



baidon horticultural society
www.baidonhort.co.uk



ALLOTMENT NEWSLETTER APRIL 2021

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A Message from the Chair

The fruit trees are showing their new growth, the greenhouses are filling up, plots are being turned and made ready, Spring is in the air and the anticipation of a new growing season lifts the spirits during this troubled time.



I would like to give a special mention to our Smallholder Tenants. The discovery of Avian Flu and the subsequent lockdown (or Lock-in) of all poultry has been distressing to those of us who love to see our birds running free doing what comes naturally. It has been six months of extra cleaning, bio-hygiene, close medical scrutiny of our flocks, being ever mindful of DEFRA inspections and the possibility of heavy fines for non-compliance. I am delighted to say that the ban is lifted with effect from the first of this month and the birds are once again free to roam. We have been congratulated by the 'Powers that be' for our diligence and compliance, and I would like to sincerely thank my fellow Smallholder Tenants for their support and efforts during this time. Well done all of you.

If you have not already done so, have a wander round the Smallholder Plots and view the many Rare Breeds that are kept on both sites. Eggs are available in the Huts for a donation of which a percentage goes to Society's funds.

Other good news is that Plot 50 at Charlestown has been officially designated as a 'Disabled Plot' in perpetuity and will be wheelchair friendly. Plot 18 has become a 'Community Plot', details later in this Newsletter. Work has begun in installing Solar Panels at Thompson Lane for security and power to the Hut.

We should all be mindful that we have many new tenants at both sites so please introduce yourselves and give them a friendly welcome to help them settle in to what we hope is a long and productive relationship.

John Turner

Seed by Paula Meehan

The first warm day of spring
and I step out into the garden from the gloom
of a house where hope has died
to tally the storm damage, to seek what may
have survived. And finding some forgotten
lupins I'd sown from seed last autumn
holding in their fingers a raindrop each
like a peace offering or a promise.
I am suddenly grateful and would
offer a prayer if I believed in God.
But, not believing, I bless the power of seed,
its casual useful persistence,
and bless the power of sun,
its conspiracy with the underground,
and thank my stars that winter's ended.

March 21st is said to be "the first day of Spring"

John Cole

Allotment News

The allotments and sales huts are buzzing with energy and jollity, we're so lucky to have such a lovely place to relax. Thanks again to the loyal helpers unloading the deliveries and working in our sales huts and to those who've donated tombola prizes for our show. A big thank you also to Clive for stepping in and helping out.

Charlestown has 14 on the waiting list, Thompson Lane 17, with no vacant plots.

Welcome to all our newcomers, we've such a lovely community and everyone's so helpful. Do pop to the hut on Sunday for a chat, soon we'll be able to have a cuppa and a bacon sandwich! We've plenty of free seeds but if you don't get chance to grow your own this year don't go out and buy any, we always sow too many seeds so there'll be plenty of plants going free!

Just a remind that we have a notice board at the entrance and near the hut at Charlestown where we try to keep you up to date. Anything at all you need then please contact myself or Charlotte via email or pop a message in our letterbox, Louise is happy for you to text or email her at Thompson Lane, we're happy to help.

The allotment competition is going ahead this year and I'll be letting you all know, if you don't already about our annual show. I'm so looking forward to encouraging you all to enter some of your produce and flowers. It will be held at Sandal School, 5th of September 2021 so put it in your Diary, I'll be asking for volunteers to help on the day!

Dawn Tinsley

Whilst the community plot hasn't had any takers from plot holders looking to downsize we have been able to use it for 3 new members of our allotment family.

We are pleased to welcome Imogen, Matthew and Neil to the community plot.

This will give them the chance to develop their gardening skills on a small scale whilst they wait for a full plot to become available.

We hope everyone will make them welcome and share ideas with them.

Whilst the plot is now fully utilised it is still our objective to give anyone wishing to downsize the opportunity to move onto the community plot. If you do want to look at this option at some stage then please speak to the allotment officer or any member of the committee.

In the meantime all the best to our 3 new gardeners and let's hope we can get some nice weather we can all enjoy.

Ian Helyer & Sue Wheatley



Horsetails - for those who've not had the pleasure.....**yet!**

Look what's showing its face already -

Horsetail is Charlestown's public enemy number one and spreads like wildfire, often underground from neighbours plots, (especially the railway).

