

Community Growing Toolkit



A guide to planning
a community growing
project and seasonal
growing tips

Community Growing

Identify a need

First of all consider if there are community growing spaces in your area already? If so, you may find that there are existing gardens or projects that you could become involved with.

You can check with South Lanarkshire Council, your local Community Council or it may help to ask through social media. If you don't find anything, the next step is to identify who your project is aimed at, who will work in and / or visit the garden. This could be:

- young people
- older people
- people with specific needs
- anyone from the local area

Speak to these specific groups or people who work with them to identify their needs and establish whether there is an interest in your project locally.

Find a growing space

There may be lots of unexpected opportunities for growing space in your local area such as:

- reclaiming disused land
- gardens on school land
- woodlands
- unused land owned by councils
- allotments / raised beds
- care home gardens
- social housing providers - shared backcourts / greens

If you need help to find a growing space, contact the Landscape Support Officer at South Lanarkshire Council via email ffgs@southlanarkshire.gov.uk and we will check if suitable land in your area has already been identified. There are options to lease unused land from the Council or where appropriate apply for a land asset transfer however these would be subject to the necessary ground ownership and condition checks.

When identifying suitable pieces of land, think about practical issues such as:

- soil condition / contamination
- access to water
- electricity
- space for a shed or storage
- access
- length of lease - how long will you be able to use the land for?
- planning permission

If you intend to apply for grants, funders will often want you to have a lease in place for a minimum number of years.

You then need to consider what you want to grow – flowers, herbs, vegetables or fruit and whether the proposed space is suitable for the community it will serve. Think about the different areas you will need in the garden such as:

- growing space
- seating areas
- secure storage
- wet weather space
- (composting) toilet
- wildlife garden
- compost bins
- sensory garden

Many community gardens start life as an overgrown disused patch of land and it can be a lot of work to clear the space. Jobs like this can be very appealing to company employee volunteer programmes or team building days. Having a physical task with a clear benefit ticks lots of their boxes. Look at the website of big businesses in your area or contact them directly.

The Royal Horticultural Society also offers information on getting started and the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners has useful information on dealing with overgrown plots.

Write a wish list of what you think you will need such as tools, seeds and equipment. To learn more about how to get goods donated for your community garden, check out the website <https://knowhownonprofit.org>

Finding funds

There are a wide range of funders who support community garden projects. The following organisations have lists of funding opportunities for community growing projects:

- <http://www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/funding-support>
- <https://farmgarden.org.uk/>

The Council's Planning and Economic Development Team can also assist you in funding suitable funders as well as completing funding bids.

Prior to securing land and applying for funding, you need to think about how could your community garden become self-sustaining? Will the attendees use all of the produce? Or could you sell spare produce at fetes and markets? Could you sell plants, make jams and chutneys? Could you offer services or recruit paying members? There are lots of ideas and examples found on the internet.

Key steps

1. Organise a meeting of interested people

Determine whether a garden is really needed and wanted, what kind it should be (vegetable, flower, both, organic?), whom it will involve and who benefits. Invite neighbours, tenants, community organisations, gardening and horticultural societies, building superintendents (if it is at an apartment building) - in other words, anyone who is likely to be interested.

2. Form a planning / management committee

This group can be comprised of people who feel committed to the creation of the garden and have the time to devote to it, at least at this initial stage. Choose well-organised persons as garden coordinators, form committees to tackle specific tasks: funding and partnerships, youth activities, construction and communication.

3. Identify all your resources

Do a community asset assessment. What skills and resources already exist in the community that can aid in the garden's creation? Contact local municipal planners about possible sites, as well as horticultural societies and other local sources of information and assistance. Look within your community for people with experience in landscaping and gardening.

4. Approach a sponsor

Some gardens "self-support" through membership dues, but for many, a sponsor is essential for donations of tools, seeds or money. Churches, schools, private businesses or parks and recreation departments are all possible supporters.

5. Choose a site

Consider the amount of daily sunshine (vegetables need at least six hours a day), availability of water, and soil testing for possible pollutants. Find out who owns the land. Can the gardeners get a lease agreement for at least three years? Will public liability insurance be necessary?

6. Prepare and develop the site

In most cases, the land will need considerable preparation for planting. Organise volunteer work crews to clean it, gather materials and decide on the design and plot arrangement.

7. Organise the garden

Members must decide how many plots are available and how they will be assigned. Allow space for storing tools, making compost and don't forget the pathways between plots which should be DDA compliant! Plant flowers or shrubs around the garden's edges to promote goodwill with non-gardening neighbours, passersby and municipal authorities.

8. Plan for children

Consider creating a special garden just for kids as including them is essential. Children are not as interested in the size of the harvest but rather in the process of gardening. A separate area set aside for them allows them to explore the garden at their own speed. It is important to note that if children are involved you will need to consider having disclosure checks undertaken.

9. Rules

To keep everything consistent and fair, it is important to have written rules that apply to members and volunteers. Gardeners themselves devise the best ground rules however it is crucial to cover expected behaviour and people are more willing to comply when they have been involved in creating rules. Some examples of issues that are best dealt with by agreed upon rules are: fees, how will the money be used? How are plots assigned? Will gardeners share tools, meet regularly, handle basic maintenance, code of conduct?

