

## It's that time of Year

It's the start of the New Year and with it comes a new growing season. Things never slow down for gardeners and there are jobs to be done even if there's not much to sow or harvest. And any time spent actively outdoors brings mental and physical benefits – what better excuse to get down the plot?



We've just experienced the warmest year since records began culminating in a mild autumn/winter - Cabbage White caterpillars were spotted at Broadwater in November!. But the start of January has brought frost with a vengeance. Planned trips to the plot may be disrupted by the weather, providing an opportunity to review the year, plan ahead, sort through old seeds and restore tools and let the frost break down the soil. Meanwhile, cover any prepared ground with plastic sheeting or tarpaulins to prevent soil becoming water-logged.

Now is not the time to be tempted into rushing things – it's the time to be disciplined and patient.

## **Jobs**

January: Manure empty beds. chit potatoes. Winter prune fruit bushes and 'hard' fruit trees.

February: Dig over your plot and add well-rotted organic material, chit seed potatoes. Last chance to prune hard fruit trees.

March: Prune berries, prepare frames/cloches/fleece. Weed, remove large stones and rake seedbeds and apply fertilisers. Dig bean trenches. (Remember - compost, manure, grow bags, fertilisers, fleece, bamboo sticks etc., are available from the LAA Shop.)

## **Plant**

January: Fruit trees and fruit bushes. Garlic sets, shallots, hardy peas and broad beans, winter salad leaves.

February: Outdoors - garlic and shallots, broad beans, fruit trees and bushes. Indoors - peas, spinach, broccoli, tomatoes. Under cover - peas, spinach, broccoli, tomatoes.

March: broad beans, peas, early potatoes, root/stem vegetable, onions, cabbages and cauliflowers, lettuce and salad crops.

## **Harvest**

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

February: Winter salads, kale, Brussels sprouts, swedes, cabbage, leeks, parsnips.

March: early rhubarb, kale, sprouting broccoli, leeks and spring onions.

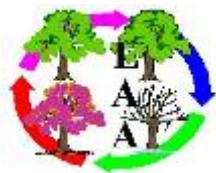
## The LAA Shop

It is currently planned to open the LAA shop at Digsowell from 09.30 to 12.00 on the following Saturdays: Feb 21st, Mar 21st, Apr 18th, May 16th, Jun 20th, Jul 18th, Aug 22nd, Sept 19th, Oct 24<sup>th</sup>.

If any of these dates are rescheduled they will be updated on the LAA web-site at the following page - <https://longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk/events-and-news>

**THE** place to stock up with compost, garden equipment, fleece, weed suppressant fabric, compost and other items before it re-opens in the spring. All payments are now contactless.





## Update from the Committee

**LAA Shop** – The first shop opening of the year is scheduled for Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> February from 09:30 until mid-day. Subsequent opening and other key dates are provided below and are updated (when necessary) on the LAA web-site.

**Annual General Meeting** – This will be held on Wednesday April 22<sup>nd</sup> from 7-9pm. Our Guest Speaker will be Kate Sheard of the Herts & Middlesex Kate Sheard. Kate has been working with our Association to provide advice on how to improve biodiversity at our sites – see article below.

**Email Issues** – We are continuing to experience (and attempting to resolve) difficulties when sending emails to members that have email accounts with gmail. The problem relates to changes to gmail account settings which are added or amended intermittently. Unfortunately, we have no advance warning of the changes and only become aware of the issue when we receive delivery failure messages a few days after sending emails. In the meantime, please keep an eye on the WhatsApp group and the LAA web-site messages and our web-site for details of shop openings, work parties, and other key messages.

**Interested in BeeKeeping?** - The Hertfordshire Beekeepers Association is running its annual course for people who wish start beekeeping or just want to find out more about keeping bees from 7:30pm to 10:00 pm on Wednesday evenings throughout March.

The course is run by local, experienced beekeepers providing an insightful introduction to beekeeping and allows you to meet those who will help support you as you get going.

The course comprises of 4 evening classes, a practical session on a Saturday putting together frames and boxes and a hands-on apiary session.

The course costs £99 and you can book online at the following link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/beginners-beekeeping-course-2026-tickets-1754750980419>

**New Members** – Since the last newsletter was issued, we have been joined by Jon (D120) and Gavin and Anan (D141). Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.

Beginners Beekeeping Course  
2026

Welwyn Garden City

HBCSA

Learn about Bees and Beekeeping this spring with local beekeepers

Wednesday evenings, 4th to 25th March 7.30pm to 10pm  
Christchurch Parkway, Welwyn Garden City

If you want to take up beekeeping or are just interested in bees then the HBCSA Beginners Beekeeping course is for you.

Get close up to the bees and learn how to get started. This award winning course will take you through everything you need to make your first year a success.

The course consists of 4 evening classes, a Saturday practical day and a hands-on apiary session.

6 Classes for just £99

Book online today at : [tinyurl.com/beginbees26](http://tinyurl.com/beginbees26)

The Local Access Association  
Biodiversity & Work Parties

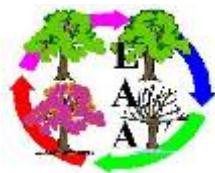


## Polite Reminder

Please do not leave the padlocks to the entrance gates unlocked and dangling from the chains. This can result in the lock combinations being reset inadvertently.

