



It's that time of Year



The weather is getting warmer, the days are getting longer and it is time to plant and sow outdoors. Cropping really gets started in early summer as the first potatoes, peas and soft fruits become ready to harvest. But watch out for frost during May, keep plants watered as we move into summer, and keep slugs and other pests at bay.

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.

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 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.

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, courgette/squash/pumpkin/cucumber (under cover), French and runner beans, lettuce, peas, sweetcorn, cauliflower, sprouting broccoli

June: 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.



Coronavirus Update from the Committee

We are recommending that our members follow National Allotment Society (NAS) guidance as summarised below. We will be monitoring their advice and updating our web-pages if this changes.

Longcroft Allotment Association members can work their allotments during the Coronavirus (Covid19) lockdown - either alone or with members of their families/household. Members should practice good hand hygiene when working your plot and when using the locks when entering and leaving the site, and maintain a social distance of 2-3 metres from other members.

The toilet facility at Broadwater and the toilet/kitchen facility at Digswell have also been closed until further notice.

Allotments are a means of getting exercise as recommended by the government (and for obtaining food during this crisis).

Government Ministers suggest that an hour's walk is reasonable and have asked us all to limit time spent outside the home. The NAS believes that an hour or two is reasonable to undertake the jobs that need doing for that day and then to return home.

Do not attend the plot if you have Coronavirus symptoms or a family member is self-isolating.

Please ensure that children visiting our sites are closely supervised by the plot-holder, in order that everyone observes proper social-distancing rules.

National Allotment Society (NAS) guidance is available from: <https://www.nsalg.org.uk/news/covid19-information/>

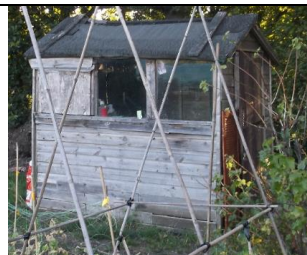
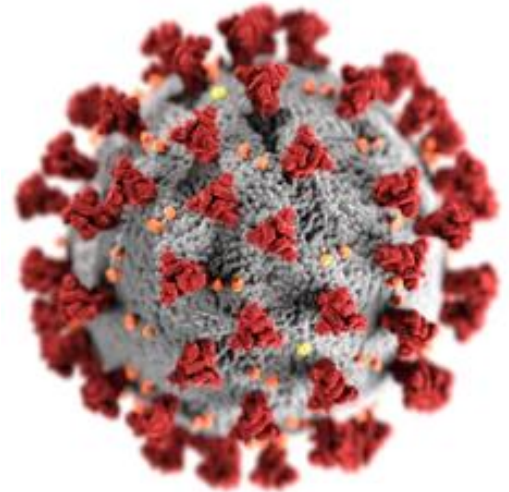
Additional information about staying safe on the allotment is provided by BBC Gardener's World Magazine: <https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/grow-plants/coronavirus-can-i-still-go-to-the-allotment/>

Other Updates

Annual General Meeting: the AGM will hopefully still be held, but later in the year.

New Members: Since the last newsletter was sent out we have been joined by Steve Brocchini, James and Lisa Chilton, Ian Deal, Adam Parlouti, and Jenna Salcedo. Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.

Waiting List: This currently stands at fourteen for Digswell and ten for Broadwater.



Down at the Shed

In view of the Coronavirus spread and out of respect for the health of both customers and helpers, we feel it appropriate to close the LAA Digswell shop until the situation returns to normal.





Crop Planner

	key:					
			sow			
			plant			
			harvest			
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
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 much Money do Allotments Save?

During these extraordinary times of shortage and food queues, our allotments are a useful resource to supplement supermarket purchases. For those feeling the financial effects of lockdown they also bring useful cash savings. But how much do they really save?

We work our allotments for fun but, unlike most other hobbies, it can save money. Our outgoings are low: the must-have tools are relatively inexpensive (particularly if purchased second-hand); seeds are so cheap that each successfully grown plant costs only a few pence to grow. The biggest outlay for most of us in our annual rent. So, how much might we be saving?