In spring, brown green shoots appear with small cones at the tips that produce spores. It grows from creeping thin brown roots that you can hardly see as they are soil coloured. Digging out these roots is not feasible, they go down into the soil for up to 1.5 metres and a new plant will grow from a tiny bit of root left behind.

It's critical to controlling horsetail to hoe off the initial stalks to prevent them distributing

the spores. There's lots of information online but my advise and experience is to just snap it off with your fingers when it shows it's face and burn it, **DO NOT** compost horsetail, **weed killer does not even brown it so don't waste your time or money.**

In summer, sterile green shoots develop into fir tree-like plants, 60cm (2ft) tall, there is no point in my opinion and experience in digging these out, just keep snapping and burning.

Good luck and remember that the roots are that deep that it doesn't affect your crop.

Dawn Tinsley





Easter is seen as generally the start of the gardening season. As the weather warms up and early flowers start to bloom, all of a sudden there's a load of jobs to do outside.



In the flower garden

Lift and divide established border perennial plants now, like Hostas, to improve vigour and create new plants for your garden.

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



Divide primroses once they have finished flowering.

Move evergreen trees and shrubs now, provided the soil isn't frozen or waterlogged.

Feed trees, shrubs and hedges with a balanced, slow-release fertiliser, by lightly forking it into the soil surface. Roses, in particular, are greedy plants and will greatly benefit from feeding as they come into growth.

Tie in climbing roses.

Check any tree stakes and ties to make sure they're not cutting into the trunk. Loosen any that are tight, to allow the trunk some room to expand.



Finish cutting back any dead foliage on perennials and ornamental grass plants (if you haven't done so already), to make way for new growth. Prune Forsythia as soon as they have finished flowering, cutting back to strong, young shoots.

Trim winter-flowering heathers as the flowers disappear, to prevent plants becoming leggy.

Tie in new honeysuckle and clematis stems. These plants will be putting on growth now, and you'll need to train them along their supports.

Deadhead daffodils and tulips as the flowers finish, but leave foliage intact, allowing it to die back naturally.

Apply a layer of mulch around your perennials and biennial plants, trees and shrubs before the hot weather arrives. Use organic matter such as well-rotted manure.

In the vegetable garden

Prepare vegetable seed beds by removing all weeds.

Dig a 5-cm (or more) layer of compost, well-rotted manure or green waste into beds.

Cover prepared soil with sheets of black plastic to keep it drier and warmer in preparation for planting.

Build raised beds to take the bending out of growing vegetables.



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

Support pea and bean plants now. For quick and easy pea supports, push some twiggie sticks around your plants.

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

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

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

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

Top-dress patio fruit-trees with fresh compost and a slow-release fertiliser.

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

Looking after your lawn

Sow lawn seed now on well-prepared soil and keep the soil moist while it germinates.

For an instant lawn, lay new turf this month, and keep it moist until it's established.

Repair any bare patches in your lawn — try sowing lawn repair grass seed.

Apply a high-nitrogen fertiliser to your lawn, for a boost at the start of the season.



Apply specialist lawn weed killer to your lawn wherever moss and weeds are a problem.

Brush away any worm casts on dry days.

Mow your lawn more regularly, as required. Lower your mower blades towards the end of the month.

Recut lawn edges to straighten them up.

Install lawn edging to make future maintenance easier.

Aerate compacted areas of lawn, by spiking it with a garden fork.

Robin Weedon



The best way to sow seeds

Fill a seed tray with compost then wet the compost in the seed tray prior to sowing the seeds, this stops the seeds being pushed further down and giving a sporadic germination. When sowing seeds always cover with a fine dusting of compost, a sieve or fine riddle will do. Once done cover with a sheet of glass or polycarbonate with newspaper over the top, I find I get good germination this way.

Mike Webster

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<http://www.baildonhort.btck.co.uk>

2021 MEMBERSHIP



Home Made Slug Pellet free traps

I'm making slug traps out of ice cream roll boxes with the cheap beer to go pellet free and it's working!

Alessandra Nappo Oddy



Home made propagator by *Mandy Glover*

March Notes from Plot 11E/11W, Thompson Lane - Chris Dearnley



I don't know about you but I like things to be 'just so'. The new growing season for me always starts with a good tidy up of all the things that just seemed to have been left any old how, at the end of last season! I can't work in a mess, so this is always first on the long list of jobs at this time of



year and as the weather for the early part of March was, well, 'weather', – my old geography teacher's description of the English climate! – the polytunnel is a good place to start. It's dry and surprisingly warm at this time of year, even when the sun is at its weakest.