10. Communication

Good communication ensures a strong community garden with active participation by all. Some ways to do this are: form a telephone tree, create an email list; install a rainproof bulletin board in the garden; have regular social events. Community gardens are all about creating and strengthening communities.

11. Insurance

To operate a community garden you should have insurance cover. Public liability insurance will protect you from being held responsible for injury, disability or death of people visiting or taking part in your activities. You should have at least £2m cover however most groups are now insured for a minimum of £5m. Employer's liability will protect you from being held responsible for accidents causing injury, disability or death of employees and volunteers. It is also advisable to have a policy that covers all risks which include community garden property such as equipment, money, against fire, theft and other risks. You must display your public and your employer's liability certificates in your main building or on your public noticeboard. You are legally responsible from the day you take over the site however it is recommended that you take out public liability insurance before any site works are undertaken.

12. Health & safety

It is strongly recommended that whether you have paid employees or not, your organisation applies the duties of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 to cover volunteers, members, users and visitors. Duties include having a health and safety policy, ensuring that the environment is safe minimising risk to health including the provision of information, instruction, training and supervision, clearly detail first aid and emergency arrangements, welfare facilities, provision of an accident book, clear procedures for the safe use, handling and transportation of articles and substances. A risk assessment checklist is available from the Health & Safety Executive (HSE).

Common dangers include poisonous plants, pathways and walkways, overloaded wheelbarrows, use of garden tools, power and electrical tools and compost heaps that can attract vermin if not well managed.

Consider whether dogs will be admitted as dog faeces can affect land for up to 15 years and can pose health problems for young children and pregnant women.

Consult with local professionals such as the Fire Brigade regarding the assessment of fire risks on your site and Environmental Health regarding any food related issues.

Health & Safety Executive Publications include:

- *Workplace health, safety and welfare - Approved code of practice* (L24), for general advice
 - *COSHH: The new brief guide for employers* (INDH 136 Rev), for when you might use any chemicals on the garden
 - *Everyone's guide to RIDDOR 95* (HSE 31) for information about risk assessments
 - *Avoiding ill health at open farms - Advice to farmers (with teachers' supplement)*.
- Agriculture information sheet No 23 (revised).
Tel: 01787 881165 for a publications catalogue. www.hse.gov.uk

Gardening Which? magazine has produced a factsheet on poisonous plants to download for free. Visit: www.which.net/gardeningwhich/campaigns and click on 'poisonous plants'.

13. Legal requirements

It is important to seek independent legal advice early on to protect the group and its members. You must comply with current laws and each piece of legislation will have specialist government appointed or voluntary organisations that can offer support to interpret legislation that applies to you.

14. Volunteers

Your most valuable resources are the people in your group. Whatever they do, and no matter how much time they spend, if they aren't getting paid they are volunteers - that probably includes you reading this now! Community gardens can offer a wide variety of opportunities for volunteering, for the skilled and experienced and the unskilled or less experienced. Volunteering can cover anything from the volunteer chairperson with legal accountability and specialist skills, to the casual volunteer who agrees to deliver leaflets. Volunteers can be recruited from your own members and supporters, people who use your garden, other local residents, members of other local organisations, local school children or conservation work parties from organisations such as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV).

Volunteering should be mutually beneficial, enjoyable and rewarding – your group should benefit from the time, enthusiasm, skills and energy of the volunteer, and the volunteer should be able to learn new skills, meet new people and make a positive contribution to the local community. To make sure that volunteering on your garden benefits everyone, it's important to keep a balance between your group's capacity to support and manage volunteers, and the amount of work that needs doing. Saying "yes" to everyone who wants to volunteer can cause problems. Some volunteers might have needs that you cannot meet. You need to offer friendly and informal volunteering opportunities while remembering your responsibility to protect the public and the volunteers working with you.

15. Monitoring

Effective evaluation will help your group to decide what to do in the future and whether to repeat certain activities and events. Use visitor feedback about what people like and the don't like and learn from your mistakes and successes. Report back to your members, supporters and funders on your achievements and chart your progress on a month to month basis to demonstrate how resources are being used and the impact your group are making.

16. Training

Training must meet your overall objectives and take into account what your group are trying to achieve, how are you going to do this, who is going to do what and do they need training to do this and if so how will this be provided and funded.

17. Membership

Once you've decided to charge fees you'll need to decide how much to charge. Even if you have fees now, when did you last raise them? Are they realistic? What proportion of your garden's running costs do they meet? Membership fees should help to cover some of the running costs of your garden. It's not a good idea to set fees too low - better to set them at a level where you get some income from those who are able to pay, and can offer concessions to those who cannot.

Always make it clear what membership fees are paying for, by confirming that fees will be used to buy plants and materials and not admin costs.

18. Constitution

A constitution is a legal document that sets out rules for governing an organisation. Your group should have one in order to:

- Ensure the objectives are clear and agreed by its members
- Establish a management committee and define who this should consist of
- Provide mechanisms for decision making and resolving disputes
- Clarify liability, responsibility and accountability
- Gain credibility with other organisations, supporters and potential funders
- Become a registered charity

19. Publicity

Having established your group you can then decide on how best to promote what you plan to achieve i.e. local residents, schools, businesses, shops, community centres, local Councillors, Council officers. Consider if you can contribute to local publications and what noticeboards are in your area, particularly in locations where existing groups meet, what existing contacts your members currently have, hosting local events to raise your profile, leaflet drops, newsletters, public meetings and creating a website that is regularly updated.

