



It's that time of Year



We've had a late summer with one of the warmest September on record but soon temperatures will drop as the sun lowers in the sky and the days get shorter..

October signals the start the end of the growing season as it's time to harvest the last of your tomatoes, peppers and courgettes, and frosts become more regular. But it is also a time to welcome the next season by starting to prepare the soil and plant hardy broad beans and peas, while shallots and garlic can get an excellent start if they avoid waterlogged soil.

Now is the time to start your winter digging – the frosts and rain will help to further break down the soil so that ready for planting in the spring. If you combine some organic matter then the worms will 'do their bit' below the ground. Mulch the soil around plants above warm, wet, weed-free soil.

It's the perfect time of year to tidy up the plot, compost the remains of the year's harvest and plant/prune fruit trees and bushes.

You may want to consider extended your growing season by investing in a greenhouse, hot frame or polytunnel.

Jobs

October: Clean pots, apply mulches, cover pot plants with fleece, insulate greenhouses and tidy up to prevent pests from over wintering, take cuttings from currants and berries.

November: Order seeds for the coming year. Prepare you plot by winter digging. Considering covering for winter.

December: Prune hard fruit trees (apples, pears) and currants, gooseberries and autumn raspberries. Remove faded leaves from winter brassicas. Clean pots, store produce, and plan for the year ahead. Cover beds.

Plant

October: Broad beans (Aquadulce varieties are most resistant to cold), rhubarb, peas (under cover) and garlic.

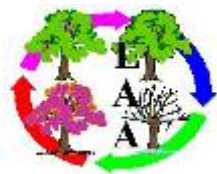
November/December: Fruit trees, fruit bushes and rhubarb. Garlic sets, shallots, hardy peas and broad beans (Aquadulce varieties), winter salad leaves.

Harvest

October: The very last tomatoes, apples and other hard fruits, leeks, beetroot, beans sweetcorn, squash (they should sound hollow when you tap them), kale and chard.

November: Brassicas (cabbage, kale, Brussels sprouts), late salad crops.

December: Leeks, root vegetables, brassicas (cabbage, kale, Brussels sprouts), late salad crops.



Update from the Committee

Summer BBQ – The 2023 Summer BBQ took place on 10 September at the Digswell site. Once again this was well attended and (once again!) Thomas Markatopoulos won the prize for growing the largest pumpkin.

The Association would like to express its thanks to Peter, Sue and Dave for again stepping up to the grill. We are sure that everyone greatly enjoyed the food and the day.



Kings Seed Catalogue – the deadline for ordering from the latest Kings Seed catalogue is Monday 30 October. All members should have received an email containing the catalogue, and order form and instructions. An online brochure available from the following link: <https://nsg.kingsseeds.com/nsg-catalogue>.

Christie Smith has decided to step down from her Committee roles of Secretary and Membership Secretary. We would like to express our thanks for Christine's great support to the Association over many years. Sam Hayton has kindly agreed to take on the role of interim Membership Secretary, in addition to her existing role as LAA Treasurer.

Scout Visit – Late in September at the Digswell site we hosted approximately 30 Cubs (1st Welwyn Garden City) who are seeking their gardening badges. They were learning about the types of crops which can be grown and harvested throughout the year, the tools that are required, and biodiversity (i.e. the “mini-beasts”) that allotments support. The weather was kind and as plots were descended upon in swarms and the cubs sampled blackberries, raspberries, mangetout, carrots (complete with dirt) and even a late spear of Asparagus! Digging for worms was another highlight.



Natural Ponds – There will be a meeting on Saturday 7th October (10 am) at Digswell to plan arrangements for clearing the site, measuring and ascertaining levels for the pond and determining future action.

The area around the pond at Broadwater was been cleared during the 16th September work party. The pond had become stagnant and this will allow more light to allow the pond to recover.

Water tanks – new metal covers have been fitted to all water tanks at both our sites. These should be a lot more durable than the previous plywood covers which were showing signs of age.

Disciplinary Process for Neglected Plots - Given our enduring long wait list for plots, we feel it appropriate to tighten up the disciplinary and will be applying the Enforcement process defined in the Tenancy Agreement.

New Members - Since the last newsletter was issued we have been joined by Peter and Vicki Aldridge (B6). Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.



“Frankenstein” Food



Some of us saw something a bit freaky at this year’s Barbecue – Thomas (of pumpkin-growing fame) had grafted three varieties of tomato stems onto a single potato plant. Such “pomatoes” can produce tomatoes above ground and potato tubers below.

Tomatoes and potatoes are both members of the nightshade family (Solanaceae), and are biologically so similar that they can be successfully grafted. Aubergines and peppers are also members of this family and so can also be grafted to potatoes.

The principle of grafting is basic but the process (cutting a small the stem of both plants and carefully strapping them together) is difficult. For the plant in the photograph, Thomas modified five stems of which three took.

For details of the technique of grafting, and a bit of the history behind the “pomato/tomato” see the Allotment Garden web-site:

<https://www.allotment-garden.org/garden-diary/6702/pomato-tomato-tomato-potato/>

Asian Hornets

The number of Asian hornet (*vespa velutina*) sightings has recently grown sharply – particularly in Kent and the south coast - and there are fears that it may have become established in the UK. Asian Hornets are smaller than native hornets and can be identified by their orange faces, yellow-tipped legs and darker abdomens.

The Asian Hornet preys on insects and are a major threat to bee colonies, and other native species in the UK. They are most likely to be seen near bee hives where they attack bees as they leave or return to the hive, and bees that are attempting to defend their colony.



Asian Hornets first arrived in Europe in 2004 when it was thought to have reached France via freight deliveries and has caused concern with the number of insects they have killed. It has since thrived in continental Europe but, although it was first spotted in the UK in 2016, it appears to have been unable to survive the colder winter UK weather.

Any sightings should be reported as soon as possible and southern parts of England are an area of high risk. Details of how to identify and report an Asian Hornet are available from the government web-site:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asian-hornet-uk-sightings>.



Down at the Shed

There is still one last chance this year to stock up with compost, manure, fleece and weed-suppressing coverings - the LAA shop will open on Saturday 21st October between 09.30 and 12.00.

All payments are now contactless.

Autumn Recipe

Borlotti Bean and Fennel Stew (2-4)

A hearty stew for those colder evenings – perfect with rustic chunks of crusty bread.

- 2-3 tablespoons light olive oil
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 5-6 garlic cloves
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- Half a fresh fennel bulb (optional)
- 1 bay leaf (optional)
- 1 can of tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon white sugar
- 1-2 cups borlotti beans, fresh from their pods
- 1-2 cups water
- 2-3 strips lemon peel
- 2 tablespoons capers
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Chopped parsley to garnish (optional)

Gently heat the oil in a saucepan and cook the onions until soft. Add the garlic (chopped or crushed), bay leaf and fennel/fennel seeds and cook gently for 5-10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add the tinned tomatoes, sugar, beans and water and cook at a steady boil for approximately 45 minutes.

Add the lemon peel, capers and season the mixture. Simmer for a further 15-30 minutes until the beans soften and have a creamy texture.





Comments and Feedback



With thanks to Andrew Hepher for details of the cubs' visit and to Thomas Markatopoulos for his potato/tomato grafting ingenuity.

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

