



It's that time of Year



The days are noticeably shorter, the sun is lower in the sky and temperatures are falling. Leaves are changing colour and starting to fall.

October signals the start the end of the growing season as it's time to harvest the last of your tomatoes, peppers and courgettes, and frosts become more regular. But it is also a time to welcome the next season by starting to prepare the soil and plant hardy broad beans and peas, while shallots and garlic can get an excellent start if they avoid waterlogged soil.

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 tidy up the plot, compost the remains of the year's harvest and plant/prune fruit trees and bushes.

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

Jobs

October: Clean pots, apply mulches, cover pot plants with fleece, insulate greenhouses and tidy up to prevent pests from over wintering, take cuttings from currants and berries.

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

December: Prune hard fruit trees (apples, pears) and currants, gooseberries and autumn raspberries. Remove faded leaves from winter brassicas. Clean pots, store produce, and plan for the year ahead. Cover beds.

Plant

October: Broad beans (Aquadulce varieties are most resistant to cold), rhubarb, peas (under cover) and garlic.

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

Harvest

October: The very last tomatoes, apples and other hard fruits, leeks, beetroot, beans sweetcorn, squash (they should sound hollow when you tap them), kale and chard.

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



Update from the Committee

Summer Barbecue – The 2021 Summer BBQ took place on 12 September at the Digswell site. The event was well attended and we have a new winner of the annual prize for the largest pumpkin – congratulations to Christine Smith.

The Association would like to express its thanks to Peter, Sue and Dave for again stepping up to the grill. We are sure that everyone greatly enjoyed the food and the day.



Digswell – The pump on the water tank and associated controls is due to be replaced during October – hopefully water should soon be available whenever it's needed.

Broadwater – We have arranged for plumbers to repair the tanks (leaky pipe to the northernmost tank and adjustment to float valve on the southernmost tank).

Kings Seed Catalogue – The latest Kings Seed catalogues are available at the Broadwater Shed and the Digswell kitchen. All the information you need to complete your order is provided in the inside front cover of the Catalogue. Completed order forms should be completed by Sunday 31 October 2019 and returned to Barbara Wilton. These are then sent in as a bulk order, thereby giving us a better discount.

New Members – Since the last newsletter was issued we have been joined by Dr Jane Denyer, Ms. Tanya Dickson and her sister, Mrs. Francesca Spooner. Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.

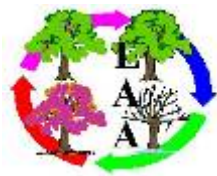
The Committee – We're Here to Help

A note from Andrew Hepher – LAA Chair

The LAA Committee has the responsibility of managing our two sites on behalf of the local Council. As a minimum, this involves collecting the rent for each plot (half of which we pay to the Council) and ensuring that the allotments and communal areas are well maintained. However, of course, we aim to do much more than this, helping to create a vibrant community of allotmenters that look after each other, as well as their vegetables! I think that our plots have been ever more appreciated over the past 18 months, and we always like to hear suggestions from our Members about how things may be further improved.



The Committee are, from left to right: Andrew Hepher, Helen McLean, Mick Pestle, Matthew Hannah, Sam Hayton, Simon Chard, Christine Smith, Andrew Thorne and Ian Cocksedge.



Crop Planner

	key:					
		sow				
		plant				
		harvest				
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
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						



Allotment Pests - Rats

Rats can become a problem on allotments where there is a good supply of food and potential nest sites in the form of sheds, wood piles and compost heaps.

Rats don't live for very long – typically less than a year – but they can breed every 6-8 weeks with litters of 5 or more, so their numbers can increase rapidly. Killing rats has an immediate short-term effect but sustained control can only be achieved by modifying the environment.

Killing rats can only provide short term control of populations. Sustainable control can only be achieved by making the habitat less suitable for rodents to nest and feed. Their preferred food is cereal and grain but will eat fruit, discarded food, insects and small animals (and a lot more!).

Rats tend to stay within a 50 metre radius and follow the same routes - "rat runs". They feed at night so if they are seen during the day it is generally because either: food is scarce; their nests are disturbed; or their population is high.

Manage Your Plot Well: block access points in and under sheds; remove rubbish from site regularly; turn; compost heaps regularly; ensure that any structure is housed on hard standing; make your presence known (e.g. kicking compost bins)

Restrict Potential Nesting Sites: remove rubbish, old equipment from the plot • minimise the amount of materials you keep on plot (e.g. timber and sheets of tin) • (paving slabs) to prevent rodents from burrowing in underneath. For example, shed/s, storage units, greenhouses etc.

Remove Food Sources: harvest fruit and vegetables promptly; don't leave discarded fruit and vegetables on the plot; avoid using household waste on compost heaps; secure compost heaps (e.g. use bins with solid sides); don't feed birds (rats will feed on fat balls and bird seed); and store seeds and bulbs in rodent-proof containers.

Observe Good Hygiene: thoroughly wash fruit and vegetables and discard those with signs of rodent damage; make sure you wear disposable gloves when working a plot where rodents are, or may be, present.



Winter Digging

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, allowing excess moisture to be released, and by

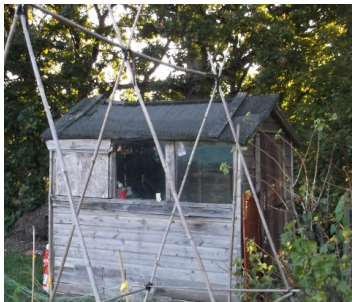




encouraging worms, centipedes and other beneficial life forms. Raking in some general purpose fertiliser will also help prepare the soil for next year's crops.

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 LAA shop has had an enormously successful year so far and will open for the last time this year between 09.30 and 12.00 on Saturday Oct 16th. The shop now stocks reduced-peat compost.

The numbers allowed in the shop at a time will be controlled and usual distancing rules will apply.

Preferred payment is via a card, ideally iZettle touchless.

Leaf Mould

Autumn is the perfect time to gather the ingredients for leaf mould.

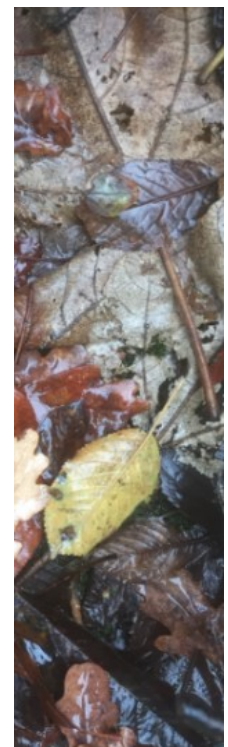
Being virtually all carbon, leaf mould does not have high levels of the main plant nutrients: nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus, but does contain some trace elements. Leaf mould can be dug into the soil to improve structure and retain water. Its water retention also means it can also be applied as a mulch or used to supplement soil in containers. It helps to form ecosystems within your soil and is, for example, attractive to worms.

To make leaf mould, simply gather autumn leaves and allow them to rot for at least two years. Oak, hornbeam and beech leaves rot quickly and produce the quickest results. Freshly fallen leaves are slightly acidic they become neutral as they decompose.

The leaves can be rotted in bin bags (with some holes to allow the decaying leaves to 'breathe') or in a large open container enclosed by pallets or chicken wire. Keep the leaves moist to aid decomposition and you can speed the process up by: adding a few layers of soil and/or manure; shredding the leaves before storing them; and regular turning to aerate the mixture.

The leaf mould is ready to use when it looks like dark soil.

For more information see: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=478>





Autumn Recipe

Stuffed Rainbow Chard

A variation on dolmades (stuffed vine leaves) from 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.

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