20. Budgeting

Good financial management is essential to ensure that money is being spent wisely, that legal requirements are met and that accurate records are available to funders as well as your members. Find out what financial skills you have within your group or if there are organisations in your area that offer financial services to community and voluntary groups. Whether you are spending £1 or £100 the group must be able to account for all money received and spent.

Other Useful Websites

Royal Horticultural Society	www.rhs.org.uk
Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society	www.sags.org.uk
The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens	www.farmgarden.org.uk
National Society of Allotments & Leisure Gardeners	www.nsalg.org.uk
Greenspace Scotland	www.greenspacescotland.org.uk
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations	www.scvo.org.uk

South Lanarkshire Council

Community Growing – Hints and Tips

How to plan a growing plot

Growing plots must be cared for and nurtured in order to get the best out of them. The type of soil you have, the way the sun hits your plot and direction of the wind will all play a part in the types of plants you'll be able to grow. To save time and effort, chat to some of the longer established allotment holders as they will know instantly what does and doesn't work on your site.

If you need to clear your site of weeds before you can even see the soil, then we recommend not using a rotavator as some weeds, particularly the more persistent (couch grass, docks, nettles, bindweed) will be chopped up and will spread and multiply as a result. It may seem tedious, but cut your weeds back to stubble height and then dig them out, also regularly hoeing in dry weather is the best way to kill off weeds.

Traditionally allotments are set in rows, on a three year crop rotation system (brassicas, roots and then other veg), but today the style of allotment planting is much looser – with people choosing to mix up their beds, breaking up the formality of the rows. It is really up to the gardener to choose what works well for them, but the notion of rotating your crops is worth sticking to – as it helps to keep the soil in good condition and certain types of pests and diseases at bay.

It is also worth considering what type of crops you intend to grow, as some will take years to establish and will need a bed to themselves for the duration of their life (and as such will not be included in the rotation system) – for example, asparagus beds can last up to 20 years, cane and bush fruit are long term fixtures, requiring cages and netting, while fruit trees can outlive many generations of plot holder. Perennials such as rhubarb and globe artichokes also need to be thought about.

Soil

In order to work out your soil type you need to get your hands dirty!

Sandy soil (also known as light soil) is gritty to touch– you will be able to feel sandy grains when you rub your fingers through it. This type of soil will drain quickly and heat up quickly, but it will often lack nutrients and be very acidic.

Clay soil (also known as heavy soil) is sticky when wet and when rolled between your fingers it will have a shiny finish to it. This type of soil is slow draining and takes a long time to warm up, but in the summer it will bake hard, leaving wide open cracks on the surface.

Silt soil can be easily compacted in your hands, it will hold more water than sandy soils but are not as heavy as clay soils. If the soil is left unplanted it can become eroded by the wind.

Loams are a mixture of the best bits of clay, sand and silt. It is fertile, well-draining and easy to dig.

Chalky or lime-rich soils are largely very alkaline, made up of calcium carbonate

Testing your pH level

The acidity of your soil will also help you to identify which plants you can grow more easily and if you need to add extra improvers to the soil. Soil testing kits can be bought at garden centres and cost very little.

pH 3.0 – 5.0

Very acidic soil, tends to be lacking most nutrients. Add lime and nutrients back into the soil

pH 5.1 – 6.0

Acidic soil, add lime unless you plan to grow ericaceous plants

pH 6.1 – 7.0

Moderately acidic soil, loved by most plants, high in nutrients and worm activity

7.1 – 8.0

Alkaline soil, some nutrients are lacking, but the brassicas family prefer this type of soil as risk of club root disease is minimised

If your soil is on the acid side then you can apply garden lime to make it more alkaline. If however your soil is very lime rich (alkaline) then you can use acidifying materials like sulphur – it all depends on what fruit and vegetables you wish to grow.

All soils can do with being conditioned from time to time, adding back in the precious nutrients lost over seasons of growing. Some soil testing kits will also be able to provide you with the levels of nutrients found in your soil – and so tell you what you need to add in order to make it rich again e.g. potash, phosphate, magnesium, nitrogen etc. Alongside this, it is always worth adding bulky organic matter to your soil every year (good rotted compost, that is dug well in) to help improve the general fertility of your soil and its ability to retain moisture during the summer.

Shady plots

Ideally your new growing space will be in a sunny position but this inevitably is not always the case. If your growing area is partly or totally shaded, considering fruit and vegetables that can tolerate these conditions is essential.

Fruit – redcurrants, whitecurrants, gooseberries as well as raspberries, blackcurrants that originate from woodland edges may produce reasonable crops in partial shade. Apples, pears and plums prefer a more open position but cooking apples can also tolerate partial shade. Morello cherries may also thrive on a shady wall.

Vegetables – beetroot, chard, kale, kohlrabi and lettuce are all tolerant to some shade. Sowing seeds in bright conditions and then transplanting them will get them off to a good start with established roots.

Invasive weeds

If you have concerns regarding invasive weeds such as Japanese knotweed, please contact the Landscape Support Officer for advice as it is illegal to dispose of this material at landfill.

Plan your year...