I started with a quick check on the things overwintering. I planted my garlic cloves in good sized cells on the 5th November – 'Plot' Night – and the cloves have grown well since planting. By

March, they were ready to plant outside. I have decided to grow the same varieties I grew in 2020, Carcassonne Wight and Lautrec Wight, which are both 'hardneck' types. These are supposed to grow better in cold climates and I have to say, the yield in 2020 was *really* good. Hardneck garlic tends to grow larger but fewer cloves; they are, however, considered to have a stronger flavour – great for warding off vampires...oh and friends, that is unless you share your cloves. Garlic is the original 'social distance inducer'!



Many of my dwarf fruit trees have also overwintered in the polytunnel, so I had a look to see if they needed any water. During the last few months of the year, I had slowed the watering right down but as the trees are now starting to produce buds, it is time to give them a bit more than the merest trickle. It's always a balancing act at this time of year though, as frosts can still hit. I had pruned the figs in January – "no new growth, no new figs" – and these are showing new shoots at the tips of the branches and also tiny, embryo figs, which had been produced on last year's new wood but too late to develop into full sized figs.



The peach tree (var. Crimson Bonfire) has now come into flower, the blossom a beautiful, pale pink, with a delicate fragrance. At this time of year and with the weather being so erratic, there aren't many natural pollinators around, so I have been hand-pollinating the blooms with my trusty paintbrush. Thankfully this variety is self-pollinating, so I didn't have to find another tree in bloom! The nectarine (var. Flavortop) is a couple of weeks behind the peach but is starting to come into flower. I have some fleece handy so that if frost is at all likely, I can protect the blossom of both. One of the things I will need to look out for from here on, is the dreaded 'red spider mite', about which I have written before. 2 years ago, the peach tree had a really bad attack, so last year, fruit



production was decimated. I managed to protect it in 2020 and new wood grew, on which the blossom is currently blooming. The nectarine was hit badly last year and I lost a lot of the new wood on which this year's blossom depends. So this year's blossom and hence the fruit, will be limited. By next year, I hope to be back in full production on both trees. In the meantime, a top-dressing of all the pots with some John Innes No. 3, followed by a feed of blood, fish and bone. Fruit trees are best fertilised just before bud break at the end of winter/beginning of spring.



The persimmon is still covered in fleece to protect the fruiting buds, which are still very small. Having had success with this last year, I am impatient for more of these beautifully delicious fruits. With care and patience, they *can* be grown in Baidon!

The grape vines (var. 'Flame' (red) and 'Lakemont' (white) have not really started into growth yet but the kiwi vines (var. Jenny (full sized) and arguta Issai (bite sized) *are* showing signs of growth. It will be another 2-3 years, I think, before they produce any fruit but they have survived the Winter, which is a good start!



The blueberries (var. Brigitta and Chandler) have also overwintered in the polytunnel and are now budding. This is the first year I've pruned them – they were getting very cluttered – and I took care not to prune out the fatter, fruiting buds. Both bushes look a lot tidier now – which pleases me! – and will hopefully produce a good crop this year.

Last year's production was very good. When the blossom is out, I will move the pots outside so that natural pollination can take place, bringing the pots back under cover, once the fruit has set. Don't want the pesky birds to get a look in!

I have several growbags and pots under cover, containing strawberry plants, some being runners taken from plants last year. I will continue to bring these on, to encourage an early crop. Last year and I think generally, was not a good year for strawberries, the only ones I had that fruited well, being the ones I had kept under cover.

In my small 6'x6' greenhouse, I have a dwarf cherry tree (var. Stella), which last year produced its first crop – one cherry! This year, I am hoping for a much better crop as there are loads of fat, fruiting buds about to break out into blossom. Just need to encourage the pollinators in, to do their stuff!





Some of my tomato seeds have germinated, the heritage variety 'Black Krim', a beautiful red/black beef tomato and terrific for cooking, first out of the starting blocks; closely

followed by 'Shirley', a really reliable tomato. The cherry tomatoes 'Piccolo' and 'Sakura' are not wanting to rise and shine yet but the melon (var. Emir) and cucumber (var. Emilie) seeds are now coming through. I was really disappointed with the melons last year. Each year, I find that only a few of the flowers seem to develop into fruits but have always had about 3 medium sized melons per plant. Last year I had just one 'apple-sized' melon of the variety 'Charentais', not a variety I will be rushing to try again!



