

It's that time of Year

As we approach the midpoint of the year it's our last chance to plant some crops, as well as an opportunity to harvest the first fruit and vegetables of the year.

The early summer months transform our plots from mostly soil to an array of vegetation. They are very important months for keeping on top of weeds which take advantage of the additional warmth and daylight.



It's time to earth up your spuds - applying earth around the base of potato stems will reduce frost damage and stop well as keeping them in the dark to stop them turning green. Thin out direct-sown crops such as spinach, carrots and lettuce.

Keeping grow bags and potting compost in direct sunlight or a greenhouse/polytunnel will warm them up and give your seeds a head start in the growing cycle.

Plants need regular water and, as we move towards the driest parts of the year, can suffer if there are prolonged spells of dry weather. Water regularly and take a look at the growing tips in the article below (Successful Harvesting Using Less Water) for advice on helping the soil to retain water. harvesting.

Remember to ventilate your greenhouse on warm days, and consider using blinds or shades to avoid excessive temperatures, and damping down pathways to maintain moisture levels (and discourage mites).

It can be 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 bench/table.

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, 19th April 2023 at Jack Lee Hall, Woodside House. The event was well attended with eight representatives from the committee and 25 other members.

It was a good opportunity to celebrate some of the improvements that have been made over the year: displaying plans at each site showing members' names and the locations of communal fruit trees; the continuing growth of the LAA WhatsApp group (now with 80 members), the annual Barbecue which had its highest ever attendance, numerous woodchip deliveries; successful work parties at both sites; laurel hedge trimming at Digswell and repairs to the gate at Broadwater. Suggestions for further improvements include a wildlife pond at Digswell, marking parking spaces at Broadwater, a different competition at the barbecue (maybe one for children), and further rainwater collection.

The Association's accounts were agreed and it was reported that all rents and subscriptions were received by 6 April (another record!) and an increasing number of members are paying on-line. Existing Committee members were re-elected and Kate Sims volunteered to join the Committee. Thanks were given to all Committee members for their work over the year and to Barbara Wilton for (again) co-ordinating the seed scheme.

A number of long-standing members have recently left the association including Gavin Duncan at Broadwater (sadly, deceased), as well as Neil Holmes-Smith, Cyril Phelps, Colin Pope and Philip Fotheringham at Digswell. Philip was a past-Chairman and Treasurer and all were wished well.

Louise Humphreys, Landscape and Allotment Officer at Welwyn Hatfield Council, spoke briefly about developments in the Borough, experiences of other sites in Welwyn and Hatfield (which, like ours, are experiencing a higher turnover of tenants since the end of the pandemic), and the need to renew our existing lease which expires in 2024 (only minor changes anticipated before we renew for another ten years). Louise confirmed there is a statutory requirement to provide allotments in the Borough and responded to a number of questions from the floor.

Andrew explained that it was hoped to change the Association year to align (if only approximately) with the calendar year so that new tenants have a chance to work their plots before the start of the growing season. If permissible within the new lease, we hope to introduce this from 1st April 2024 with pro-rata (i.e. reduced) invoices for the remainder of that calendar year.

The meeting ended with a raffle and a chance to chat with fellow gardeners.

The minutes of the AGM are available from the members' area of the web-site:

<https://longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk/m/login?r=%2Fagm>

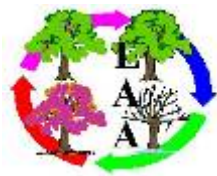
Summer Barbecue – The 2021 Summer BBQ will take place in September – date to be confirmed. Please make try and come along to enjoy the food and drink and meet fellow plot-holders.

LAA WhatsApp Group: The WhatsApp group continues to be well used for exchanging plants and growing tips, welcoming new members and showing off outstanding harvests. If you would like to join then please ask your site rep to add you to the group or send us an email.

Digswell – All members are invited to take the free seeds that have been moved from the shop to a tray in the Digswell kitchen (and please feel free to donate others if you have some to spare).

Work Parties - The next work parties will take place from 09:30-12:00 on Saturday 16th September at both our Digswell and Broadwater sites.