January

Overview

January is often the coldest period of the winter and coming on top of the floods and heavy rains of just before Christmas it is well worth taking the time to look over the allotment and prioritise the jobs for the month. Top of the list has to be clean up the plot and dispose of all of the damaged and rotten crops. Most of the overwintering vegetables will have suffered under the wet conditions make a list, visit the site shed or garden centres and get in what replacement seeds or bulbs you will require for your immediate needs.

Harvesting

Brussels sprouts, cabbages, leeks and parsnips, if not damaged by flood water.

Check on any vegetables in store and discard any that have gone mouldy or rotten.

Sowing and planting

The days are still too short and cold even think of sowing seeds either outdoors or in the open. A few sowings of onions, lettuce, peas, broad beans, radish and early carrots can be made under protection towards the end of the month. The January sun can push temperatures quite high so give a little air to the transplanted lettuce plants on warm days closing down early in the afternoon.

General

Protect vegetables under cloches or fleece over winter, don't forget to ventilate and allow plenty of fresh air to get in on sunny days. Under the protection, winter sunshine temperatures can get as high as on a hot summer's day.

Pack some straw or fleece around celery to protect it from frost but remove it on sunny days to let the plants breathe.

Draw the soil up around the stalks of cabbages and winter cauliflowers to just under the first set of leaves. Check over Brussels sprouts and sprouting broccoli and support them with a strong stake to prevent them from being blown over in high winds.

Take advantage of days when the soil is frozen hard to barrow and stack manure and compost close to where it will be dug in later on. Don't walk on the soil as it begins to thaw it will be wet and sticky.

If you have any plants or seedlings ticking over in a cold greenhouse cover them with several layers of newspaper on frosty nights but remove it on warm days.

Dig up rhubarb roots and divide them leaving the sections on the surface of the soil for a few days to let them be frosted prior to forcing. Cover any crowns in the soil that have been set aside for forcing with an upturned bucket or flower pot and cover the drainage holes to shut out the light. With luck you will be harvesting pale pink sticks by late February.

Check on any fruit and vegetables in store and remove any that are diseased or soft.

Towards the end of the month when the weather and soil conditions allow plant out soft fruit bushes. Spray all fruit trees and bushes with a garlic winter wash on a fine day; do not spray in frosty conditions. It won't hurt to hold the job over to next month.

Seed potatoes will be available from the end of the month. Order your seed potatoes and collect seed trays or wooden tomato trays ready to chit them in. On days when you can't work on the plot clean the shed, greenhouse, tools and linseed oil any wooden handles. Check that the watering can and buckets don't leak and that the wheelbarrow doesn't have a flat wheel.

February

Overview

We get a glimpse of the early signs of the arrival of spring this month. The soil begins to warm up around the middle of February and we can see for the first time this year the buds beginning to swell on fruit trees and bushes. Overwintering vegetables begin to look less sorry for themselves and they start to produce new growth. These are the signals that it is now safe to think about sowing a row of early peas and broad beans using a hardy cultivar. It is too late to sow the broad bean 'Aquadulce' it is only really suitable for growing over winter.

Sowing and planting

After the middle of the month it is safe to think about sowing the seeds of early vegetables. Prepare a seed bed and sow 'white Lisbon' spring onion, early short horn carrots, early types of lettuce, try a cut and come again it saves on time waiting for a heart to form. It may be too early to make a start in the colder areas of the country but try sowing parsnip seed if you really want large roots but use a canker resistant cultivar.

February is the best month to plant out garlic and shallots. Prepare the ground as you would a seed bed and plant using a trowel, don't push the bulbs into the soil. Plant the garlic cloves about 2ins / 5cms deep and leave the tips of the shallot bulbs just at the soil surface. The birds will pull one or two out leaving them lying on the ground. Replant them as soon as possible the birds will quickly lose interest.

General

Top dress all of the fruit trees and soft fruit bushes with a general fertiliser at the recommended application rate. At the same time top dress the rest of the plot with a general fertiliser as land becomes available.

Check over any fruit trees and bushes for damage and disease problems and take appropriate action.

Prune late / autumn fruiting raspberries down as low as possible and mulch around them. Tip back summer fruiting back to around 6ft / 1.9mts to encourage the development of fruiting side growths.

Complete any outstanding winter pruning of soft fruit bushes cutting out down to soil level the older dark stemmed shoots of blackcurrants.

Cover the soil with cloches or sheets of plastic to warm it up in readiness for the next batch of sowing and planting. Don't overdo it, little and often is the plan over the coming weeks.

Check over the chitting potatoes and begin to rub off any eyes that are unwanted leaving three or four well spaced shoots. Keep some fleece or newspapers nearby to cover them up on starry, frosty nights you don't want to run the risk of losing them at this late date.

Keep checking frequently on the condition of any produce in store it will begin to wake up after its winter dormancy and start to regrow.

March

Overview

Hopefully by now we are now standing on the threshold of spring and the new gardening season. The days are beginning to lengthen and although it may not feel like it at times the temperatures are slowly increasing day by day. More importantly the longer days are the real trigger to new growth and you will find that with the help of a little protection you can really go for those early sowings. They might not all make it but it is still worth a try and you will still have plenty of time to re-sow any misses. Your best friend this month is the weather man try to keep up to date with the local forecasts, better still ask the advice of the gardeners around you who have years of experience to draw on.

Sowing and planting

Plant out early cultivars of potatoes as soon as possible and follow on planting out at regular intervals with the second early potatoes and first maincrops until the end of the month. A little bit of forward planning, don't be tempted to plant out more potatoes than you can protect from any frosty weather further down the line.

