



## Storing your produce

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It has been a strange year, with a hot dry spring, a cold wet summer and a record-breaking October. A difficult year for gardening but with any luck, some of your crops have turned up trumps. Now what to do with all your produce? Here are some tips on how to store some of the crops that you may have recently harvested.

### General guidelines

Don't wash vegetables before putting into storage - use a brush to remove soil.

Cut tops off root vegetables.

Check vegetables in storage frequently and remove any that are spoiled.

Choose your location and preservation method for storing vegetables based on the vegetable's preferred temperature and humidity, as listed below:

- Cool and dry: onions
- Cool and moist: root crops, potatoes, cabbage
- Warm and dry: winter squash, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, dried hot peppers

### Potatoes

For storing, lift main crop potatoes when the tops die back and the skin resists gentle pressure. All potatoes should be gathered by the end of October to avoid weather damage.

Lift on a dry day and allow potatoes to dry on the surface of the soil for two or three hours.

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The best containers are hessian sacks or large strong brown paper bags. You can buy these quite easily and many potato suppliers sell them as well. You can store potatoes in paper sacks but leave the neck slightly open to allow excess moisture to escape. For this reason, do not use plastic bags under any circumstances.

Potatoes should preferably be stored above 5° C. The optimum temperature range is between 5 and 10° C. Above 10°C, potatoes can sprout, and below 5° C the starch turns into sugars, which can give them a sweet taste.

The most important point when storing potatoes is to exclude light. Prolonged exposure to light will cause greening of the potato. Green potatoes are poisonous as it indicates that solanine, an alkaloid, has been formed. Partially green potatoes are still edible – just cut off the affected parts. Remember that potatoes are part of the same family, solanaceae, as Deadly Nightshade!

After you have had the potatoes in store for a month or so, wait for a fine day and empty the bags out, to check for any developing rots. Potatoes will keep for six months.

### Other root crops

You can store other root crops in the following way. Remove foliage close to the crown. Place in layers in boxes, crates etc separated with a damp, but not wet, packing material. You can use sand, coir or even leafmould.

The ideal temperature for your root crops is between 0 and 4° C, lower than potatoes.

### Winter squash

Cure (harden the shell) by keeping at room temperature for two weeks, then store at 10-16°C with a preferred humidity of 50-75%. Winter squash can be stored on slatted wooden shelves in a basement or garage. Move them occasionally so that they don't rot in the area that is in contact with the wood.

## Key dates

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Sunday 12 February 2012

Distribution shed re-opens

Sunday 26 February 2012

Seed and potato orders available from the shed

Monday 5 March 2012

Annual General Meeting

## Winter digging

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**Now is the time to think about winter digging.** The main purpose of winter digging is to expose the soil to the elements and allow the frost to break up your soil, making it much easier to get going in the spring. The main point of caution is to ensure that you avoid compacting the soil when you do this, so it is best to wait until some drier weather. Alternatively, you can stand on a wooden plank to do it. This

prevents the soil becoming compacted under your body weight. Two planks are better than one: then you can shuffle between them, moving one whilst standing on the other. You can turn in any annual weeds, and they will work as a green manure. However, any pernicious perennial weeds and any weeds with a seed head should be removed as you go.

Using a large fork, up-end the soil once and it should form large clods. Resist the urge to break up the clods yourself. Leave them on the ground and their presence will increase the surface area of your soil. When frost occurs the moisture in the soil will freeze and thaw, breaking up the lumps for you over the winter months. By the time spring arrives all you will need to do is rake through the soil and weed it. You will be left with a fine tilth, the perfect fine medium for sowing and planting.

## ...and some other winter jobs

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**Winter is the quiet season for the allotment, but there are still a few jobs that can be done around the plot. Here are some ideas.**

- it's still possible to sow some crops - spring onions, onion sets, garlic and broad beans can be sown in winter
- remove and store bean poles, leaving bean roots in soil to replace nitrogen
- cover problem beds (perennial weeds such as docks, dandelions, belladonna, bindweed, nettles, etc.) with black plastic to exclude light and limit growth
- manure raspberries, blackberries and other soft fruit bushes.
- manure rhubarb well, three inches minimum - it will pay off
- prune fruit trees for flower and fruit as the leaves die and fall - although note that plums are best pruned in the spring for young trees and summer for more established trees. (See next article on pruning apple trees)
- pull carrots and store in dry sand for winter use. This is also good for other root crops but remember that swedes do not ripen until late November sometimes
- protect broccoli, calabrese and Brussels sprouts from the birds during the winter by netting, scarecrows, surplus CDs, etc.

