legumes should thrive in a well prepared soil without any additional feeding. Fruiting plants, potatoes and brassicas will require feeding and/or a dressing of manure or well-rotted compost in the spring.



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: (outdoors) Basil, beetroot, Brussels sprouts, cabbages, carrots, courgette, squash, pumpkin, cucumber

(under cover), French and runner beans, lettuce, peas, sweetcorn, cauliflower, sprouting broccoli, aubergines, pepper

Harvest

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

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



Update from the Committee

Annual General Meeting – The association's 47th AGM is will be held on **Wednesday, 19th April**, at the Jack Lee Hall, Woodside House, WGC, at 7 pm. Light refreshments will be provided, and there will be a raffle (free entry) and a 'seed swap' table so that members can exchange any spare and surplus seeds and seedlings.

This is an opportunity for all our members to hear about plans for the Association and to voice your thoughts on how it can be improved. We hope that you will be able to attend.

As usual, it will be a good opportunity to get an update on matters relating to the LAA, to share thoughts on how we can further improve the Association, and to socialise with fellow Members.

If any member has any particular item that they would like to discuss, or would like to give a short informal talk at the AGM or knows of someone who would do this, please let us know.

Membership Subscriptions – A big thank you to those of you who have renewed their subscriptions. Reminders will be sent out over the next week or two for the few remaining unpaid membership fees.

Whilst many local allotment sites have experienced sharp increases in their rents the LAA requires 12 months' notice of any rent increase. As such, the rent that LAA Members will pay for the coming season remains unchanged from last year.

Contact Details - If you have changed email address or are not receiving email updates from the Association please send your latest contact details to us at email@longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk.

We have found that some of our email notifications have been directed to members' junk folders – you can help to stop this happening if you add the LAA email address to your contacts list.

School Visit - On Friday 24th March, the Broadwater site had a visit from a class of Year 5 pupils from Templewood school. The 30 children, together with their teacher, teaching assistants and a few parents, spent just over an hour on site as part of their 'Sow, Grow and Farm' topic. They were keen to understand what was growing, what problems allotment holders have to overcome, and our facilities (our composting loo being a highlight for the second year running. Feedback from the school indicated a high level of engagement with some children reportedly asking their parents if they could have an allotment.

Work Parties: These are scheduled for the following Saturdays, from 09:30-12:00: 15th April and 16th September at both our Digswell and Broadwater sites.

Health and Safety Inspections – our six monthly inspections will take place in April at both sites so please ensure your plots and free from broken glass and any other potential hazards.

New Members – Since our last newsletter we are pleased to be joined by Mrs. Maria Cachia (B35), Mrs. Par Gilliar (D175), Mr. Gheorge Jalthamer (D153), Mr. Elwyn Way (D135), Paul Suter (B29), Mrs. Lucy Gravatt (D110), and Miss Sara Cannon-Leppard (B23) - welcome to the association and we hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.

Down at the Shed

The LAA shop will open once a month from 09.30 to 12.00 on the following Saturdays:

| | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Apr 22 nd | May 20 th | Jun 17 th | Jul 22 nd |
| Aug 19 th | Sep 23 rd | Oct 21 st | |

Members should have received a price list by email - if you haven't received one, or have suggestions regarding what else the shop might also stock, please let us know.





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 | | | | | | |



Early Spring Recipe

Rhubarb Crumble Muffins (makes 12 No. standard sized muffins)

- 175g (7 oz.) caster sugar
 - 175g (7 oz.) rhubarb cut into small cubes
 - 2 tbsp sunflower oil
 - 1 egg
 - 1 tsp vanilla extract
 - 125ml buttermilk/natural yoghurt
 - 200g (8 oz.) plain flour
 - 1 tsp baking powder
 - 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- For the crumble topping
- 50g (2 oz.) soft brown sugar
 - 50g (2 oz.) plain flour
 - 25g (1 oz.) porridge oats
 - 1 tsp ground cinnamon
 - 50g (2 oz.) butter



Pre-heat the oven to 220°C (200°C fan) and place twelve muffin cases in a cake tray.

Stir the sugar and rhubarb together and set aside to soak while you prepare the crumble mixture.

Mix together the soft brown sugar, flour, oats and cinnamon, then rub in the butter to form a coarse crumble topping.

Stir the sunflower oil, egg, vanilla and buttermilk (or yoghurt) into the sugar and rhubarb mixture. Add the flour, baking powder and bicarbonate of soda and stir well for fifteen seconds (don't be concerned if there are patches of dry flour). Spoon equally into the muffin cases and top with a thick layer of the crumble mixture.

Bake for 15-18 minutes until golden brown.

Allotment Poem

'The Allotment' by Jill Bamber...

You were doubled digging heavy clay
According to the plan that reached to Autumn
Drawn out in different coloured inks,
The wind-shield hedge, the bark chip paths,
Two rows set aside for leeks,
Four for seed potatoes.

And I walked down the catkin path that day
To ask what you'd like for dinner.
'Lamb Stew' you said, 'with these'
And dug two parsnips, deeply ringed
Awesome as inverted urns
Comfortably carried.

Lamb stew, so lean it could be grass,
Each small silk-coated gold shallot
Ring-cut, runner beans as fresh as leaves
With eyes, those bean-cut eyes,
Some kept to sow. Beetroot bleeding,
Searching earth and going round its stones

And finding ways. Obscene five-fingered
Carrot roots, how do they draw
Such orange from damp clay?
Your aching back and clever hands
Know how to conjure life
And when to feed me.

From a poetry completion run by Gardeners' World Magazine in June 2011



Trees on Plots

Please remember that trees must not be planted on anyone's plot until a request form has been submitted and permission granted. You can find the form here:

<https://longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk/requests-and-forms>

Trees are a long term commitment that will nearly always be growing long after the individual plot-holder who planted it has moved on, so we have to be careful what we allow people to plant. One of the most important points is that the tree should be on a dwarf stock.

Dealing with Weeds

Annual and ephemeral weeds, such as Fat Hen, Chickweed and Groundsel, typically appear in springtime and can be either dug into the soil or removed and added to compost heaps if it gets hot enough to destroy the seeds (more than 60°C for at least a few days).

Perennials are more of a problem because they not only distribute seeds but can regenerate growth through their roots and rhizomes. Dandelions, for example, have a long tap root which regrows so it is important to remove the root in its entirety (and sometimes).

The size of the plant is no indication of the size of the root – when part of the root is removed and the residual root regenerates the visible part of the plant that emerges is initially small regardless of how far the tap root goes down.

Perennial weeds such as nettles and the Couch Grass extend their roots outwards beneath the soil – although not ideal these can easily be dug out.

The worst weeds are those with deep and extensive roots. These often require repeated attempts at removal which. Even then, as those suffering from bindweed invasions will probably agree, never quite achieve complete success.





Comments and Feedback



With thanks to Christine Smith for tracking down poems from the June 2011 edition of Gardeners World.
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

