



It's that time of Year

May and June are the months that transform our plots from mostly soil to an almost complete array of vegetation. They are very important months for keeping on top of weeds – these will be taking advantage of the longer days and warmer weather (by June there should be no risk of frost). They will be competing with crops for light and heat so regularly hoe and hand pick out weeds.

Earth up your spuds – applying earth around the base of potato stems will reduce tubers' exposure to frost as well as keeping them in the dark to stop them turning green. Thin out direct-sown crops such as spinach, carrots and lettuce. Move leeks and brassicas to their final positions.



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

Keep an eye on your crops for early signs of pests or nutrient deficiency – e.g. if the leaves on your tomato plants turn yellow this is a sign of magnesium deficiency. This can be caused by overstimulating growth by



using fertilisers with high content of other nutrients. This can be overcome by adding epsom salts (20g per litre, 1/2 oz per pint) to water every two weeks.

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).



Jobs

May: Harden off plants (leave outside in the day and under cover at night), ensure that growing plants do not dry up.

June: Pinch out growing tomatoes and broad beans. Inspect plants regularly - water and remove pests whenever necessary. Thin out directly seeded beds.

Plant

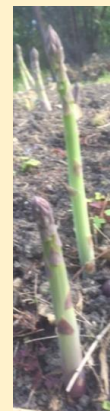
May: Basil, beetroot, Brussels sprouts, cabbages, carrots, French and runner beans, lettuce, peas courgette, squash. Under cover, pumpkin, cucumber, sweetcorn, cauliflower, sprouting broccoli, aubergines, pepper.

June: fruiting plants (peppers, tomatoes, aubergines). Plant out sweetcorn, brassicas and courgette seedlings.

Harvest

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

June: Chard, French beans, garlic and onions (if leaves are turning pale), early potatoes.





LAA Update

Summer barbecue – following the success of last year's barbecue, another has been arranged for this summer, to be held at the Digswell site on 9th July – make a note in your diaries and we'll send out further information in due course.

Broadwater – a working party was held on Saturday 6 May – a skip was available for several days so that members could dispose of any rubbish from their plots.

Digswell Work Parties – the next work party at Digswell will be on:

Saturday 1st July (and subsequently

Saturday 2nd September and

Saturday 28th October



Pallets – there are a number of pallets – ideal for constructing compost heaps – at the Digswell site. These are available to all Association members on a “first come, first served” basis, limited to four pallets per plot-holder.

Security – there has been a recent spate in garage and shed burglaries in Welwyn Garden City so don't leave anything valuable in your shed/greenhouse and please take care to ensure that the allotments sites are secured at all times (and particularly overnight).

New members – We have recently been joined by Hilary Dellar-Lane, Tom Wheeler, Helen Johnson, Victoria Barrett, John Collins, Valerie Gibbs, Guy Hollington and Owen Richards. Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.



Focus on Fertilisers

The purpose of fertilisers is to re-introduce chemicals to the soil that are absorbed by plants as they grow. The main elements, all of which are available from The Shed, are:

Nitrogen, which promotes the growth of leaves and stems (ideal for brassica, leeks, onions and leaf salads).

Phosphates, for root growth, flowers and seeds (carrots, parsnips, swedes and turnips).

Potassium/Potash, which helps plants to develop resistance to disease and build up sugar/starch (potatoes, beetroot, sweetcorn and soft fruits).

Trace elements are taken up in minute quantities by plants and include magnesium, zinc, iron and copper.

Crop rotation is important because different types of plant draw different nutrients from the soil.



Greener Fingers - Organic Fertilisers

Manure - an excellent source of nitrogen, but use well-rotted manure or pellets as fresh manure can damage plant roots

Bonemeal - high in phosphates, ideal preparation for planting perennials

Fish, blood and bone - a general fertiliser to stimulate growth during spring/early summer

Hoof and horn - a slow release fertiliser that is high in nitrogen



Comfrey leaves - contain nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Comfrey can be: added to compost to speed activation and add nutrients; made into liquid feed (see below); used as a rich mulch; or added to potting compost.

Liquid feeds - soak comfrey or stinging nettles in a water butt to make a 'tea' (some people use old pillow cases for tea bags!) and add (5-10%) when watering plants

Gypsum - ground calcium based rocks which 'lighten' clay soils

Wood ash (bonfire residue) - a source of potassium for applying directly to soil or adding to the compost heap

Seaweed - increases pH of soil (reduces acidity) and contains calcium and magnesium

Preparing winter brassicas

Although it seems a long way off, now is the time to start preparing your Christmas sprouts and winter cabbages. Brassicas prefer an alkali soil so ideally the ground will have enjoyed a winter application of lime, followed by some organic compost/manure added during the spring.

