



Longcroft Allotment Association Newsletter – November/December 2016

It's that time of Year

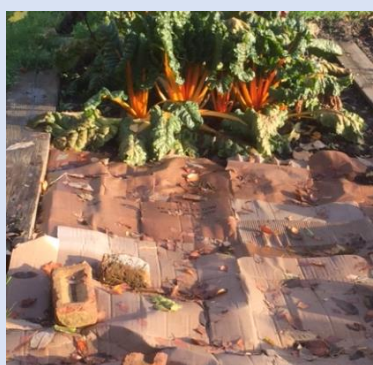
It's getting darker and colder, and there is less growing and fewer crops to harvest (although some – e.g. winter brassicas – are at their peak in December). But some crops are still growing and there are plenty of jobs to do.

It's the perfect time of year to plant and prune fruit trees and bushes, hardy broad beans and peas can be sown, and shallots and garlic can get an excellent start if they avoid waterlogged soil.

Also, net your brassicas to prevent attack from pigeons and other hungry birds.

You may want to consider extending your growing season by investing in a greenhouse, hot frame or polytunnel.

Finally, think of anything you may need over the coming year and put it on your Christmas list!



Jobs

November: plant and prune apple/pear trees. Improve the soil by adding organic matter. Turn over the soil to allow the frost to break it down further (winter digging). Cover vacant beds to prevent weed growth and keep the soil warm – proprietary covers and fleeces will work best but cardboard, carpets, manure and straw are also effective alternatives.

December: test the soil and dig in soil improvers, plant fruit bushes and trees while they are dormant, trench parsnips, monitor the condition of any stored produce and remove any rotten items. Think about the plants you'll be growing over the next year and devise a crop rotation plan.

Plant

November: hardy shallots and garlic (on mounds if soil is wet), broad beans and peas (hardy varieties), Rhubarb (divide roots) green manures (to dig in during early spring).

December: bare root trees and fruit bushes.

Harvest

November: root vegetables, autumn brassicas, late salad crops.

December: chard, winter brassicas, hardy root vegetables, leeks and Brussels sprouts!



LAA Update

Update from the Committee:

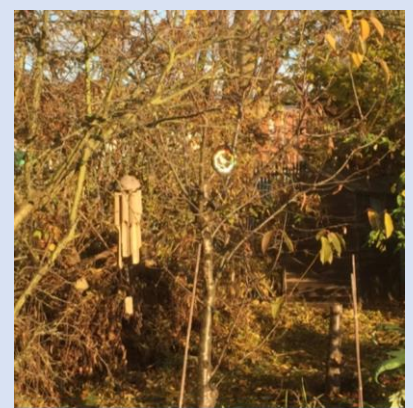
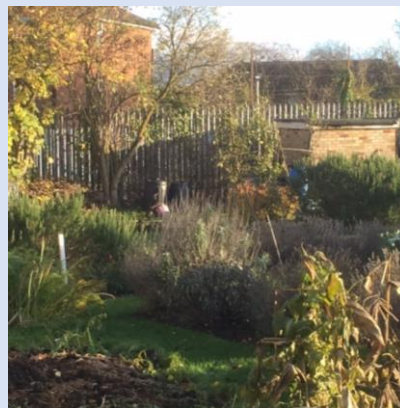
Broadwater Toilet – the toilet at the Broadwater site was officially opened by Mrs Pat Mabbott, Mayor of Welwyn-Hatfield Borough Council, on Thursday 20 October. The Mayor showed a genuine interest in the Association and spent almost an hour at the site, appreciating the diversity of the site and the dedication of plot-holders.

The occasion was also marked by Helen Johnson (Allotments Officer at the council) and Jake Rendle-Worthington, who installed the toilet. Short articles were published in the Welwyn Hatfield Times.



Work Parties: There are no more work parties this year, and details of future work parties will be communicated in the New Year.

New members: Since the last newsletter was sent out we have been joined by Mr Danny Evans – welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.





Crop Planner

Key:
 sow
 plant
 harvest

	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
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						



Growing Garlic

Garlic is relatively easy to grow and tastes much stronger than those available in supermarkets. It's also one of the few crops that can keep the plot producing over winter.

There are two broad types of garlic: soft stem and hard stem. The soft stem varieties can generally be stored for longer.

Garlic should be planted now – although a Mediterranean vegetable, garlic needs cold weather to develop a good head of cloves (they can survive the harshest winters in the UK), and it is a delight to see their green shoots growing through snow and frost. Plant them at a depth of 3-4cm, 10-15cm apart in 30cm rows. If there is a risk that they will be waterlogged, plant them on small mounds or ridges.