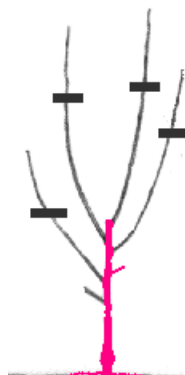
## Pruning your apple trees

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**Winter, when the tree is dormant, is generally the best time to prune apple trees, as this will invigorate the tree, causing it to grow more during the following season.** If you prune during summer this will cause the tree to grow less during that growing season. Spring pruning has an effect somewhere between winter and summer pruning

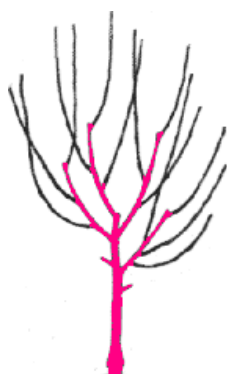
- the bush tree is the most common form of fruit tree, with an open arrangement of branches growing from a short trunk.
- Remove any dead, dying or diseased branches and then cut out any branches that are crossing over each other.

- Branches that are growing into the centre of the tree can also be cut out , as these prevent sunlight from reaching it.
- If the tree has reached the desired height, cut back the leaders (the new growth at the tip of each branch) by about two-thirds.
- If you want the tree to grow taller, leave the leaders and cut back lateral branches leaving about six buds.
- When pruning, cut just above an outward facing bud - this bud will then produce a side shoot in the spring which will grow away from the centre of the tree.



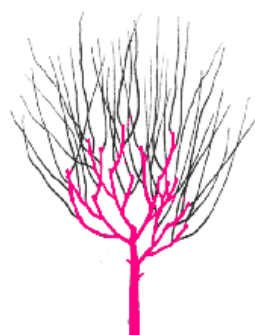
### **Two year old tree**

The pink coloured parts of the tree show growth in the previous year, this should not be pruned. The black coloured side shoots should all be pruned by a third - see the thick black lines.



### **Three year old tree**

Pruning is similar to the two-year old tree - the pink coloured parts of the tree show growth in the previous year, this should not be pruned. The black coloured side shoots should all be pruned by a third.



### **Four years and older**

Pruning is the similar to the three-year old tree - the pink coloured parts of the tree show growth in the previous year, which should not be pruned unless it is diseased. The black coloured side shoots should all be pruned by a third.

Source: [www.gardenaction.co.uk](http://www.gardenaction.co.uk)

## Security on the sites

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**Unfortunately, we have continued to suffer from break-ins, at both sites.** It is mainly the sheds that are being targeted and, although in many cases, nothing is taken, the distress and inconvenience remains.

In view of all the crime being committed it's important that every single incident is reported to the police by each individual plot-holder and a procedure has been established for this purpose. The details of this are described below.

- **Step one: a break-in occurs.** Once the committee is aware that an incident has occurred the police will be notified through one point of contact and a crime reference number will be allocated. This reference number will then be posted on the notice board on the Digswell shed for your subsequent use, if you were affected by the break-in.
- **Step two: reporting by individual plot-holders.** Any plot-holder who has been affected by this break-in should then report the details of the crime to their own particular property by telephoning the police on 01707 355001, quoting the crime reference number already allocated through step one.

If we follow this procedure, then police will begin to build up a picture of the degree of loss and inconvenience being suffered. While there is no easy answer to this problem, it is important that we try to ensure that the police take this issue seriously.

As you may know, the Allotment Watch Scheme has been launched as a collaboration between Hertfordshire Constabulary, Neighbourhood Watch and OWL (Online Watch Link). Advice that they have offered is as follows:

- Shed doors can be secured with two substantial hasps and staples and two closed shackle padlocks on the outside, one towards the top and one towards the bottom. External hinge screws should be replaced with one-one clutch screws to prevent them being removed and access gained this way
- Shed windows can be secured with internal diamond mesh grilles which provide a good visual deterrent to opportunistic burglars
- Shed alarms are available from North Herts Crime prevention panel, they have a website [www.hertscrimeprevention.com](http://www.hertscrimeprevention.com)
- Tools and garden implements should be marked with the postcode
- Register your valuables for free at [www.immobilise.com](http://www.immobilise.com). It only takes a couple of minutes and once you have registered you will have a better chance of getting your property back if it is lost or stolen
- Properly mark items with a UV pen

## Housekeeping

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### Green waste and rubbish

Please compost all green waste either on your plot in your compost container or on the communal compost heap.

