

# THE ALLOTMENT

HAMPTON COURT WAY ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

## GREEN MANURE - NATURE'S SECRET WEAPON!

**Green Manure**, which does wonders for soil health and crops, has been known about for centuries. Then chemicals were introduced, to kill off pests & diseases, enhance plant growth and increase productivity, so it became overlooked. Little was known then about the harmful effects of chemicals on the ecosystem. Now we are much more aware of natural ways to enhance soil and crops and green manuring is one of the best methods.

**Improved Soil Structure** Some green manures deep growing roots open up soil. In heavy soil drainage occurs and organic matter is left in the soil. On lighter soil the particles bind together to hold water and leave organic matter in the soil.

**Weed Suppression** Green manures grow quickly. The leafy growth smothers weeds and,

helps retain moisture in the soil. It is best to make sure the soil is weed-free first.

**Adding Nutrients** Plants need nitrogen for healthy growth. Green manures absorb nitrogen from the air and fixes it in the root nodules and, when dug in, nitrogen is left for following crops. Specific bacteria are also needed but should be present in healthy soil.

**Soil Protection** Green manure protects the soil from compacting after heavy rains, prevents the leaching of nutrients and helps hold the soil together. In summer it protects the soil from the drying effects of sun and wind.

**Pest Control** Green manures provide habitats for frogs, beetles and other predators that feed on snails and slugs. If a non-invasive green manure is planted between crops it confuses *carrot fly* and the low-flyer won't attack the crop.

**Resting Soil** Some soils need to recover from

constant cultivation. Planting green manure helps soil fertility and structure with very little effort. It can be left in for a year or more, but it is generally for winter.

Green manures can be left to grow, then before flowering cut down to prevent seeds growing.



Green Mustard

### Some Green Maure Crops

*Alfalfa* (deep roots brings nutrients to surface), *Buckwheat* (in temperate regions), *Cowpea*, *Clover* (e.g. annual) *Sweet Clover*, *Fava beans*, *Fenugreek*, *Lupin*, *Millet*, *Mustard*, *Radish*, *Soybean*, *Vetch*, *Vicia sativa*, *Vicia villosa*.

**Winter green manure crops: Oats and Rye.**

**The AGM is on Mon 19th January, 7.30 pm at Thames Ditton Lawn Tennis Club, Weston Green Road. Refreshments provided, bar available • It would be brilliant if you can come!**

## JANUARY

January is usually a very cold month with hard, ground freezing frosts. Recently we have had such unusual weather that if we prepare for any thing we should be OK.

### SOWING & PLANTING

**Onions** like cooler temperatures and can be sown in January. Otherwise, there's not much to sow or plant outside but you can start off (in a heated propogator - or try under glass or on a south facing window sill) plants such as tomatoes and aubergines.

*To gain daylight: try placing a reflective foil board on the north side of any seed trays to gain extra light and help prevent leggy seedlings.*

### GENERAL TASKS

If you are ahead with things, your plot will possibly be dug over, manured and leaf-mould could be slowly forming in a cage. But if you have been unable to get ahead it is a last minute panic to catch up! Now is the time to decide on what to grow

and go **seed shopping**. How much fun can anyone have with a seed catalogue in one hand a credit card in the other?

### FRUIT

Prune **Apple** and **Pear** trees.

**Bare rooted trees** and **bushes** can be planted out from now until March.

**Currants** (See February - big bud mite).

### GREENHOUSE TASKS

Ventilate green houses on warm days, to prevent mould and check for loose clips and panes and repair as required.

### HARVEST

**Leeks** left standing will be OK, but if there is a snap cold spell it could be hard getting them out of frozen ground.

## FEBRUARY

The last of the winter months can be the coldest but we just have to wait and see what mother nature brings us. If there has been a lot of rain it may be wise to avoid sowing in waterlogged, slightly frozen soil, as the seeds will probably rot.

## SOWING & PLANTING

**Seed Potatoes** should be available now but it is too early to plant them out but they can be chitted ready for planting. There are mixed views on doing this so it is 'whatever floats your potato'.

*To chit them, put the **Seed Potatoes** in a cool, frost-free place where there is some light but not direct sunlight. The Potatoes will then grow the shoots. Some gardeners feel removing all but three shoots will help get larger potatoes with the main crops.*

Weather permitting, you can direct sow **Broad Beans**, **Peas** (e.g. **Feltham First** or **Meteor**) for a May/June harvest.

### Batten down the hatches!



**Prepare for strong winds and floods.**  
Last winter in high winds:-

- Three greenhouses were lost to damage
- Whole shed was blown over
- Plastic bins and cloches were displaced blown about. (Please ensure bin lids are labled with plot numbers).

Traditionally **Parsnips** are sown now. However, one source suggests that poor germination rates may be due to sowing in cold wet soil and it is better to wait and sow in March or April.

