

## It's that time of Year

Once again, we've been affected by storms and have had to retrieve pots, netting, sheets, polytunnels, etc. from all corners of our allotment sites. The storms do seem to be more frequent and more extreme, perhaps as a result of climate change. Storm Bert arrived in November and was followed by Storm Conall less than a week later. Both caused minor damage and redistribute some of our possessions around each site. The picture below shows some minor devastation at our Broadwater site.



Once these storms have passed, December and January should be relative quiet months on the plot – the perfect time for getting organised: planning, and housekeeping.

It's a good time to sort through any leftover seeds and decide which ones to keep and which to throw out or offer to other plot holders – seeds typically have a life of around two years and results deteriorate over time. You may also wish to discard any seeds that you didn't enjoy growing (or eating!). And, while you're at it, think about what to plant and where in the year ahead. A good crop rotation plan will help to limit pests and diseases.

Also, those cold/rainy days when there's little incentive to visit the plot are an opportunity to ensure your garden tools are clean, sharp or otherwise in good condition.

Check the condition of any crops that are in storage – fruit, potatoes, onions and squashes are the main candidates.

## **Jobs**

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**

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

## **Harvest**

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

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





## Update from the Committee

**Health and Safety:** Safety inspections were completed at both sites during September with no major concerns identified.

**Water Supplies:** These have been turned off at both sites to reduce the risk of frost damage over winter. The water supplies will be restored in the spring, ahead of the next growing season.

**Shop at Digswell:** The shop will next open towards the end of February, with a list of opening dates for 2025 to be published early in the new year.

**Spare Seeds** – If any of our members have spare seeds, seedlings or plants, please consider offering these to other members via the WhatsApp group)?

**LAA as a Trust** – as the Association handles money on behalf of its members it is deemed to be a trust as part of anti-money laundering legislation. We are in the process of registering with HMRC, with our Chair and Treasurer as trustees.

**Broadwater:** There is an intermediate bulk containers (IBCs) on site: a container which holds 1,000litres of water which will be used to collect rainwater from the mower shed.

**Digswell:** All members are reminded that there is compost available next to the recently decommissioned communal heap. Please help yourselves (sieving is recommended).

**New Members:** Since the last newsletter was sent out we have been joined by Kerry Houslop (B11), Tristan Welldon and Sarah Punter (B8), Nadina Rickets (B151), Daniel Adeniran (B12), Sardar Hussain and Iffat Hussain-Malik (D139), Edward and Keith Handley (B17). Welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.

**Waiting List:** Our waiting lists have declined over recent months and waiting lists are now less than a year. We have therefore produced a flier to encourage new applicants. Please feel free to share this with friends, members of your family or work colleagues if you think they may be interested in taking on a plot. The flier can be downloaded from the following link:

<https://longcroftallotmentassociation.org.uk/requests-and-forms>

Finally, we wish all our members a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

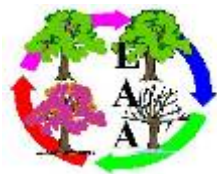


## Something for Your Christmas List?














































































**Runner bean slicer/stringer:** These nifty devices slice and string fresh runner beans in seconds. Simply top and tail the runner bean using the blade at the end of the device. Open the spring-loaded arm and push the beans part way through the set of blades until you can grip them from the other side and pull through completely. The added bonus is that if the beans aren't fresh they are more difficult to slice, so the device does your quality control checking for you.

They are available on-line from various sources for £2-4 – a very economical addition to your (or someone else's) Christmas list.





## 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						





## Autumn/Winter Recipe

### Italian Greens

A delicious development of the traditional way of boiling greens in salt water. An ideal accompaniment to a roast dinner (including Christmas Dinner!) or pasta dish.

Approximately 500g (8oz.) of greens: cabbage, kale, broccoli or a combination  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
3-4 cloves garlic  
1-2 small chillies

10-15 green and/or black olives, thinly sliced  
Heaped tablespoon capers (optional)  
Small handful cherry tomatoes, halved  
Salt and pepper to taste



Cut the greens, rinse, drain and boil in salt water for a few minutes. Thoroughly drain again and keep warm.

Finely slice the chilli and crush the garlic with some salt. Gently fry in olive oil for a few minutes

Add the drained greens and warmed through.

Add the olives, capers and tomatoes and stir occasionally for another five minutes until the tomatoes start to soften. Serve.

Inspired by Nico Simone, Broadwater

## Our Shop at Digswell

The Shop at Digswell is now closed for the winter.

the Shop will next open towards the end of February, with a list of opening dates for 2025 to be published early in the new year.