Transplant any early peas, broad beans, cabbages or lettuce you may have started off earlier.

Sow the seed of Brussels sprouts, summer cabbage, broccoli, onions and leeks in short rows on a "nursery seed bed". These will be grown on to be transplanted in April.

Sow in rows in the open ground, seeds of round seeded spinach, Swiss chard, early types of beetroot, carrots, parsnips, lettuce, spring onions, peas, broad beans and turnips. Plant out onion sets, shallots and garlic before they start to produce shoots. If you are buying any from the site shop or garden centres reject any that are shooting they will only bolt during the summer. Transplant any onions that were grown from seed sown last summer into rows. It is best to treat these as a sacrificial crop to be harvested and used from August onwards.

If you can offer the protection of a greenhouse sow the seed of celery, celeriac, French beans (they are hardy enough to be planted out before the runners), cauliflowers to transplant on the open soil next month.

General

Complete any unfinished digging and winter pruning. Clear the old leaves off strawberry plants and clean up the ground in between the plants before giving them a top dressing of a general fertiliser. Keep some fleece handy to protect the developing strawberry flowers from frost. Any frost damaged flowers are easily identified as they display a tell-tale “black eye” at the centre of the dead flower.

When the weather conditions allow it, complete the preparations of seed beds for direct seed sowing. Spread the job out over several days to allow the surface of the soil to dry out.

April

Overview

April is a ‘let’s go for it!’ month on the allotment but proceed with caution. Hopefully we will all be feeling the benefit of the lengthening days and warm sunshine but beware there is always a price to pay with the treat of hard, night frosts never far away. Hold back and wait a day or two rather take a risk. It isn’t the loss of seedlings or young plants that causes the problems but the loss of your precious time that you will ever get back that does the damage. The allotment will always catch up eventually and reward your patience with bumper harvest.

Sowing and planting

Continue with planting out the seed potatoes; aim to complete the job by the end of April. Be prepared to cover the emerging shoots of the early potatoes with soil if a frost is forecast.

Complete the planting of onion sets and carry on making successional sowings of beetroot, carrots, parsnips, lettuce, spinach, spring onions, radish, turnips, early peas, Swiss chard.

Sow main crop peas and make the last sowing of summer broad beans. You could try an early sowing of dwarf and climbing French beans towards the end of the month. Use the darker seeded varieties they are hardier and more suited to the early sowings. Protect them from frosts.

On a prepared seed bed sow the seed leeks and summer cabbage. Plant out celeriac grown on earlier and keep the plants well watered all through the summer.

Sow under glass, in pots and trays filled with fresh seed compost, the seeds of runner beans, sweet corn, courgettes, pumpkins, squashes, outdoor / ridge cucumber.

It is now safe to transplant the cold greenhouse tomatoes in to their final positions keep some frost protection handy.

Plant out globe artichokes, either by slicing slips off the sides of main plants or plant out bought in roots. Seed raised plants sown earlier are best planted out towards the end of the month. Water well and feed regularly to build up the crowns removing any buds that may form as soon as possible.

Plant out Jerusalem artichokes but don’t allow them to overrun the allotment, if left unlifted at the end of the summer they will quickly develop into an impenetrable jungle.

Plant up a new asparagus bed but it will take two more years to establish before producing succulent shoots.

General

Early sowings of Brussels sprouts will need thinning out this month and the soil for next month's transplanting of sweet corn, courgettes, marrows, pumpkins and outdoor / ridge cucumbers will need preparing.

Put up the runner bean poles and start to support the growing peas with brushwood or netting.

Prepare seed beds for outdoor sowing of main crop vegetables next month.

Pest and diseases

Check over top and soft fruit for the first broods of aphids and take appropriate action; spray the plant with soapy water (diluted washing up liquid) or squash the flies with your thumb and finger. You can buy insecticides if you prefer, including a fatty acid soap to spray on the plants.

Protect any early strawberries with netting to keep birds and squirrels out.

May

Overview

May is always looked forward to as the first month of summer but it marks the end of the spring. It is a month when we can get caught out by mini droughts and heat waves. The biggest threat is to any young plants that have recently been transplanted into the open ground and any freshly emerging seedlings. Be sure to keep all of them well watered and if the young transplants look as if they are flagging give them some shade protection from the heat of the sun or drying winds. On the other hand May can be a complete disaster month bringing damaging frosts, cold winds with heavy rain or hail, so be prepared to take steps to protect plants if it is necessary.

Harvest

Sprouting broccoli, cabbage, spinach, rhubarb, spring onions, early sown lettuce, beetroot, radish and peas. Cut asparagus regularly to maintain the supply. Start to remove the side shoots on tomatoes.

Use up of the last leeks. Clear away any old or finished crops and dig over the soil and prepare the site ready for the next crop.

Sowing and planting

Plant in pots or trays under glass, dwarf and climbing French beans, runner beans, sweet corn, outdoor cucumbers, courgettes, pumpkins, squashes, outdoor cucumbers – all which can be planted out next month.

Savoy cabbage, winter cabbage, endive, kale and sprouting broccoli can all be sown in the open ground now, ready to be planted out next month.