Typical estimates of the value of produce grown on a typical plot vary between £800 and £1,000, but could be higher if we grow crops that are expensive in supermarkets. That's between ten and twenty times the rent for our plots.

These savings assume our labour is free – which, of course, it is! But, even if we assume minimal hourly rates and apply this to the cost of producing our vegetable, the gap closes significantly.

But the time we spend cultivating improves our understanding of the value of food, gives us an opportunity to enjoy fresh air and take exercise, and it's impossible to put a value on the difference between the flavour of fresh allotment produce and supermarket fruit/vegetables.

The "Real Men Sow" web-site contains a downloadable spreadsheet to calculate savings: <http://www.realmensow.co.uk/?p=171>

Sponsored Run (Around Plot 131 at Digswell!)

The daughter of LAA members Claire and Michael Wood has completed a sponsored run – around their plot!

As a marathon is 26.2 miles, Catherine (age 8) completed 26.2 laps of the plot on Sunday 26 April: the day on which the London Marathon was scheduled to take place. With Coronavirus restrictions in place, the run was limited to the single plot, and only Claire and Michael were present.

The run was organised to raise money for the Motor Neurone Disease Association which claimed Michael's father's life in March. Catherine wants other people whose relatives have MND to survive so that they don't feel as sad as she did and says that "before Grandpa died, I started making and selling loom band bracelets, pompom pets and cupcakes but sadly the coronavirus prevented me from selling any more."



So far she has raised more £500, and we can help to boost this sum by donating on line at:

www.justgiving.com/fundraising/allotmentrun



Gardening and Health

Spending even short periods on your plot is shown to benefit our physical and mental health. Gardeners tend to have a lower body mass index and have higher levels of fitness than average. Growers also tend to suffer less fatigue, anger and tension whilst having higher self-esteem.

Simply spending time outdoors experiencing nature is good for us and research indicates that this can translate to a physical improvement that is equivalent to being up to five years younger.

Many of us may also experience a relief from stress when working their plots which, in my case, can start from the minute I go through the gates to the site. Allotment provide the peace and quiet that is so rare in modern life. And the repetitive nature of digging, planting and harvesting gives the mind a chance to truly relax or to ponder any nagging issues that can be resolved without interruption.

Last but not least, allotments bring the nutritional benefit of fresh, seasonal produce.

For more information about the effects of gardening on health see the following links:

<https://academic.oup.com/jpubhealth/article/38/3/e336/2239844>

<https://www.nsalg.org.uk/allotment-info/benefits-of-allotment-gardening/>



Polite Reminder

Lawnmower Care

The mowers are provided to help members keep their plots tidy. Please adjust the cutting height as appropriate before use, empty the clippings basket and return them in a clean state after use. They are one of the main expenditure items for the Committee and keeping them in good condition is in everyone's interest.





Lockdown Recipe

Spicy Bean Burgers

The beans This tasty recipe should help you through the lock-down, particularly well with a slice of strong cheese and rich tomato ketchup or chutney. Makes eight normal sized burgers or four whoppers.

One medium onion, finely chopped
2 tinned kidney beans
1-2 carrots – parboiled, then cooled and diced
1 Large egg
Breadcrumbs – equivalent to 2 slices



One small chilli pepper - finely sliced
1-2 garlic cloves, crushed
Finely chopped coriander leaves
Pinch cumin seeds (optional)
Salt and pepper to taste

Fry the onions until soft in a little oil or butter and allow to cool.

Drain the kidney beans well and mash them thoroughly, but leaving some of the beans partially intact.

Mix with all of the other ingredients and form into patties. Fry in cooking oil or barbecue just like beef burgers.

Comments and feedback



“Coronavirus”, “Savings” and “Health” images are taken from Unsplash: an internet resource providing freely usable images - <https://unsplash.com>

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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Visit the Longcroft Allotment Association website: www.longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk

