



Longcroft Allotment Association Newsletter – September/October 2016

It's that time of Year

Early autumn is a key time in the allotment year: there is an abundance of crops to harvest, cook, preserve and store; there is an opportunity to review what has grown well and what has been less successful; make plans to prepare the plot for the coming year; and it's also time to pick next year's seeds (King's catalogue is now available with a wide selection at very competitive prices – see below).



Most of the planting has been done for the year but there's time to sow spring cabbage, garlic and broad beans.

Our main priority is harvesting crops, storing them for winter and preserving them by freezing and making jams, pickles and chutneys. There are some seasonal recipes below that may inspire you.

It's a time to tidy up: clear leaves, prune fruit trees and late weeding – all of which can be added to the compost heap. But it can also be a dry time of year (so keep one eye on the weather and be ready with the watering can) and October can bring early frosts (so be ready to protect exposed plants).



With a lot of our produce looking its best, it's also attractive to others. Traps can be used for wasps (but remember they are beneficial to gardeners in the main) and you may want to consider netting fruit plants and brassicas to deter birds.

Jobs

September: prune soft fruit bushes, pick off diseased or damaged apples, weed regularly, clear dead foliage, and add as much as you can to the compost heap

October: Cover autumn salads to protect from frost, construct raised beds and compost heaps, mulch beds to restrict weed growth and improve soil structure.

Plant

September: spinach and other leaf vegetables/salad crops, spring cabbages and Japanese onions, strawberry plants (plant runners in pots or trim them)

October: Broad beans, garlic/onions, currant and gooseberry bushes.

Harvest

September: tomatoes and other salad crops, beans, carrots, beetroot, sweetcorn (cobs are ready when the silks turn brown/black), potatoes, winter squashes, chard, onions, blackberries and hard tree fruit.

October: fruit, brassicas, squashes and pumpkins (cure them in the sun for extra sweetness and hard protective skins) and any remaining summer vegetables (e.g. beans, turnips, potatoes and beetroot).



LAA Update

Update from the Committee:

New toilet at Broadwater – those of us at the site will have noticed that the toilet was installed in August and is now fully functional. The toilet was largely paid for by the Big Lottery Fund following a successful application earlier in the year. An official opening will take place during early autumn and representatives from Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council will be invited.



Digswell – the LAA summer barbecue was held on 14th August at the Digswell allotment site. The event was well attended with burgers, Sausages, and Vege-burgers provided by the Association, with members bringing wine, salad, cake to share with others.

Compost Heap - Plot holders are requested to not dispose of waste from their plot on the main compost heap at the Digswell site – please either compost it on your own plot or remove from site.

New members - Since the last newsletter was sent out we have been joined by Mrs. Bev Kleiser and Mr Ian Cocksedge – welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.

Bonfires - the Committee has taken advice from the Hertfordshire Fire Service and has been told that there are no specific laws against having a bonfire but there are laws against the nuisance they cause (and potential fines for any damage caused or danger to traffic caused by smoke). The Council can issue an 'abatement notice' if bonfires cause a nuisance. Burning gardening waste should be a last resort but if you have to do so please observe the following:

"Dos"

- Only burn in a clear open space
- Have fire-fighting media (water) available
- Monitor the fire at all times and do not leave unattended
- Surrounding areas should be wet/damp

"Do nots"

- Do not burn waste that could cause pollution or harm people's health.
- Do not have bonfires after prolonged dry weather.





Crop Planner

key:

	sow
	plant
	harvest

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
Broad Bean.						
Runner Bean.						
Pea						
Potatoes					chit	chit
Leek						
Onion / Shallot						
Garlic						
Beetroot						
Carrot						
Sweet / Turnip						
Courgette						
Pumpkin / Winter Squash						
Tomatoes						
Chilli / Aubergine						
Chard / Leaf Beet						
Cabbage						
Kale						
Black/Redcurrants						
Raspberries						
Strawberries						
Fruit Trees						



Down at the Shed

The Kings Seeds 2017 catalogue has arrived for collection in the mower shed at the Broadwater site and the kitchen at Digswell. Please use it to order seeds, seed potatoes and onion sets (note that onion sets are perishable so please only order them if you collect them soon after they are delivered to the Association). All the information you need to know is provided in the inside front cover of the Catalogue and £1.00 has already been added to each order form. If you order soft fruit, you should indicate on the order form your preferred delivery date, either Autumn or Spring.



The Shed is open on demand between **11:00am to 12:30pm on Sundays** from the end of February to the end of September. Watch out for Helen in her hi-viz jacket or ring the bell!

Greener Fingers – Cultivation using Organic Methods, part 1 (by Roger

People think about having an allotment for different reasons and for me personally the key issue was to enjoy the process of growing while enabling my family to eat vegetables that were free of chemicals. There is a lot of research now to suggest that the overuse of chemicals in farming generally is not good for human health and is also having an effect on wildlife.

The organic method places importance on looking after your soil. Growing plants takes nutrients out of the soil and you will need to replace these regularly. A good way to do this is to spread organic material such as well rotted horse manure, spent mushroom compost or maybe garden compost over the ground surface. The deeper the layer the better but you should aim to cover the soil to a depth of about three inches. More good news is that you don't have to dig in the organic matter (often called a mulch) into your ground. All you do is sit back and allow worms to take the material down into the soil and for all the beneficial bacteria present to process it so it can be absorbed by whatever plants you are going to grow.



The other benefit of applying a mulch is that the soil structure is much improved, opening up the ground to the penetration of water and making it much easier to plant things into it.

You could aim to apply a mulch as often as possible even when you have plants growing but in any event you should do it at least once a year either after the growing season has ended, around the end of October, or perhaps in early spring.

If any members are interested in finding more about organic gardening, Roger has prepared a short paper containing numerous tips. If you would like a copy please email us at longcroftallotmentassociation@gmail.com



Autumn Recipes

Stuffed Rainbow Chard

I found this variation on dolmades (stuffed vine leaves) in Monty and Sara Don's book: Fork to Fork. The main ingredient is large (and, ideally, colourful) leaves of chard. For the stuffing you will need:

- 75g (3 oz.) basmati rice
- 1 large onion
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts
- 2 tablespoons sultanas
- Sea salt and pepper (you could also add garlic/chilli/fresh herbs)



Parboil the rice in salted water for about 5 minutes. Soften the onion in the olive oil and sweat for a further two minutes. Add all the other stuffing ingredients.

Blanch 6-10 large (brightly coloured) chard leaves for 1 minute in salted water. Drain and add a handful of the stuffing and fold/roll into a parcel.

Pack the parcels into an oiled oven-proof dish and pour in water to 10mm (1/2") up the sides and bake at 190°C (375°F) for approximately 25 minutes.

Thai Squash Soup

Serves four.

- 1 medium-sized squash (butternut or similar texture)
- Salt and pepper
- One generous slosh of olive oil
- 2-3 fresh red chillies
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 thumb fresh grated ginger
- 1 large bunch fresh coriander
- 2 limes, zested and halved
- 2 tablespoons fish sauce
- 800 ml unsweetened light coconut milk
- 300 ml chicken stock
- 200 g rice noodles



Chop the squash, deseed, cut into chunks (skin on) and roast at 180 °C with the dried chilli, salt and olive oil for 40 minutes.

Pummel the garlic, ginger and coriander into a paste and mix with the lime and fish sauce to form a thin paste. Heat a large pan and add the paste and squash flesh for 1-2 minutes then add the coconut milk and chicken stock (add more chilli/salt/pepper/lime/fish sauce/sugar to taste).

Simmer for 15 minutes then add noodles to the soup and, simmer for a few more minutes, then serve with freshly chopped coriander/chilli.



Lifting and Storing Maincrop Potatoes



Maincrop potatoes are larger than earlier varieties and store well for three months or more.

The tubers should be left in the ground for as long as possible (enough to grow but before the slugs have the opportunity to spoil them). Ideally lift them on a sunny day so their skins can dry or harden in the sun for a few hours (turn them after the first hour or so). If there any damaged potatoes put these aside to use straight away.

Scrape of the mud (rather than wash off in water) and transfer to a dry paper or hessian sack for storage in a cool, dark, well-ventilated space.

Comments and feedback

Many thanks to Roger for his article on organic gardening.

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...

Andrew Thorne, Newsletter Editor: longcroftallotmentassociation@gmail.com