Garlic grows best in light, well-manured soil on a sunny site but will need regular watering during hot weather, and should be kept free of weeds.

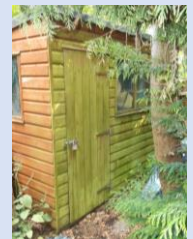
They are ready when the green stems turn yellow – usually in mid-summer. They can be dried in a shed/garage/kitchen and can be stored until well into the New Year.



Down at the Shed

The Shed is closed until the end of February.

We'll be providing price information and details of the most popular lines in the New Year. Please visit Helen and stock up with canes, compost, fertilisers and other accessories when it re-opens.



Greener Fingers – Companion Crops

We often think about our crops in isolation, not thinking about how plants interact. In fact, many plants can affect others by attracting insects, repelling pests, and using complementary nutrients.

Some crops grow well together because of the shape and size, root structure, and need for light.

Climbing beans and sunflowers, tomato and fennel, and other combinations are bad neighbours.

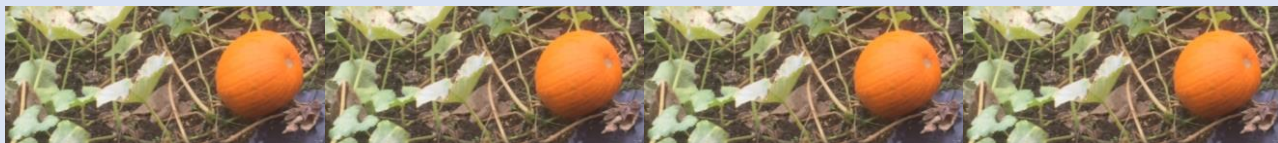
However, onions can grow happily alongside beans, leeks can be grown amongst celery, and turnips can be grown with peas.

Tomatoes are believed to deter asparagus beetle, onions and other alliums can reduce attack by carrot fly. Cabbage root fly is dissuaded by herbs such as mint, rosemary or sage.

Native Americans believed that crops would thrive if they grew squashes alongside sweetcorn plants, and planted climbing beans in between, which grew up on the sweet corn plants, using the stems like canes while fixing nitrogen amongst its roots. This system known as the Three Sisters which is now scientifically understood to be a sustainable method of growing a nutritious combination of crops.



Winter Recipes



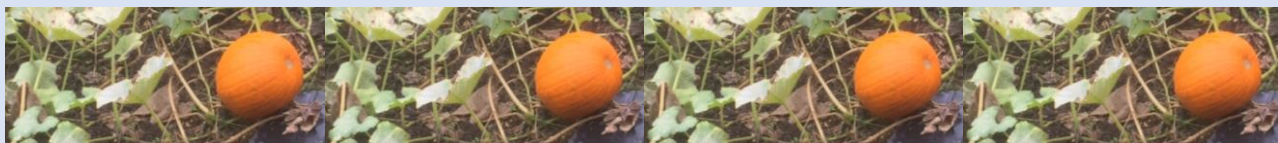
Pumpkin Pie

This American favourite is even better when it's made with home-grown pumpkins or squashes - delicious (hot or cold) with whipped cream.

- One supermarket 9" pastry base (or make your own if you prefer!)
- 500g (1lb) pumpkin or squash flesh
- 2 large egg
- 1 tin condensed milk
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 - teaspoon ground ginger
- Grated nutmeg (to taste)

Boil the squash/pumpkin in salted water for 15-20 minutes. Drain thoroughly and allow to cool.

Mix all blend all the ingredients in a bowl and mix until smooth. Pour into the pastry base and cook for 40-45 minutes at 2- although this will depend on the moisture content of the pumpkin. Check at 30 minutes and then every five minute, and reduce the oven temperature to 150°C if the pastry or topping are showing any signs of excessive 'darkening'.



Parsnip Puree

Serves four - delicious with turkey, gammon and roast pork.

- 1 kg (2lbs) parsnips
- 100g (4oz) butter
- 2 tbsps double cream
- Salt and pepper

boil Peel and trim the parsnips and boil until soft (10-15 minutes). Drain and reserve the water. Blend the cooked parsnips with the butter and cream. Add the reserved water until it has the consistency of a sauce.

Return to the pan and season to taste.



The Secret of Sprouts

Here are some tips to help you get the best from your 'Brussels':

- Plant in compact ground that is rich in organic matter/manure
- Remove any yellowing or spotted leaves as they appear
- Protect the plants from the birds and other pests
- Weed beds regularly
- Draw up earth around the lower stems or stake
- Pick your crop after a frost – the sprouts will be sweeter
- To harvest, pick the lower sprouts first, and snap each sprout downwards

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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