



It's that time of Year

We might have kept our plots tidy over winter but now the real work starts – preparing seedbeds, weeding, raking and sieving, pruning, feeding and mulching.

The most important thing is to remove any weeds that have survived winter and start to prepare seed beds for sowing and planting over the coming months.



Some of the hardier plants are ready to go outdoors but most and it's a crucial time to get others started early under cover – so time to prepare cloches, cold frames or to plant seeds indoors.

Don't be tempted to plant out too early – seeds that are planted later usually catch up but seeds that are sown too early rarely recover from setbacks in their growth.

There's little to harvest – April is known as the 'hungry gap' when there is a real shortage of fresh fruit and vegetables other than the brassicas: cabbages, cauliflower, broccoli and kale. Hence only the one recipe in this newsletter!



Jobs

March: prune berries, prepare frames/cloches. Rake seedbeds and apply fertilisers. Dig bean trenches.

April: erect pea-sticks and bean supports, prune cherry and plum trees. Keep an eye on pests – slugs/snails, aphids.

Plant (under cover)

March: root and stem vegetable, cabbages and cauliflowers, lettuce and salad crops

April: tomatoes, aubergine and other fruiting veg

Plant (outdoors)

March: bare root trees, broad beans, peas, early seed potatoes, onions, shallots and garlic.

April: second earlies and maincrop potatoes, carrots, beetroot, parsnips, squashes, French & runner beans, sweetcorn.

Harvest

March: the first rhubarb of the year, and the last of last year's brassicas and root vegetables.

April: more rhubarb,, spinach and chard, spring onions, spring cabbages, asparagus



LAA Update

Annual General Meeting:

The AGM was held on 1 March at the United Reform Church. Attendees heard that:

There has been no increase in rent since last year – members should have received their subscription letters and payments are due on 1st April 2016. (Members may not be aware that rents fall by 50% if you reach statutory retirement age before the renewal date – if you are entitled to this reduction but are not taking advantage of it please provide the Secretary with your birthdate)

There are changes afoot at both sites...

Broadwater – no more crossed legs! A planning application has been submitted for a waterless toilet (with solar powered lighting) on the site called a “WooWoo”. This will be located at the northern end of the plot, furthest from the gate to minimise the risk of vandalism. Details of the facility are available from the manufacturer’s web-site <http://www.waterlesstoilets.co.uk>.



Digswell – The Council have said the height of the redwood trees at the southern end of the site trees can be reduced. If the Nursery doesn't want that to happen then the Council can't enforce it. We are about to enter discussions with the Nursery.

Work Parties – These are arranged for 9 April, 7 May and 2 July at the Digswell site.

New members: Since the last newsletter was sent out we have been joined by Mrs Helen Hopkins, Mrs Cassie Sutterby, Mr Graham Greene. Mr. Jon Somers and Mr. Paul Davis – welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.

There are fifteen others on the waiting – there were a few additions when Welwyn Hatfield Life magazine published details of the availability of ‘taster’ plots which are about half the size of typical ‘5-pole’ plots.

And finally... Kim Haynes (Secretary) is stepping down as Secretary and is giving up her plot over the Easter weekend. Many thanks to Kim for her help over the years and we'll certainly miss you at the Broadwater site.

Down at the Shed

The Shed has reopened after being closed since September for the winter. It's a good time to stock up on compost, fertiliser, pest control, pots/planters, netting, canes and any seeds that you forgot to order from the Kings Catalogue.

Shop opening times: The Shed opening hours are **11:00am to 12:30pm on Sundays** from the end of February to the end of September.



And if you'd like to help your association we need more volunteers to help with the rota. Please contact Helen (helenmclean38@hotmail.co.uk) if you can help out).



Well, fancy that!

I usually dig my beds over to the depth of my spade head (one spit) and occasionally double dig – going down twice as far (but taking more than twice as much effort!). I'd always assumed that this was deep enough for most plant roots. So I was surprised recently to read how deep the roots of some crops grow it is typically several feet (possibly deeper even than dandelions!).

Onion: 20-30cm (8-12")

Beans: 600-90cm (24-36")

Potato: 45-60cm (18-24")

Tomato: 45-130cm (18-48")

Beets: 45-90cm (18-36")

Peas: 90-130cm (36-48")

Leek: 45-90cm (18-36")

Armed with the above, how long the world's longest carrot was (for the answer, see the end of the newsletter).

Spring Recipe

Rhubarb and Custard Tart

Makes one 300mm (12") diameter tart (8-12 portions).

450g (1 lb) sweet pastry,

450g (1 lb) early rhubarb cut into 25mm (1") lengths,

1 small vanilla pod

150ml (1/4 pint) milk

150ml (1/4 pint) milk

3 egg yolks

One heaped teaspoon of plain white flour

100g (4oz) white castor sugar



Pre-heat the oven to 220°C (425°F) and Line a circular tin with the pastry and bake blind for 10-15 minutes.

Warm the milk and cream gently but do not boil. Scrape the seeds out of the vanilla pod and add to the milk/cream. Add the sugar, egg yolks and flour and whisk together, allow to cool slightly and pour into the pastry base.

Arrange the rhubarb pieces on top of the custard and bake for 25 minutes. Serve warm or cold.

How About a 'Social'?

In the past the Association has held a variety of successful events for members to get to know each other, relax and have fun. These range from working parties to barbecues and picnics. If you would be interested in a particular event – horticultural trips to Wisley or Capel Manor, a theatre trip, musical performance, sporting event, or anything else, then please let us know. We'd love to support our members and help to arrange social events.



Crop Planner

Key:

	sow
	plant
	harvest

	MAR	Apr	MAY	Jun	JUL	AUG
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						

How to Grow Jacket Potatoes

Have you ever wondered how to grow those large potatoes that are perfect for cooking in their jackets? Well, I just read that the secret is to remove most of the shoots when they have been chitted, leaving just two or three. All of the nutrients are then diverted into fewer, larger potatoes. I'll be testing this theory (on a small selection of plants!) later this year.



Rotate it a bit

Now we've ordered our seeds (from Kings!) and are planning and preparing our plot for the year.

A key consideration is crop rotation - growing plant types in different places each year so that nutrients aren't exhausted and reducing the risk of pests/diseases. The most basic system is the three year rotation where legumes or fruiting vegetables are grown in one year, followed by brassicas the next, which in turn are followed by roots or onions or leaves before the process then starts all over again. This system works because legumes 'fix' nitrogen in the soil when they grow, and brassicas (which follow legumes) grow best in soils with high levels of nitrogen, etc.

An alternative rotation method, which allows the soil longer to recover, is the five year rotation: year 1 = brassicas, year 2 = peas and beans, year 3 = potatoes and fruiting vegetable, year 4 = onion family, year 5 = root and stem vegetables.

If there are others that have worked well I'd be pleased to receive details.

Polite reminders

In order to avoid unwanted visitors please scramble the combinations on the padlocks whenever you arrive or leave the allotment sites. Also, please don't keep power tools or items of value on site. The Association has had an unfortunate history of break-ins, vandalism, fly tipping and theft.

Comments and feedback

Well fancy that! - the world's longest carrot was 5.841 metres (19' 2"), grown in Somerset, 2 September 2007.



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...

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