Continue making direct successional sowings in the soil of lettuce, radish, spinach, turnips and beetroot for summer use and also maincrop beetroot to put into store at the end of summer. While the leeks, Brussels sprouts and French beans sown last month under glass, can now be planted out.

This is also your last opportunity to sow peas and parsnips this year.

General

Thin out whilst still very small, the seedlings of beetroot, carrots, lettuce, onions, parsnips, turnips and always water along the row to settle the disturbed seedlings back in, once the job is completed.

Put up poles for runner and climbing French beans. Support peas and broad beans before they become too tall. Start to earth up potatoes especially if a frost is forecast.

Keep hoeing between crops to control weeds and also create a “dust mulch” to conserve precious soil moisture. Try to water in the cool of the evening if possible using a watering can to direct the water around the root area of the crops.

If you can get it, put some straw underneath the developing strawberry fruits to keep them off the soil and try to avoid watering overhead to reduce any problems with mildew.

Pest and diseases

Look out for blackfly on broad beans, greenfly on peas, lettuce, cabbage root fly, carrot fly, thrip damage on brassicas especially when the plants are small. Spray the affected plants with soapy water (diluted washing up liquid) or squash the flies with your thumb and finger. You can buy insecticides if you prefer, including a fatty acid soap to spray on the plants.

June

Usually the risk of frost has passed by now, and with longer days there comes more sunshine and time to be in your allotment. If the weather is dry, then water your seed drills well before sowing any seeds – this way the young plants will develop a good root system.

Harvest

Beetroot, broad beans, cabbage, cauliflower, early peas, lettuce, rhubarb, spring onions, radish, spinach can all start to be harvested now. Lift the earliest potatoes towards the end of the month and continue earthing up the rows of your other varieties. June is the end of the asparagus season, so stop cutting and give the plants a top dressing of general fertiliser to help build up the crowns for next year. Start to harvest the first of your soft fruits.

Sowing and planting

Successional sowings of beetroot, lettuce and winter cabbage seeds can all be done now – follow the instructions on the back of your seed packets, but it is worth starting them off in trays indoors and then transferring them outside after a couple of weeks. Sow every 2 - 4 weeks for a continual supply of produce.

Brussels sprouts, cabbages, cauliflowers, celeriac, courgettes, outdoor cucumbers, French and runner beans, leeks, pumpkins, squashes, sweet corn, outdoor tomatoes can all be planted out into their final position now. As with all young plants water in carefully and protect from birds with netting.

General

- Hoe at every opportunity to remove weeds and break-up the soil. This allows water to soak down into the earth.
- Train in climbing beans and continue to put in supports for your peas. Water along the rows of peas to swell the developing pods.
- Carry on with the thinning out of seedlings of earlier sown crops.
- Don't allow plants growing under glass to dry out or overheat.

Pests and diseases

Watch out for aphids (black fly on broad beans and greenfly on various crops) and thrips on brassicas – spray the plant with soapy water (diluted washing up liquid) or squash the flies with your thumb and finger. You can buy insecticides if you prefer, including a fatty acid soap to spray on the plants.

Carrot fly is a particular problem between May and September – when female flies lay their eggs. There are varieties of carrots on the market that have been bred to be more resistant to carrot fly (e.g. Fly Away and ResitaFly) but none are 100% proof. To deter low-flying female flies, cover plants with horticultural fleece or place two foot high barriers around the plants (plastic bottle cloches work well). A biological control (pathogenic nematodes) can be bought from mail-order companies (known as Nemasys Grow Your Own), to help control the young larvae or you can opt for chemical control in the guise of Westland Plant Rescue Fruit & Vegetable Bug Killer (Lambda cyhalothrin).

Cabbage root fly attacks the roots of brassicas. Female flies lay the eggs on the surface of the soil next to the stem of the plant. When transplanting out young plants, place a piece of carpet (or cardboard or fleece) around the base of the plant to create a collar, this will stop the flies from laying their eggs on the soil. Again the biological control (pathogenic nematodes) can be used to deal with any larvae.

July

Jobs for the month

July is usually one of the driest months, so watering can be essential. To help with this, hoe regularly to break up the soil and remove weeds. Water plants in the cool of the morning or evening.

Harvest

Keep up with the harvesting of all crops because the allotment is now in full production. Lift early potatoes and carry on earthing up the rows. Harvest garlic and shallots as the foliage begins to become yellow and strawy. Pick the first of the early tomatoes. July is the start of globe artichoke season. If your plant is into its second year then cut off the top bulb once big and swollen with a couple of inches of stem attached. Lift autumn planted onions for immediate use. Continue to pick rhubarb until the end of the month and begin to harvest the main crop of your strawberries. Start to pick plums, early pears and apples.

Sowing and planting

Start sowing the seeds of the overwintering crops of kales, spring cabbage, radicchio, chicory, spinach beet and a hardy type of onion to mature in the early summer of next year. Now is the best time to sow the main crop of carrots to avoid attack from root fly. Continue with successional sowings of beetroot and lettuce. Follow the instructions on the back of the seed packet, and sow every 2 - 4 weeks for a continuous supply of crops.

Plant out the last of your marrow, pumpkins, squashes, overwintering cabbages and leeks. Cover with netting to help protect them from the birds.

General

Aim to keep the hoe moving at every opportunity. Water all crops at least once a week. Start to draw the soil up around the base of Brussels sprouts and sweet corn plants to encourage extra roots.