Outside, there is much digging to be done to get the beds ready for planting. The copious amounts of rain we have had in recent times, means that the beds are in need of 'a good fettling'. I appreciate that there are different schools of thought about digging, so I am not advocating one over the other. I belong to the 'digging' school though, always taking care however with my worm population – nature's natural aerators. I do think you can

tell the health of a bed by the number of its worms and this year, there are loads of them! Hand digging the bed, also enables me to weed at the same time, not allowing even the tiniest one to escape from being pulled. Diligence now, pays dividends in the future!

The garlic and onion bed was the first to be dug over, followed by the potato bed, as the first earlies (var. Foremost) will soon be ready to go into the ground. At the moment, they



are still 'chitting' on a windowsill at home, alongside the second earlies (var. Kestrel). As the days and weeks go by, I will work my way round the plot, digging and weeding as I go preparing each bed for its occupants!



The prunings from the 2 large apple trees have been drying out, ready to be burned, so I brought out the incinerator towards the end of the month and managed to burn about half of the material. The resulting wood-ash was added to the cage containing decaying leaves, with the larger branches being kept to make into a pile for insects and the like, to inhabit. The 'stone fruit', plum and cherry trees will not be pruned until Spring has really taken hold, to avoid silver leaf disease.

So, as March gives way to April, the growing cycle has begun again, with much to look forward to and much to be thankful for. Over the last 12 months of the Covid-19 pandemic, the allotment has been a source of solace and escape, safe in the knowledge that 'allotmenting' has been an 'approved activity' from the earliest days of lockdown. Across England, applications for council-run allotments have soared, our own waiting lists probably longer now than for some time. By their very design, allotments offer a ready-made, socially distanced solution to urban food, mental and physical health challenges; and although the primary purpose of allotment sites is to grow food, they offer many other benefits, their contribution to supporting wildlife in urban areas being significant. Allotments form some of the best habitat mosaics and wildlife corridors, often linking up with parks, tracks, hedgerows, and rivers.

Happy growing...!





How to make your own FREE Fertilizers

Nettle Fertilizers



Nettle's are just popping up, young stems are best but any nettles can be taken at any time. Quicker results are obtained if the nettle stems and leaves are bruised.

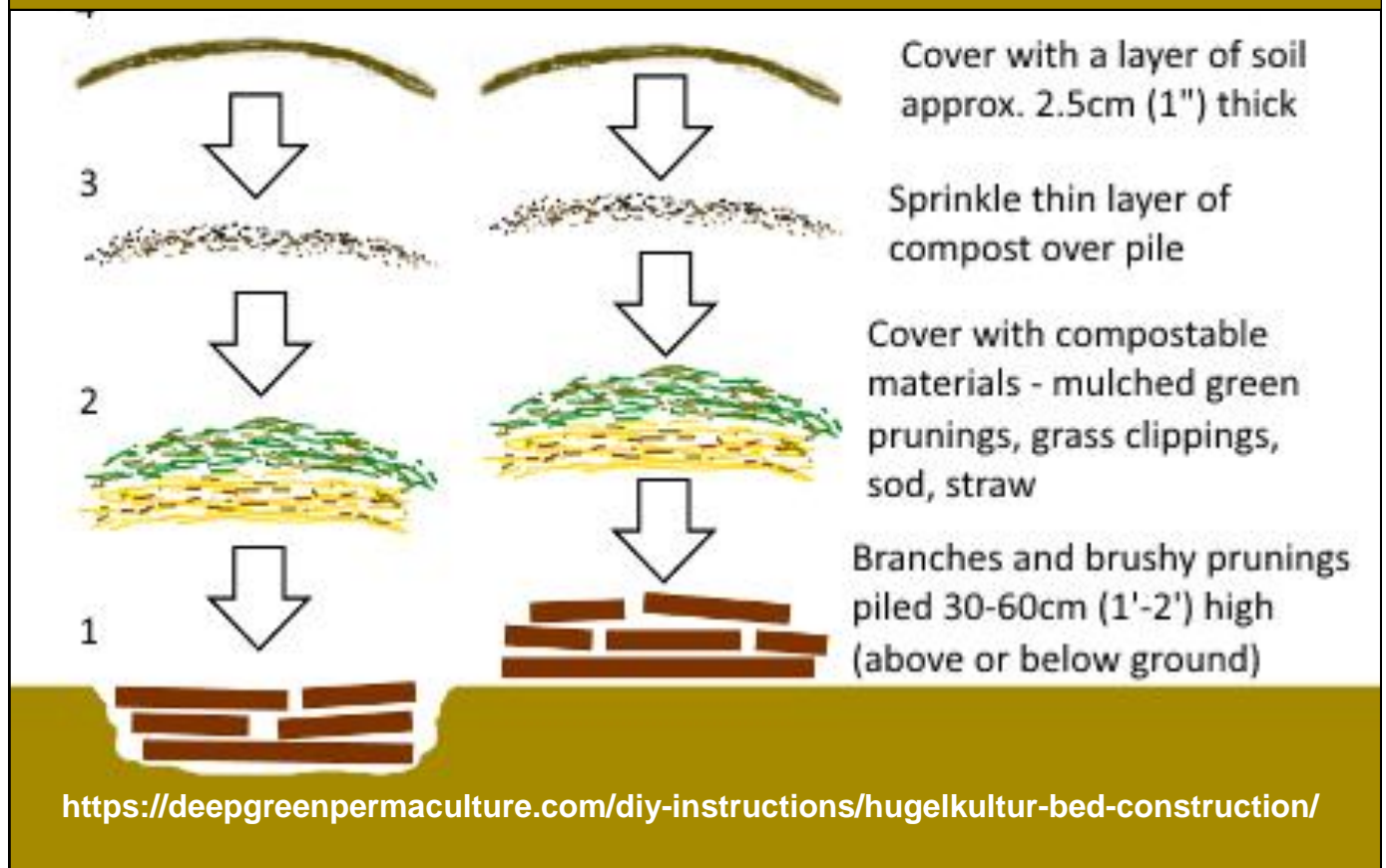
Crush them by scrunching the stems in gloved hands or by placing the stems on a freshly mown lawn and using your mower to chop and collect the nettles at the same time.

Immerse in water, stuff the crushed stems into your bucket. Place your weight on top of the stems. Fill the container with water, sufficient to cover the nettles and leave to brew. After around three or four weeks the liquid should be ready for use. The mixture should be diluted until it is tea coloured - usually around 1 part liquid to 10 parts water. Water liberally around or on the plants.

Continue to top up your container with more leaves & water through the year. As autumn sets in put the remainder of the feed and the sludge in your compost heap. Give your container a rinse and store for next year.

Dawn Tinsley

Hugelkultur Bed Construction



Hugelkultur is a technique by which soil is built over a mound of rotten or rotting wood. The word comes from the German for "hill culture" or "mound culture". It's a good way to use up any bits of rotten wood that are lying around. Avoid any wood which might give off toxins such as Cedar or Eucalyptus. You can adapt it anyway you like by creating a mound – where you just lay it on top of some grass over some cardboard - or you can dig a trench and lay the wood at the bottom. The idea is that as the wood decomposes it produces lots of lovely mycelium fungi which feeds the soil for several years and, as well as slowly releasing nutrients, it retains water. You can add a variety of materials such as manure, rotting vegetation, grass clippings and even upside-down turf before returning the soil to the top. The deeper the trench or the mound the better as if its not deep enough you can get some nitrogen lock-in at first while the wood decomposes.

I've always loved digging but too much of it over years has taken its toll on my back so I thought I'd have a go at creating a few beds using the "no dig" method which Dawn wrote about a while ago and experiment with the Hugelkultur method at the same time.



First of all I started in my raspberry bed at home which was overrun with bindweed. I removed all the raspberry plants and got every scrap of bindweed root out of them before replanting them in another part of the garden. I then dug down and removed all the soil and put it in several large builders' bags. I went down 2 or 3 feet and it was a large area, so it took several days and lots of aches, pains and hot Radox baths. I then dug all the subsoil over and tried to get all the bits of bindweed root out because if you leave a tiny bit it will regenerate. My next task was to line the bottom of the trench with cardboard, to hopefully suffocate any remaining bindweed, followed by a mixture of rotten and rotting wood. Next came a thick layer of well rotted manure and then came the interesting bit. Remember all that soil in several huge builders' bags? I sieved it through a garden riddle to remove the tiny bits of bindweed root and there was LOADS of it. It took quite a few days but I now have a lovely bed with the most gloriously fine sieved soil on top ready to plant in and which I won't have to dig again. I'll just keep adding more organic material every year to keep the fertility up.