New Members – Since the last newsletter was issued we have been joined by Ralph Clementson (D163), Graham Pitt (D171). Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.



Crop Planner

	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
key:							
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	harvest	sow	harvest	harvest	harvest		
Carrot	harvest	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	harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest	harvest	
Cabbage	sow	harvest	harvest	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

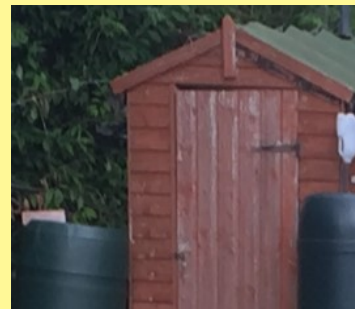


Down at the Shed

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

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.



Successful Harvesting Using Less Water

Water is essential to crop growth but it is a precious resource and there are steps we should take to ensure that it is not wasted.

The timing and nature of watering is critical. Watering around the base of the plant will ensure that moisture quickly and effectively reaches the roots. The best time to water crops is in the evening or very early morning when the air is cooler. Occasional (approximately weekly) thorough watering is better than more frequent light watering because it soaks the soil encouraging deeper root growth to search for moisture.



Applying organic matter down around the base of plants helps to retain moisture and insulate the soil from high air temperatures. As the mulch encourages bacteria it will eventually decompose, improving soil structure and enhancing plant growth in future seasons.

Not all plants need the same amount of water, and some plants need more/less water at various stages of their growth cycle. The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners web-site contains specific considerations for a range of commonly grown crops (see link below).

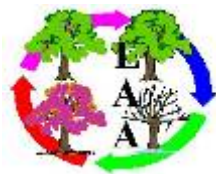
Also, planting in blocks rather than rows can make watering easier and reduces water loss - the water escaping from each plant will provide some benefit to neighbouring crops. In the case of sweetcorn, planting in blocks aids pollination.

<https://www.nsalg.org.uk/growing-advice/gardening-advice/water-use-on-allotments/>

Polite Reminder - Mowing

At this time of year grass grows quickly and can soon get out of control. When mowing please ensure that you cut the grass on footpaths surrounding all sides of your allotment. Our tenancy agreements require ploholders to "keep all footpaths surrounding their allotment in good condition, including mowing, weeding and keeping them free from obstructions".





Macerated Strawberries

Have you ever noticed that ripe strawberries go soft within a day or so of picking and wondered if there is a way of keeping them fresh for longer? Well there is – maceration!

Wash and drain freshly picked strawberries and slice them. Add two tablespoons of sugar to each 500g (1 lb.) of strawberries and stir. After allowing them to rest for an hour or so, add two teaspoons of vinegar (balsamic or cider vinegar are ideal) and stir again. If you are feeling adventurous add a few twists of black pepper.

The mixture will stay fresh in the fridge for up to a week.



Roast Beetroot

Roasting or baking beetroot brings out a lot of their natural sweetness. They can stain so you may wish to handle with rubber gloves and protective clothing when handling.

They can be eaten raw as an accompaniment to a hot meal or, when cool, used as the basis of salads (try it with crumbled feta cheese and thinly sliced red onions over a mixed green salad, drizzled in olive oil).

- Whole beetroot, washed (allow two medium or one large one per person)
- 2 tablespoons of oil (light olive, rapeseed or sunflower oil)
- Coarsely ground sea salt
- A few sprigs of fresh thyme (or a generous pinch of dried thyme)



Coat the raw beetroots with the oil, sprinkle with salt and thyme and place in a baking tray in a pre-heated oven, 200°C.

Bake until the beetroot is soft but before it wrinkles or shrinks – usually 30-40 minutes for medium beetroots 45 minutes for large.

Remove from the oven and peel the beetroot (if using for a salad, allow to cool first).

Add more seasoning if necessary.



Comments and Feedback



With thanks to Marion and Thomas for the images of their magnificent harvest on the cover and back pages of this newsletter.

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.