Pest and diseases

This is the start of potato blight season, and if the weather is wet and humid in July then your crop is likely to be at risk. You can use fungicides containing copper to help protect your crop from the blight; these should be sprayed from June onwards if a wet July is predicted (crop rotation the following year is advisable). An infected plant will have a watery rot on its leaves, causing them to collapse – the infected matter should be bagged and binned or burned and not placed into your compost, as this will not kill the disease and it will reoccur the following year.

The main pests are aphids, cabbage white butterfly caterpillars and pea moth. Spray to control the aphids and pea moth with an insecticidal soap brought from the garden centre. Use the biological control of a pathogenic nematode, *Steinernema carpocapsae*, (trade name Nemasys Caterpillar Killer) to kill the caterpillars (the other bio control often cited is *Bacillus Thuringiensis*, but unfortunately this is not available to amateur gardeners).

August

If you're on holiday during this month, it's worth asking a neighbouring plot holder or the allotment association if there is one to keep an eye on your patch, as no doubt everything will come into season all at once and need picking.

Harvesting

Continue with the harvesting of all vegetable crops and keep up with the picking of runner beans to maintain cropping well into the autumn. Continue with the lifting of potatoes. Prepare to lift onions towards the end of the month. Wait until the tops begin to fall over as this indicates that the bulb has stopped swelling. Dry them before 'stringing' and putting into store. These bulbs will then keep until next March.

Start to thin apples and pears down to one or two fruits per cluster. The apples and pears will soon begin to colour up. The plums and damsons will be in full flow so harvest regularly.

Harvest the earliest grapes such as 'Black Hamburg'. If not already done, carry out the last thinning of the bunches on late grapes.

Harvest soft fruit. The late fruiting raspberries will be cropping well by now.

Sowing and planting

Make the last of any outdoor sowings to provide a late harvest for this season, radishes and lettuce will still produce a crop.

General

The end of this month signals the time to begin summer pruning your apples and pears (grown as cordons, espaliers or fans. For trees and bushes, leave these until the winter to prune). Start with the pears and then move on to apples. The purpose of summer pruning is to encourage the development of fruit buds for next summer.

August is definitely the last month to prune stone fruit trees (plum, apricot, cherry and peach), complete the task as soon as possible. You want to aim for an open structure of branches and remove any that cross over so they don't damage each other.

Trim any box hedging before the first of the frosts arrives. Remember, "Make the first cut after the last frost and the last cut before the first frost".

Pest and diseases

Blossom end rot can affect aubergines and tomatoes causing black sunken blotches on the skin of the fruit. Usually due to a lack of calcium, the disease can be stemmed by amending your watering habits to ensure the calcium found in the soil is fed through the water to the plant – so water regularly and don't allow the soil to dry out (discard any damaged fruit).

September

In many ways this month can be regarded as the start of the new gardening year. Now is a good time to take stock of the successes and failures of this year and make plans to ensure that next year will be better. Also, if you are starting out from scratch you will have plenty of time to prepare the ground whilst planning your ideal allotment.

Harvesting

Top of the list has to be onions and potatoes they need to be got out of the soil before the cold, damp days of autumn arrive. They have completely the opposite storage requirements. Onions must be kept in the light and potatoes need to be stored in the dark to prevent them from turning green, but both have to be stored somewhere that will keep the frost out.

Harvest apples and pears as they become ready and pick the late season strawberries and raspberries to keep them producing fruit. They will keep cropping right up until the first frost.

Cut courgettes and marrows regularly because they will be finished by the end of the month, as will outdoor tomatoes. Remove any green tomatoes and place them in a drawer or shoebox to ripen.

Sowing and planting

Now we have shorter, cooler days it is the perfect time to sow the seed of the Oriental vegetables. They will germinate quickly and are hardy enough to withstand the cold of winter and will provide a steady supply of fresh leaves well into the spring of next year also make a sowing of hardy winter lettuce and spinach. There is still time to sow an early variety of turnip to be able to use the tops as greens.

Plant out earlier sown spring cabbage and protect with netting or fleece.

General

Complete the summer pruning of soft fruit bushes, apple and pear trees. Continue with their training and tying in.

Feed all late crops with a general fertiliser such as chicken manure pellets.

Dig up and compost any plants that have finished their season.

Clear the soil of spent crops and leave it rough dug over for the winter. It is also a good time to sow winter grazing rye as a green manure. It can be dug back into the soil as part of your spring preparations.

Pest and diseases

Wasps are attracted this time of year due to the ripening of your fruit. Hang wasp traps in fruit trees and protect any grapes from wasps with netting or mesh but also remember that wasps are the gardener's friend because they are major predators of aphids and caterpillars at this time of the year.

October

With autumn well under way, October is usually a month full of chilly mornings and spooky nights – the kind of weather that puts you in mind of hot mugs of tea, bowls of soup and if you're an allotment gardener, lots of lovely winter digging! Remember that the clocks go back an hour at the end of this month so grab every minute of daylight on the allotment that you can before the dark days of winter are upon us.