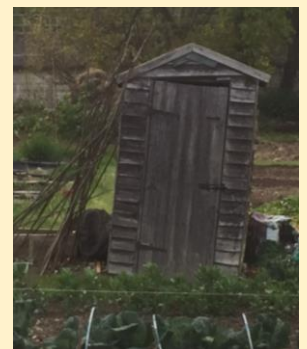
Seeds can be directly sown into the beds and thinned to a 5cm (2") spacing, but most of us now grow seeds in individual pots/modules and then transplant in May/June.

Cabbage white larvae can devastate crops so apply a mesh or keep a careful eye on seedlings and hand pick off any 'unwanted visitors'. White fly can penetrate mesh and cannot be picked off but will be deterred by spraying plants with a soft soap solution.

Down at the Shed

At the Shed we stock a wide range of composts, fertilisers, pots, seeds, netting, canes and many other useful items for your allotment. There are often special offers which LAA members can make use of. At this time of year it is a good place to purchase canes, compost, grow bags, feed and fertilisers, and any seeds (to fill those gaps where things haven't grown as expected?).

Opening times: The Shed opening hours are **11:00am to 12:30pm on Sundays**.





Early summer pests

Slugs and snails – these seem to be ever-present but are more mobile in warmer weather, particularly after periods of rain. Leaf crops like cabbage and lettuce are favourite targets. Copper rings, crushed eggshells and beer traps are traditional solutions. Conventional alternatives include coffee grounds or bran. Slug nematodes are a natural scientific solution but can be quite expensive and require a combination of warm weather and moisture (which are certainly not guaranteed at this time of year!).



Aphids – will be sucking the sap from many types of fresh edibles as they start to grow at the early signs of summer. You can squash them with your fingers or plant strong scented plants nearby (e.g. garlic) to deter them. Ladybirds are their natural predators and you can buy ladybird pupae to spread around your plot and will welcome a rich food supply when they hatch.

Asparagus beetle – these visually attractive beetles produce small grubs which can devastate asparagus when it is resting and developing as a fern. The adults can be picked off as they develop. To prevent re-emergence next year, clear away the stems in early winter and burn them (if they are stored the bugs may be able to find shelter).

Keeping weeds down

May is a spectacular month for plant growth, but not just the ones we want. Here are a few notes on how to keep weeds at bay.

Hoeing – hoeing takes the heads off weeds as soon as they break the surface - if beds need hand weeding then you've left it too late!. It's good to hoe at least twice a month and weekly hoeing is even better. Choose a dry day if possible so that there is less moisture in the ground to allow the weeds to regenerate.



Stop digging – this may be counter-intuitive but digging can help dormant seeds within the soil to start germinating. The growing process is triggered when buried seeds are exposed to light, moisture and/or air.

Mulch – applying organic matter to the surface will bury weeds or seeds and inhibit their development. It also allows the soil to retain moisture and nutrients allowing the intended fruit and vegetable crops to grow.

Don't let annual weeds set seeds. Dig out dandelions and other annual weeds before their seed-heads fully develop.



Polite reminders

Please remember that if you wish to erect a shed, greenhouse or a poly-tunnel then you will need permission from the Association - contact your site rep. They are limited to 2.4m X 1.8m X 2.4m (6' X 8' and no more than 8' tall!). Permission is also required if you intend to plant trees other than dwarf varieties on your plot or you want to keep chickens (up to five of them. Normally there won't be an objection unless it is likely to impact on other plot-holders in the short or long term.

Crop Planner

	May	Jun.	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Broad Bean.	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest		Sow
Runner Bean.	Sow	Sow	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Pea	Sow	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Potatoes	Plant	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Leek				Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Onion / Shallot			Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	
Garlic		Harvest	Harvest	Harvest		Plant
Beetroot	Sow	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Carrot	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Swede / Turnip	Sow	Sow			Harvest	Harvest
Courgette	Sow		Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Pumpkin / Winter Squash	Sow			Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Tomatoes			Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Chilli / Aubergine			Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	
Chard / Leaf Beet	Sow	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Cabbage	Harvest	Sow	Harvest	Harvest	Sow	
Kale	Sow	Sow				Harvest
Black/Radish		Harvest	Harvest	Harvest		Plant
Raspberries		Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Strawberries			Harvest	Harvest		Plant
Fruit Trees				Harvest	Harvest	Harvest



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...

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