At Broadwater the padlock on the gate should be locked when leaving and entering the site.

At Digsowell, unless you are the last person leaving the site, the padlock should be in the locked position and hung on the hook provided (see image).



## Biodiversity on Allotments

We're working to improve our understanding how to encourage more wildlife to our sites. Allotments inherently provide rich habitats for wildlife, and we've boosted this with the recent introductions of a natural pond at Digsowell and the dead hedge at Broadwater. We're now looking to build on these initiatives and are seeking specific ideas from Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to over the coming months.

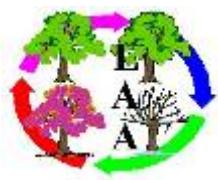
Early discussions have identified potential to:



**Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust**

- Create log piles and other forms of shelter for frogs, newts and toads in the area surrounding our existing ponds.
- Provide additional means for reptiles to enter and exit the pond from all sides and to introduce additional smaller wet habitats across each site to enable them to venture further from the main ponds.
- Introduce small areas of wildflowers on our plots to attract pollinators. The dilemma here is that, we are constantly enriching the soil whereas wildflowers and meadow plants generally prefer infertile soil.
- Continue to produce compost on site to enrich soil and provides shelter for insects and hedgehogs. Look out for slow worms in compost heaps and offer other shelter nearby.
- Create habitats for slow worms (see <https://southeastdevonwildlife.org.uk/activities/build-your-own-hibernaculum-homes-herptiles>) and report sightings to <https://groups.arguk.org/harg> or to <https://irecord.org.uk/>
- Install bird boxes for tits and robins on some of the smaller trees along the boundaries, recognising that these may need cleaning annually.
- Allow some areas (and ivy) to grow wild (but not to an extent that could result in an Enforcement Notice!)
- Create habitats for insects and hedgehogs. Log walls, dead hedges and simple wooden frames are ideal ways to do this.
- Leave some berries on plants to feed wildlife, and don't cut back fruit bush stems until Spring to provide shelter for insects over Winter.

The Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust has developed a series of booklets on wildlife gardening that can be downloaded from <https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-gardening>.



## Crop Planner

key:

green	sow
yellow	plant
red	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						



## Winter Recipes

### **Kale and Chestnut Soup**

A hearty soup which makes the most of seasonal crops (and, perhaps, Christmas leftovers!).

- 500g (1lb.) chestnuts
- 250-300g (10-12oz.) kale and/or winter greens
- 200-250g (8-10oz.) smoked bacon or ham
- 1-2 tablespoons of vegetable oil
- 1 litre (2 pints) vegetable or chicken stock
- Salt/pepper to taste

If using fresh chestnuts, pierce the skins and boil for 3-4 minutes. Allow to cool, then peel off the inner and outer skins. Simmer the chestnuts in the stock until they start to go tender. Crush approximately a third of the chestnuts to thicken the stock and continue to simmer gently.

Wash and trim the kale/greens, and coarsely chop into bite-sized pieces. Dice the ham/bacon and fry the cubes in the vegetable oil until they start to go brown and crisp.

Add the bacon and kale/greens to the stock and continue to simmer for up to five minutes until the greens are tender.

Season to taste and serve with crusty bread or croutons while still hot.



## Diary Dates for 2026

You may wish to take note of the following dates. These are also available on the LAA web-site where they will be updated if they are subject to change – see <https://longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk/events-and-news> .

### **Shop openings (09.30-12.00 on Saturdays)**

Feb 21st	Mar 21st	Apr 18th
May 16th	Jun 20th	Jul 18th
Aug 22nd	Sept 19th	Oct 24th

### **Work Parties (09.00-12.00 on Saturdays) - both sites**

April 18th

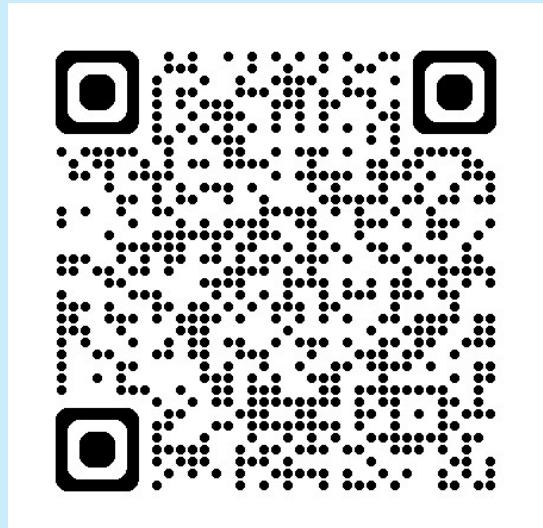
Sept 12th

### **Annual General Meeting**

Wednesday April 22<sup>nd</sup> - 7-9pm

### **Annual BBQ**

Sunday Sept 13th, from 12.30





## 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](mailto:email@longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk).

Visit the Longcroft Allotment Association website: [www.longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk](http://www.longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk)