Harvesting

Every child loves to make a lantern, so harvest your pumpkins and squashes now. Any that aren't used for Halloween will make a perfect supper. If any outdoor tomatoes are left, collect the fruit and place them in a drawer or shoe box to complete their ripening, but don't forget to check on them from time to time! Early leeks can be lifted now because they are less hardy than the later cultivars. Main crop potatoes must be got out of the ground before the end of the month using a potato or garden fork to lift them to prevent damaging the tubers. Harvest the last of the peas and runner bean crop for this year, and keep harvesting chard, spinach, carrots, celeriac, lettuce and the Oriental vegetables. Also, lift and store any Florence fennel bulbs before they are damaged by frost.

Sowing and planting

Sow winter lettuce and a couple of short rows of winter hardy peas and broad beans towards the end of the month to provide you with an early crop next spring.

Plant out spring cabbage and overwintering types of onion and garlic. It is also a good time to plant rhubarb crowns.

General

Rough dig over heavy ground and leave it in lumps or ridges to be broken down gradually by the winter frosts and rain. Keep off the soil if it is wet and don't be tempted dig it if it is frozen. When the soil is frozen hard it is a good opportunity to cart barrows of manure or compost over it.

Insulate your greenhouse before using it to protect the your more tender plants using horticultural fleece or plastic bubble sheeting; newspaper is an excellent substitute if you lay several layers over your most precious plants whenever a frost is forecast. It is also a good idea to wrap their pots in bubble wrap to insulate their roots.

The last couple of winters have been cruelly hard. Be prepared to protect chard plants, spinach, winter lettuce, peas, broad beans and any other crops that you are overwintering from the worst of the winter weather. Keep some fleece, plastic or have cloches nearby ready to use.

Clean and clear the plot of spent crops and take down the runner bean poles, cleaning the soil off the bottom of them before storing them somewhere cool and airy ready to use next year.

Stake Brussels sprouts and sprouting broccoli plants to prevent them from being blown over in strong winds, it is also worthwhile dragging soil up around the base of the plants to give them extra support.

November

There is just enough daylight to clear and tidy up the allotment of any old crops in preparation for next year. Don't leave the remains of summer crops to rot and harbour overwintering pests and diseases. Wait for a clear, crisp, sunny day and go for it.

Harvesting

Start to harvest winter cabbage, Brussels sprouts, leeks and parsnips, wait until after a frost for the parsnips because the chilling effect turns the starches into sugars and this gives them their natural sweetness. Pick the Brussels sprouts working from the bottom of the stalk upwards to make sure that all of the sprouts get a chance to swell. At the same time snap off any yellowing leaves at their base to ensure that there is good air circulation around the plants. It also makes the sprouts easier to pick on cold, wet and frosty days.

Clear the ground of any remaining vulnerable crops such as celeriac, carrots, Florence fennel and put them into store before any hard frosts are forecast.

Sowing and planting

Sow a crop of your favourite variety round seeded hardy peas. They can be sown either in the open ground if the weather conditions are favourable or three to 3" / 9cm pot and transplanted later when the roots have reached the bottom of the pot. Transplant any pot raised broad beans sown earlier somewhere sheltered and protected from cold, icy blasts. It's not too late to take a chance on a sowing of broad beans if it is done early in the month. Transplant October sown lettuces to grow on under cloches or frames space them 6".15cms square.

Although these winter varieties are tough enough to withstand most British winters it is always best to have some protection on hand ready to protect them if needs be. Wet growing conditions can wreak as much damage as the cold.

Now is a good time to plant new fruit trees and bushes. Soft fruit bushes can also be moved now if needed as well.

General

Dig, dig and dig this is the priority job of the month the more that you can get done before the end of the year the better. Check over any heaters that you rely on to make sure they are working. Check on the wheelbarrow wheel, you may have a lot of carting to do over the coming months. Most of the leaves will have fallen by now collect them up and make a leaf mould stack. Set aside a little time to check on door locks, window catches and secure anything loose or flapping that may be the source of damage or danger to neighbours on the site.

December

The year is coming to an end and the shortest day is in this month, which heralds the slow advance towards next season. So take a bit of time to reflect on your successes and to consider what went wrong with some crops. Always remember, that there are no failures in gardening it is always down to the weather, furry things or if all else fails Acts of God. Allow yourself a little relaxing time around the New Year and be ready to hit the ground running in the new year.

Harvesting

Keep picking the Brussels sprouts to ensure the sprouts don't blow open. Also harvest winter cabbage regularly although according to variety they can remain in the soil for months. The parsnips and leeks can be left in the ground to be lifted as needed.

If a prolonged cold or wet spell is forecast you can lift leeks and parsnips to store them in containers of old compost or soil to be used at a later date. Cabbages and even sprouts can be lifted with their roots in a soil ball and stored in a shed or greenhouse. Don't forget to water the soil occasionally.

Sowing and planting

There isn't anything to sow in the garden this month except your onion seed which should be sown in trays or pots in a gentle heat towards the end of the year. Treat yourself for once and spend some dream time looking through the pages of the seed catalogues putting your order together and posting it ASAP. King's seeds make it so easy for you there are no excuses, and their catalogue is an Aladdin's cave of goodies.

General

Check over all of your tools in the shed to make that they are safe and fit to use next season. Clean the metal and wipe it over with something like 3 in 1 oil. Clean and wipe down all wooden handles with linseed oil. It not only preserves the wood but makes the more comfortable on the hands. Check for pests and diseases on any produce in store especially for rat and mouse damage. Set the traps to catch them if you have to.



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Phone 0303 123 1015 or email equalities@southlanarkshire.gov.uk
www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk