



It's that time of Year

It's getting darker and colder, and there is less growing and fewer crops to harvest (although some are at their peak in December— e.g. leeks and winter brassicas). There are still plenty of jobs to do to prepare for the year ahead.

Now is the time to start your winter digging – the frosts and rain will help to further break down the soil so that ready for planting in the spring. If you combine some organic matter then the worms will 'do their bit' below the ground. Mulch the soil around plants above warm, wet, weed-free soil.

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.

You may want to consider extended your growing season by investing in a greenhouse, hot frame or polytunnel, along with a means of heating.

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



Jobs

November: Order seeds for the coming year. Prepare your plot by winter digging. Considering covering empty ground for winter.

December: Prune hard fruit trees (apples, pears) and currants, gooseberries and autumn raspberries. Remove faded leaves from winter brassicas. Cover beds.

January: Spread manure over empty beds. Clean pots, store produce, and plan for the year ahead. Start to chit potatoes.

Plant

November/December/January: Fruit trees, fruit bushes and rhubarb. Garlic sets, shallots, hardy peas and broad beans (Aquadulce varieties), winter salad leaves.

Harvest

November/December: Leeks, root vegetables, brassicas (cabbage, kale, Brussels sprouts), late salad crops.

January: Parsnips, swedes, hardy winter brassicas: cabbages, kale, Brussels sprouts.



LAA Update

Update from the Committee:

Summer Barbecue - More than fifty people gathered for our annual BBQ on 8th September at the Digswell site. Blessed with good weather everyone enjoyed the food prepared by our regular BBQ-gurus Peter and Sue, as well as various other items brought by those attending.

Overall a great day, to be repeated in 2020.

A highlight was the award of the "Largest Pumpkin 2019" trophy. This went to Thomas Markatopoulos, who produced the two largest specimens, the biggest having a girth of 157cm! The result's announcement was live-streamed to Thomas in Greece, while the award was presented to his wife Anna.



Digswell –Unfortunately the barbecue was preceded a break-in at the Digswell site one Saturday night. After cutting through the padlock on the front gate the thieves opened several of the doors in the buildings. While the shop door wasn't forced, the mower shed was opened and all the contents taken. In addition, some of the individual plot-holder sheds were opened.



Broadwater – Several pallets were delivered to site early in October to be converted to compost bins, raised beds, etc. There is also still some woodchip available at the corner of the car park – all plottolders are welcome to help themselves.

New Members: Since the last newsletter was sent out we have been joined by Sam Miller, Russell Rawles, Geoff Brown and Mrs Sarah Kay. Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.



Anglia in Bloom - Longcroft Allotment Association has been judged the winner of Anglia in Bloom's "Grow Your Own" category. This is a great testament to the Association. Judges visited our Digswell site in late June and the results were announced at the Anglia in Bloom award ceremony held on 10 September





Dig-in for Winter

Winter is the traditional time to dig over vegetable plots for planting in spring. Work methodically in trenches across your plot so that you only tread on undug ground.

During the autumn/winter period, significant benefits can be obtained through a programme of autumn/winter digging as this is the best time to get the plot ready for spring and early crops. It's particularly beneficial for heavy soil before the frosts, when the soil is neither too wet nor too dry (and the frosts further break down the soil). Even covering the soil with mulch or black membrane really helps improve soil quality and means the plot can quickly return to productive form in the spring.



The other big advantage is that when the growing season starts the ground is immediately ready and waiting for sowing and planting.

Adding some organic matter in the form of compost, leaf mould or well-rotted manure will improve the soil by releasing nutrients, allowing oxygen to penetrate the soil whilst allowing excess moisture to be released, and by encouraging worms, centipedes and other beneficial life forms. Raking in some general purpose fertiliser will also help provide nutrients for next year's crops.

Compost trenches (sometimes called bean trenches) are a more direct way of getting

kitchen waste into the soil than via compost heaps. Simply dig a whole or trench at least 30cm (1 foot) below the surface and add the kitchen waste in layers. Cover with cardboard or soil to keep vermin out and replace the soil to form a slight mound – this will settle as the compost rots. If started over winter it will be ready for direct planting in the spring, and the subterranean compost will provide a moist and nutritious base for thirsty plants such as pulses and courgettes.

Some people like to keep the ground planted over winter using green manures while others prefer to leave it unplanted and cover to suppress weed growth. Whatever approach you adopt, try and provide a habitat for helpful wildlife such as hedgehogs, frogs and insects – piles of logs, branches and leaves are ideal.

Down at the Shed

The Shed is closed for the winter and returns in March when it will be open from 11:00-12:30 on Sundays throughout the summer – the place for seeds, canes, netting, value fertilisers, manures and composts.

All goods are top quality and are excellent value compared with local garden centres and DIY stores.





