



It's that time of Year



February 2024 was the wettest on record and was the ninth consecutive month when weather records were broken. As we move into spring we can expect the days to get warmer and drier – or can we?

The days will certainly be getting longer, offering a bit more time to tend our plots. It's time to prepare our seed beds for the coming year and grow seedlings under cover. In April there's not much to harvest and the focus is on growing seedlings and preparing our plots for the months ahead: dig over beds; lift any weeds; apply organic matter (compost/manure) and apply plant feed.

Soon the first seedlings start to appear and established plants will need feeding, seeds need to be sown, and young seedlings will require potting on. But, at the same time, we need to be wary of frosts, pests, weeds and forthcoming plot inspections.

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.

There is also a chance to make some early preparations by erecting climbing frames, preparing cloches and cold frames while the ground is still soft. It's also time to re-establish borders and start mowing our pathways – the lawn clippings provide valuable nitrogen to revitalise our compost heaps.

Late spring is the time to make successive outdoor 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.

Finally, the allotment shop at the Digswell site has re-opened between 09:30 and 12:30 for one Saturday each month until October – the place to stock up on canes, compost, fertilisers, grow-bags, slug pellets, and other essentials.

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 48th AGM is will be held on **Wednesday, 24th 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). 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 will we will be discussing the area of water resilience (how to conserve more and how to use less), and receive an update on allotments within the borough from the council. 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.

Broadwater – Having cleared a space near the car park at a recent work party we're hoping to have two beehives on site this spring.

Digswell – Following the damage caused by heavy winds earlier in the year the mower shed has now been replaced.

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 so to those that are still unpaid. We are pleased to report that rentals for the coming season remains unchanged from last year.

Contact Details – We are experiencing difficulties sending group emails to our members with gmail addresses which we hope to resolve soon. . 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.

Work Parties: The next work parties are scheduled for Saturday 27 April from 09:30-12:00 at both our Digswell and Broadwater sites.

New Members – Since our last newsletter we are pleased to be joined by Magdalena Popo (B8), John and Viv Anderson (D141), Celia Casimiro (D127A), Ciara Snailham (D157) and Mark Dunn (D101). Feryal Shadi (B11) has re-joined the association - welcome (and welcome back) to the association and we hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.





Crop Planner

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
	key: sow					
	 plant					
	 harvest					
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						



The LAA Shop

The LAA shop has been extremely well attended for its first two openings of 2024. It will be open each month throughout the growing season from 09.30 to 12.00 on the following Saturdays: Apr 20th, May 25th, Jun 22nd, Jul 20th, Aug 24th, Sep 21st, Oct 26th

If people have spare plants (or seeds) they can be left on the bench outside the shop when it opens.



Late Spring Recipes

Pasta with Purple Sprouting Broccoli (serves four)

This is a delicious dish which takes as much time to prepare as it does to cook the pasta – an ideal mid-week supper.



- 250g purple sprouting broccoli
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 2-4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- Zest of one lemon
- 400g pasta (penne or fusilli are ideal)
- Grated Parmesan or other hard cheese
- Olive oil for drizzling
- Salt and pepper

Trim the end off the purple sprouting broccoli and cut into 2-3cm chunks. Cook in salted boiling water until tender (no more than five minutes) and drain.

Cook the pasta in salted boiling water. Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a large saucepan. Add the onion and garlic and cook until soft. Add the cooked purple sprouting broccoli, lemon zest, and stir occasionally for another five minutes.

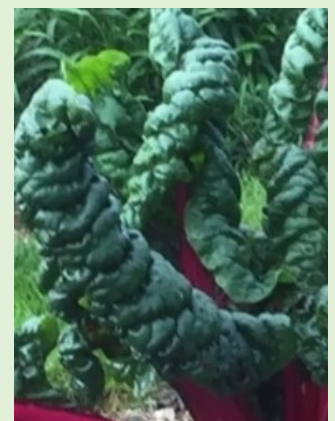
Drain the pasta when cooked and add to the purple sprouting broccoli mixture and toss well. Add Pecorino or Parmesan and drizzle with olive oil.

Chard with Lemon and Garlic (a tasty and colourful side dish to accompany most meals)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 tablespoons olive oil• 4-6 garlic cloves• Pinch of chilli flakes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A good handful of mixed chard leaves• Salt and pepper• Juice of half a lemon |
|--|--|

Crush the garlic cloves and fry gently in the olive oil with the chilli flakes until the garlic softens.

Finely slice the chard and add to the pan and cook until the leaves have started to wilt. Add the seasoning and lemon juice and cook for another 2-3 minutes until all the ingredients are combined.





Growing Squash

Squashes are nutritious, delicious and attractive. They also offer a wide variety to choose from.

Growing squash plants from seed can be a challenge but it's the cheapest and most rewarding method. The following tips can give your plants a head start and valuable extra days' growth.

Plant seeds during April in approximately 1cm deep in rich compost and allow to germinate in a warm place. Keeping them above 15°C should result in seedlings after 10-14 days which will be ready to harden off towards the end of May. Meanwhile prepare their beds by removing all weeds and large stones and fork in well-rotted manure/compost and a handful of slow release fertiliser – squashes are 'hungry' vegetables.

Plant during warm weather and place them at least 60cm apart (1m for trailing varieties). Water sparingly during the first few weeks as young plants are prone to rot. Gradually increase the amount of water as the plant grow.



Silver Leaf

Silver leaf is a fungus (*Chondrostereum Purpureum*) that affects fruit trees – particularly plum, apple and cherry trees. It causes leaves to turn silver in the summer and causes dark staining within the branches which can only be seen when they are cut. Branches will die soon after the leaves turn silver.

The fungus produces most spores during colder weather, and so the disease can be delayed by pruning vulnerable trees later in the year, i.e. late spring/early summer. If there are signs of silver leaf then affected branches should be cut as soon as possible.

Greater Success from Seeds

Most of us start to grow our plants in seed trays before planting out when the danger of frost has passed. Success rates can be variable but it's the cheapest and most rewarding method. The following tips can give your plants a better chance of germination and a few valuable extra days' growth:



- Clean any containers and trays to remove any traces of pests/diseases .
- If you are sowing directly onto the plot, the soil temperature will need to be consistently above 7°C (usually early-mid May). Horticultural fleece or clear plastic sheeting can help warm the ground sooner.
- Put the compost in a warm place – e.g. direct sunlight or a greenhouse - prior to planting.
- Space your seeds at the distances recommended on your seed packets
- Large seeds that are wrinkled (e.g. peas and beans) can benefit from soaking prior to planting.
- Seeds of tomato and pepper plant benefit from an overnight soak in cold black tea – the tea removes their natural jelly-like coating which otherwise delays germination.



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