Please ensure that all refuse emanating from allotment cultivation that is not compostable is disposed of off-site and placed in your own recycling bins. This includes plastic, polystyrene, bottles etc.

### Water tanks

The electricity supply to the distribution water pump has now been switched off, and the pipes to the tanks have been disconnected to protect the system from freezing over the winter. Plot-holders adjacent to the tanks should arrange for them to be cleaned

out over the winter, ready for refilling in the spring.

### Padlock combination

It's important to ensure that the padlock combination is kept secure. So, the basic principle is:

**If you are the first person to open the gate or the last to leave, ensure that you don't leave the padlock with the combination showing. If you open the padlock, change the combination. If you close the padlock, change it once you've locked the gate.**

## Size matters

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**Not enough room for all the things that you want to grow, or finding that your plot is getting on top of you? How about a plot-swap?** This issue has been raised with the committee a number of times, where plot-holders with smaller plots would like to take on a larger one, while others are finding that their plot is just a bit too big for them and would like to consider a downsize.

The committee wants to explore if plot-holders with the above thoughts could be brought together, the possibility of a swap could be organised, assuming that both participants are agreed and the committee approve.

If you think that this might be of interest to you, you should contact Don Fisher on 01707 321089, who will keep a record of any requests and when possible put relevant plot-holders in touch to see if an agreeable swap can be organised.

## Rainwater harvesting – is it worth a try?

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**Allotments are increasingly being seen as making a contribution to sustainability through the reduction of carbon used in transporting the foods that we eat.**

If you are so inclined, another way to help in all this is to try to use rainwater for watering our plants.

Somewhat surprisingly our climate in Hertfordshire is pretty dry, the rainfall we receive being on a par with Melbourne in Australia. Conserving what water we have will become more and more important with the advent of climate change and it would be nice to be able to 'do our bit' to help.

Rainwater harvesting is one easy way in which we can do this. This can either be done centrally – and a number of the allotments in the local area have such systems – or at the individual plot level. For this, basically all you need is some sort of impervious surface to catch the rain and a container to store it.

Even harvesting from quite a small area can generate a decent quantity of water and an internet search throws up quite a few different designs created by allotment holders.

Roger Edgson is going to have a go at sorting something out on his plot this season. The main requirements are that it:

- should be easy to erect
- is not too expensive
- doesn't take up too much space
- should be durable
- is not an eyesore

Apart from saving water, actually having water on your plot could mean less journeys to the water tank in the growing season and can also be useful if you want to set up an automatic watering system for when you are away for any length of time.

If you have any ideas about how we could do this, how we could source a supply of materials like corrugated plastic sheet for instance, please send Roger an email or give him a call and we can put suggestions in the next Newsletter.

**Roger Edgson**  
**roger.edgson1@ntlworld.com**  
**01707 895207**



Using a polytunnel to harvest rainwater – just some guttering and bit of piping

## Recipe corner

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### **Pasta with courgettes and pine nuts**

#### *Ingredients*

50g pine nuts dry toasted in a pan	2 tbs basil oil
500g pasta - short style like penne or spirals	125ml dry white wine
2 courgettes, chopped into 1 cm squares	3 handfuls of rocket
A handful of runner beans, chopped	80g Parmesan or pecorino shavings
1 garlic clove, finely chopped	15g butter

#### *Method*

- Cook pasta in a large pan of salted water, drain and keep aside one cup of the cooking water
- Put oil in a pan on a high heat and put courgettes, garlic and beans in and toss till golden on edges
- Put wine in courgette mix, cook for 2 minutes and then add pasta cooking water
- Pour courgette mix over pasta, throw in rocket, pine nuts and cheese, mix well and serve

*Thanks to Dave Rogers for this tip on using courgettes*

**If you have any news items, features, recipes or photographs that you would like to submit for future issues of the Newsletter, please contact Stephen Brown, newsletter editor:**

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