Crop Planner

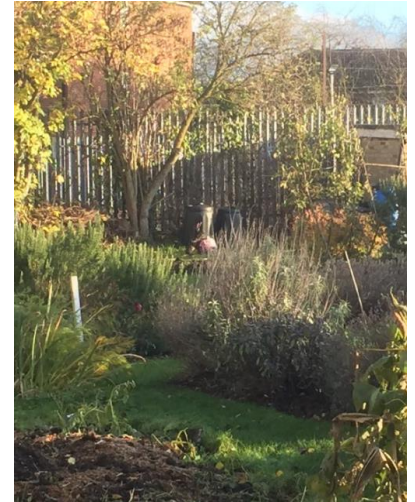
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
key:						
Broad Bean						
Runner Bean						
Pea						
Potatoes				chit	chit	
Leek						
Onion / Shallot						
Garlic						
Beetroot						
Carrot						
Swede / Turnip						
Courgette						
Pumpkin / Winter Squash						
Tomatoes						
Chilli / Aubergine						
Chard/Leaf Beet	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



November 'Tidy Up'

Most thoughts are towards preserving our harvest and indoor tasks at this time of year. But allotment sites can look beautiful in the autumn and, although there is less 'gardening' to do in late autumn, there is still an opportunity to prepare for the season ahead and to prevent the spread of pests and diseases...

- Remove yellow leaves from brassicas
- Net winter cabbages to protect them from pigeons
- Remove any plant debris on your plot
- Remove any rotten fruit that is still hanging
- Prune diseased branches on apple and pear trees
- Remove weeds around fruit trees and bushes
- Apply mulches and fork in compost as part of your winter digging
- Check the condition of stored vegetables – potatoes, hard fruit, squashes, etc.
- Collect fallen leaves – destroy those with signs of disease, the rest can be composted



Make the most of any bright warm days - the next few months may be too cold or waterlogged to perform the above comfortably and effectively.

Autumn Recipe

Hard Fruit Chutney

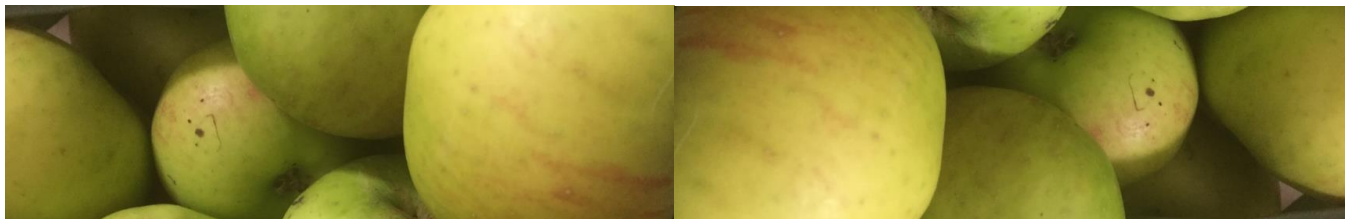
A delicious chutney, made in a slow cooker, and which requires a short time (2 weeks) to mature.

- 1kg (2lbs) cooking apples
- 450g (1lb pears)
- 225g (½lb) onions
- 450g (1lb) mixed dried fruit
- 4 cloves garlic
- 60g (2½oz) root ginger
- 1-2 fresh chilli(s)
- 1 lemon
- 1 tablespoon grain mustard
- 600ml (1¼ pints) malt vinegar
- 450g (1lb) brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon molasses
- 2 teaspoons salt

Peel the fruit, ginger and garlic and remove the seeds and core from the apples and pears and chop coarsely by hand or in a food processor. Add all the other ingredients and cook in a slow cooker overnight.

Poor into a large pan (not copper or aluminium) and cook until the chutney thickens and there is no thin liquid.

Funnel the mixture into sterilised jars and fit wax discs. Store for at least two weeks and refrigerate once opened.





Why Children (and some others) Hate Brussels Sprouts

We all taste food in slightly different ways because of the number and composition of our taste buds. Those with the most taste buds are more sensitive to the taste of food, and these are called supertasters. This sensitivity can be both an advantage and a disadvantage.

Supertasters are highly sensitive to a particular chemical found in Brussels sprouts which is called 6-n-propylthiouracil, abbreviated to "PROP", which they find disgusting. In general, Children can taste PROP more than adults which is why a higher proportion of children dislike (hate?!) sprouts.

It is thought that this sensitivity is an evolutionary device from mankind's heritage as foragers to prevent children from eating potentially toxic foods. The reducing sensitivity to PROP as children grow might be explained by a reduced need for such protection as they gain knowledge of safe foods over time.

For more information about PROP and supertasters see

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/body/articles/senses/supertaster.shtml>.



Polite Reminder

Site Security

In order to avoid unwanted visitors please scramble the combinations on the padlocks whenever you arrive or leave the allotment sites. Also, please don't keep power tools or items of value on site. The Association has had an unfortunate history of break-ins, vandalism, fly tipping and theft.

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...

Newsletter Editor: email@longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk.

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