## Climate Change

Being aware of how climate change might affect us can help us plan to make our plots more resilient.

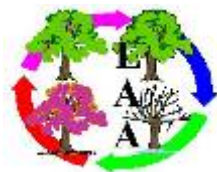
Rainfall – summer rainfall is likely to decrease but, when it does rain, this is expected to become more intense. The former means that there is a greater need to store rainwater for summer use to reduce dependency on mains water supplies. The latter increases the risk of local flooding and soil erosion, and may require more robust staking of climbing plants or providing some form protection from the rain and wind.

Growing Season – the growing season is likely to be extended. This affects the choice of crops that we can or can't grow – French beans are more resistant to high temperatures and drought than runner, as are Mediterranean salad varieties. Other plants that can be grown with little water include beetroot, kohlrabi and parsnips. The longer growing season also means that aphids and other pests are more likely to survive winter.

Soil resilience - Repeatedly adding organic matter to the soil brings multiple benefits. It helps soil to absorb and retain water during heavy rainfall. It can reduce soil run off during heavy spells of rainfall, particular on sloping plots. Finally, when applied at as a mulch, it reduces the exposure of the ground to extreme fluctuations in air temperature.



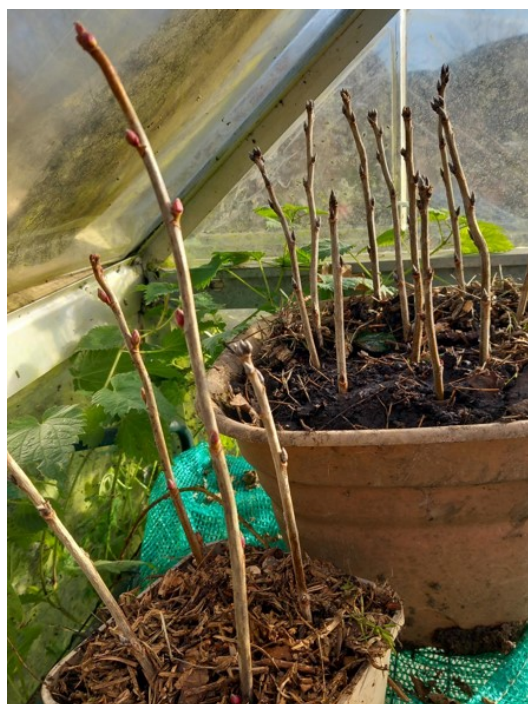




## Growing Currants from Cuttings.

Currants and other fruit bushes make excellent summer desserts, jams and preserves. Also, they probably require less effort than all other crops and live for several years. They can be expensive to buy, but at this time of year they can be grown for free from cuttings. Success rates are so high that the Royal Horticultural Society has developed a teaching resource as part of its initiative to encourage school gardening :

<https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/resources/activity/fruit-for-free-soft-fruit>



Simply cut 20-30cm (8-12") tips from the latest year's stems and place the cut end in compost to a depth of approximately 50mm (2"). The bottom of each cutting can be dipped in powdered cinnamon, honey or cider vinegar to prevent fungal growth. The ideal time to do this is when pruning the bushes – usually between mid-winter and early spring.

It is important to ensure that the compost doesn't dry out so they should be rich in organic matter and not necessarily rich in nutrients (so home-made compost can be ideal. Some gardeners grow the cuttings in potato tubers, and argue that this method provides essential nutrients and reduces the likelihood of the stems drying out, thereby helping roots to establish. Check the pots periodically and water if the soils begins to dry out (some people place the pots inside sealed plastic bags so the water doesn't evaporate). The cuttings are extremely hardy and, although the success rate will be lower, they can be directly grown by placing them directly in the outdoor soil.

After a few months, short roots of 20-30mm (~1") will develop and they are ready to plant out. They may take a year or two to provide fruit but should last more than ten years.

## Soilscapes Software

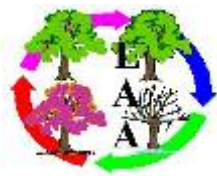
Software has been developed so describe the nature of soils at locations across England and Wales. Based on data held by Cranfield University, Soilscapes is freely available and requires no log-in. An on-line map displays soil descriptions, interesting soil characteristics (texture, drainage, soil fertility, associated habitat and landcover. The software also provides information about how common the soils at the location are when compared to the national stock.

Both our sites are described as "slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage" with "moderate to high" fertility. This is representative of slightly more than 10% of soils in England

To access the software and to find out more information about the initiative visit:

<https://www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes/>





## 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)