**Jerusalem Artichokes** and **Shallots** can be planted now, but shallots will benefit from covering with a cloche.

## UNDER COVER

Greenhouse/Cold frame/Polytunnel  
In a greenhouse you can plant an early crop of **Lettuce/Rocket/Radish**. Try a cloche outside but success is very dependent on the weather.

Sow summer **Cabbages** such as **Primo** and **Greyhound**, as well as **Turnips** and **Spinach**.

Seed **Onions** should be started now but need 15°C to get them going, so try them on a windowsill in a cool room. With a heated propagator or on windowsills, you can start **Aubergines**, **Peppers**, **Chillies** and **Tomatoes**.

## FRUIT

Finish planting **fruit trees and bushes**, especially **Raspberries** and other cane fruits. Prune **Apple** & **Pear** trees while dormant.

Prune **Gooseberries** & **Currants**. (*Shorten the side shoots of Currants to one bud and remove old stems from the centre of the bushes*).

Check **Currants** for *big bud mite* which appears between January & April. Infected branches should be removed and burnt.

**Rhubarb** can be forced (for an early crop of the sweet stalks). Cover a crown or two with buckets or large pots and insulate outside with straw or compost for added heat. The stalks will grow in the dark. The down side is that the crown won't recover for a couple of years.

## GENERAL TASKS

If all major tasks are complete (*digging over, making leafmould heaps etc, etc.*) there will not be a lot to do. If not, now is the last chance to catch up before spring. **Check** the greenhouse, ensure glass is firmly secured and replace cracked panes etc. If you've not done it yet, give it a thorough clean.

**Check** last year's potato bed for left over potatoes and remove them to avoid disease problems and blight.

**Wash** and sterilise recycled seed trays.

This years **Potato bed** will benefit from compost or rotted manure being dug in.

**Cover soil** with dark plastic sheeting, fleece or cloches to warm it up, a couple of weeks before you start to sow and plant. This also makes it easier to sow.

## HARVEST

### Leeks

**Parsnips**, **turnips** and **swedes**.

The **Cabbage** family such as **Early Purple Sprouting Kale** and **Brussels Sprouts**, **Perpetual Spinach** and **Chards**.

Other crops you may have: **Salsify**, **Scorzonera**, **Chicory**, **Endive**, **Celeriac**, **Celery** and **Jerusalem Artichokes**.

## MARCH

This month sees the start in the growing season.

## SOWING & PLANTING

If the weather is cold but reasonable, you can gain time and start early by sowing under a cloche or fleece. Water well into the drill prior to sowing and replacing the cover. Water weekly or more frequently in sunny weather under cloches.

Plant out **Onion** and **Shallot** sets. If grown from seed (started earlier in the year) these can also go out now.

Also sow direct **Onions**, thinning out as they grow.

March is the time to establish an **Asparagus** bed from crowns.

Plant out chitted **Potatoes**. For a very early crop start them in the greenhouse or tunnel in black polythene sacks.

Plant **Jerusalem Artichoke** tubers now but be aware that any tubers left in the ground may make a permanent bed.

## SOWING & PLANTING

**Beetroot**, **Broad Beans**, **Early Peas**, **Brussels Sprouts** (*early varieties like Peer Gynt will be ready in September*), **Kohl Rabi**, **Leeks**, **Lettuce**, **Radish**, **Parsnips**, **Spinach Beet**, **Early Turnips**.

## UNDER COVER

Greenhouse/Cold frame/Polytunnel

### Sow in Heat

Start off **Tomatoes**, **Peppers**, **Aubergines** and **Cucumbers**.

### Under Cloche

Many crops sown directly can benefit from cloching

## FRUIT

Finish planting **bare rooted fruit trees** and bushes, especially **Raspberries** and other cane fruits.

**Prune Apple** and **Pear** trees while they are still dormant.

**Prune Gooseberries** and **Currants**. (*prune as February instructions and check for big bud mite*)

Fruit bushes will benefit from compost spread around the base. Or add some general purpose fertiliser like fish, blood & bone. *Trees also like wood ash being spread under them.*

## HARVEST

### Leeks

**Parsnips** too should come up now before they try and re-grow. They will store for a month or so in damp sand but the plant knows when it is growing time again.

**Spinach Beet** and **Chards** should still be available, also the last of the late **Brussels Sprouts**, **Winter Cauliflowers**, **Kale**, **Swedes**, **Salsify** and **Scorzonera**.

Don't forget to keep checking the purple sprouting!

## GENERAL TASKS

March is the last real chance to finish any odd jobs as the new season starts! Happy Growing!

### SITE REMINDERS:

*The site speed limit is*



*Bonfires - OK until 30<sup>th</sup> April and only if the wind blows south to north*

*Please make sure your plot number can be clearly seen*



**Reminder: The AGM will be held on Monday 19th January 2015. See front**

### Who's Who

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