

ALLOTMENT CORNER

THIS time of year is very exciting, as spring is near and we want to get growing, but you do not get something for nothing, not even in Piddinghoe, the more hard work you put in now getting everything ready will pay off. Get down the garden or plot, look around, you will see what needs doing, digging, weeding, and removing old or dead plants. Burn where possible dead plants etc. to remove any disease. If you can, now is a good time to repair raised beds.

Have a great season; I am looking forward to hearing about your successes and hopefully not too many failures.

March

In the vegetable garden

Sow early Broad beans and early peas in seed trays of compost, just pushing the seeds into the compost, to transplant later. Sow the young plants carefully in a prepared shallow trench in the veg. Garden. If the soil is workable, dig in a 5cm (or more) layer of compost, well rotted manure or green waste into your beds to prepare for the growing season ahead.

Prepare vegetable seed beds by removing all weeds and forking in plenty of compost. You can cover prepared soil with sheets of black plastic, cardboard etc. to keep it drier and warmer in preparation for planting.

Begin chitting (sprouting) seed potatoes on delivery.

Towards the end of the month plant your chitted early potatoes outside in the ground. If you don't have enough space for growing potatoes on your plot, why not try growing them on your patio? I did last year with some degree of success.

Plant asparagus_beds from crowns. Weed and mulch existing asparagus beds. Asparagus has shallow roots so weed by hand to prevent damage. Dig trench about 20 - 25cm deep and 30cm wide, and add liberal amount of well rotted compost to the base of the trench mixed with 85g/ sqm. of blood, fish and bone, or bone meal. Carefully place the crowns 45cm apart in the trench, spreading the roots out, and cover with some sieved soil and ensure the emerging buds are just below soil level.

Plant onion, shallot and garlic sets_provided the soil isn't frozen or waterlogged. Alternatively pot up sets into individual pots for transplanting outdoors later on.

Start to directly sow vegetable seeds such as carrots radishes and lettuce in the greenhouse borders or under cloches.

In the fruit garden

Plant apple, cherry [and](#) other fruit trees_now in a sunny, sheltered spot.

Continue to plant raspberry canes, Cut autumn-fruiting raspberry canes to the ground to stimulate new canes, which will fruit in the autumn. Cut the tips of summer-fruiting raspberry canes that have grown beyond the top of their supports; cut just above a bud.

Protect the blossoms of **apricots**, peaches and nectarines from frost with a screen or some horticultural fleece. These stone fruit trees can also be planted now.

Mulch fruit trees with well rotted manure or garden compost taking care not to mound mulch up around the trunk.

Mulch rhubarb with a thick layer of well-rotted manure to keep it healthy and reduce moisture loss through the soil. Take care not to cover the crown. You can also plant fresh rhubarb crowns now.

Spray the emerging leaves of peach and nectarine trees with Bordeaux Mixture_to prevent peach leaf curl.

Covering your strawberries with a cloche will encourage earlier fruiting.

In the greenhouse

If you haven't done so already scrub your greenhouse windows etc. down with a weak soap and disinfectant wash. Remove tired and old compost and renew.

Start sowing winter brassicas in seed trays in a cold greenhouse.

Start sowing your bedding plant seeds now ready to plant out after the last frosts.

For better seed germination in cold weather, try using an electric propagator to help your early sowings along.

Repot orchids and other houseplants before they start into active growth again.

Pot on rooted cuttings of tender perennial plants taken last summer.

Put strawberries under cover for an earlier crop.

Bring bags of compost into the greenhouse to warm up for a week or two before you start sowing.

Ventilate greenhouses and cold frames on warm days.

Sow tomato seeds in a heated greenhouse for early crops.

APRIL

In the vegetable garden

Plant your chitted potatoes outside in the ground or in potato grow bags

Harvest asparagus spears when they are no more than 18cm tall.

For quick and easy pea supports push some twiggy sticks around your pea plants now.

Thin your carrot seedlings to achieve good-size carrots - do this in the evening when fewer carrot flies are around.

Prepare vegetable seed beds by removing all weeds and forking in plenty of compost. Cover prepared soil with sheets of black plastic, cardboard etc. to keep it drier and warmer in preparation for planting.

Many crops can be directly sown into the ground now, including, parsnips cabbages beetroot and radishes.

In the fruit garden

Plant out **strawberry beds**, making sure you enrich the soil first with plenty of well-rotted manure. Place cloches over your strawberry plants for earlier crops.

Protect your **fruit blossom** from late frosts by covering them with fleece on cold nights.

Spray the emerging leaves of peach and nectarine trees with Bordeaux Mixture to prevent peach leaf curl. Sheltering your plants from the rain will also reduce the risk of peach leaf curl.

Mulch fruit trees if you have not done so already, with well rotted manure or garden compost taking care not to mound mulch up around the trunk. Top-dress patio dwarf fruit trees with fresh compost and a slow-release fertiliser

Apply a slow-release fertiliser around the base of your raspberry canes, fruit bushes and fruit trees to encourage good crops this season.

Try hand-pollinating your peaches and nectarines with a soft-bristled paint brush for better crops this year.

In the greenhouse

If you haven't already, give your greenhouse a thorough **scrub** with hot soapy water to get rid of pests and diseases and to let more light in.

Start to sow tomato seeds indoors, ready to plant out after all risk of frost has passed. If you're struggling for growing space buy ready-grown tomato plants.

Continue to sow half-hardy annual seeds under cover - take care not to expose them to frost.

Keep an eye on your seedlings - as soon as they have their first true leaves, prick them out into pots or modules for growing on.

If your greenhouse is heated, plant up your summer hanging baskets with plug plants now and keep them under cover until all risk of frost has passed.

Pinch out the tips of fuchsia shoots and sweet pea plants to encourage bushy plants this summer.

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