Having enjoyed this task and my back still holding out, I tackled a smaller bed on my allotment which was overrun with couch grass. This time I dug it out in three sections and after adding the rotting wood, refilled each section with the soil from the next section. I didn't bother with the cardboard for this one as I managed to get all the couch grass out, so I just added fresh manure on top of the wood followed by the soil that I'd dug out. Because the manure was fresh, it may turn out to be a hotbed and it will certainly cause some nitrogen lock-in so I'll have to see what happens before I decide what to grow on this one. It's all about experimenting with gardening and in this case planning for the future when I'm too old to dig!!

Louise Mallinson

How to Identify Annual & Perennial Weeds

It's very important to be able to identify weeds, otherwise you can't tell whether they're annual or perennial.

The annual ones produce seeds, so they may be safely put on the compost heap providing it gets hot enough to destroy them.

Perennials are more problematic because as well as distributing seeds or spores they regenerate through their roots. Try cutting off a dandelion root, for example and you'll see what I mean.

Some of the perennials, like dandelions, have a long tap root which, if severed, regenerates. Therefore it is important to remove every last bit. You can't tell from the size of the plant how far down it goes because when it has been cut off it surfaces as a small plant again no matter how far the tap root goes down.

Other perennials like the nettles and the couch grass extend their roots outwards beneath the soil; while allotmenters complain about them neither are too much trouble if you patiently tease out the roots by getting right underneath them.

The real villains are the ones which extend to the depths. The best thing you can do is be hyper diligent in removing these insidious weeds. Those suffering from bindweed and perhaps worse, horsetail will probably agree that there is virtually nothing natural you can do about them once they have moved in

They're like the lodger from hell. All you can do is to work hard to mitigate their effects by digging out what you can, learn to live with them and keep working towards the day when you finally will get rid of them, even though you know that day will never come. If they haven't moved into your plot, rejoice, and make sure you keep it that way.



Bindweed is a very insidious weed which hides itself away among other plants, strangling the life out of them while it establishes itself. Roughly pulling it out is no good, in common with all perennials it has a great will to survive. It spreads its roots laterally, with tiny little threadlike roots extending outwards in lots of places. You need to get underneath it with a trowel and loosen the soil before teasing it out. It's worth taking time to do it properly or the problem will remain and probably worsen.

If you're taking over a plot that's been let go it will probably be so well established that it goes very deep.

Removal is still important and very labour intensive.



Couch Grass - you could have an argument over which of the perennials is worst and this one would be a good each way bet. It just depends if you've got it bad whether you think couch grass, horsetail or bindweed is the biggest villain of the piece. It's a case of beauty being in the eye of the beholder only in reverse.

Once ensconced they all take a lot of shifting. All three spread themselves surreptitiously below the surface. Couch grass has white roots which send up grass shoots every so often. It's not too hard to remove on raised beds and it's important to chase it until every last bit has gone.



Horsetail - apparently it's a stone age plant which is rooted way down in the soil.

In April and May it sends up shoots which are stockier, like asparagus, which send out spores. It's important to get these out as quickly as possible for these shoots spawn ferny fronds that link in twos. This is the worst of all weeds, in my opinion. I reckon it's impossible to get out, mainly because it goes down so deep. It sends up shoots which spread laterally in all directions.

As for the deeply attached roots I'll just have to keep digging it out in the forlorn hope of worrying it to death.



Nettles are a very useful weed which produce a substance which enhances the growth of plants with roots nearby. Of course it can't be allowed to take over vast areas, but a few nettles dotted here and there are beneficial. It is claimed that herbs grown in proximity to nettles are more pungent. They also attract insects.

Best of all, nettles make an excellent liquid feed. Wearing gloves, pull them out, put them into a bucket, cover with water and leave for a couple of weeks.

Ensure you dilute before use.



Dandelion have many herbal uses and are a good early source of nectar & pollen for insects. The long tap root can regrow from a fragment if not completely removed. Plants are quick to flower and produce masses of windborne seeds.



Chickweed is different kettle of fish, it's a bit of a demon. It is difficult to get rid of because unless crowded out by the crop it will find places to grow while you are not looking.

Once it's established the only way to remove its roots is to put your fingers into the soil below the surface and pull on them. If you pull at the leaves the roots will part company and sprout again.



Groundsel is quite prolific, and quickly flowers and spreads its seeds if you let it, each one producing up to a thousand seeds. These can germinate quickly, producing several generations of plants each year. The seeds are borne on the wind.

Digging is not constructive, a flame gun is my choice!



Shepherd's Purse is a very medieval sounding name for a fairly common weed which is quite easy to remove.



Sunspurge is not in the same league as the real villains, a rather innocuous weed which bleeds a milky sap when cut that can be a skin irritant. Like the stinging nettle it is easy to remove and is rather attractive. It flowers from May to October, the average seed number per plant is 257 but there may be up to 700.

I do hope I've covered most weeds, understanding them is a big help in beginning to control them!

Good luck!

Dawn Tinsley



April in the Apiary

My bees have been flying for a few weeks now on mild days and I'm happy to say that all five colonies have survived the winter. They have been very interested in some logs which Mike has been sawing on his hen plot next door. They have been feeding on the resins which the logs are excreting so there must be some kind of health giving minerals in there.

The flowering currant is one of the first nectar yielding plants, along with other tree blossom. The bees can be seen bringing in large quantities of willow pollen which is bright yellow. Pollen is a high protein food to feed the young larvae. The bees store it in the cells surrounding the brood nest and it's interesting to see all the different colours and guess which flowers have been visited. Seeing them taking in pollen is a sure sign that all is well in the hive without disturbing them.



Inside the hive the rate of brood rearing is increasing and the colony will be expanding rapidly. Towards the end of the month the queen will start to lay drone eggs in cells at the edges of the comb. Drones are larger so take 24 days from the egg being laid to emergence. Workers take 21 days and queens, although laid in large cells, only take 16 days because queen larvae is fed entirely on royal jelly which makes them grow rapidly.

The first inspections will take place as soon as the temperature is 15 degrees or above when most of the foragers are out flying. I will look for the queen and mark her with last year's colour – blue – if she is not already marked. I will change the floor for a clean one and have a general tidy up of the inside of the hive.

For at least the next four months, the bees will need to be inspected every week to look for signs of swarming. It's important to pick a fine day with high pressure when most of the foragers are out and the frames of brood are easy to see. Fingers crossed we'll have a lovely warm spring like last year.

Louise Mallinson





Keeping Chickens

I started keeping chickens about 8 years ago. I kept 3 light sussex hens in my garden and was soon hooked. The eggs were amazing but the hens were fab to watch. They are very clever, entertaining creatures, all with different personalities.

My flock soon grew and my interest in hatching developed. Chickens will go broody and want to hatch eggs so we did this and had our first babies. The whole process fascinated me so I invested in an incubator so I could hatch my own. By candling (shining a bright light into the egg) you can see them developing from a tiny eye into a fully grown chick. Watching them hatch is something I will never get bored of.

However, one thing to consider before hatching little fluffy bundles is that on average 50% of what you hatch will be male. Making a plan on how to deal with the inevitable surplus males is a responsibility that comes with hatching.

I have always wanted to be a responsible poultry keeper. Unwanted cockerels can fall into the wrong hands if you are not careful. It is important to me that they have a good life and are well cared for.

Lockdown saw a huge number of cockerels advertised on poultry sites or dumped – likely due to no poultry sales and more people turning to chicken keeping as a hobby. For me it was the chance to follow through the whole circle of life – hatching, rearing and dispatching.

Dispatching my own cockerels humanely was something I felt strongly about. It was my responsibility and my duty to them. With the help of my uncle and Aunty and a stun gun we dispatched, plucked and dressed 3 cockerels for the oven in November.

Don't get me wrong I don't take any pleasure from it but I was proud of myself and now know that any boys hatched will have a good life and will be used as a food source so don't go to waste.

Last year we also raised our own turkeys for Christmas. They were the best turkeys we have ever had!

Charlotte Martin



Growing Potatoes in Bags

I've grown potatoes in bags for several years now and although controversial I prefer this method as I hate those pesky slugs eating my potatoes when grown in the ground.

Roll the sides of the potato bag down so it's just under a third of its usual height.

Add 10cm peat-free compost to the bottom of the bag and place three to five chitted potatoes on the surface.

Cover with another 8-10cm of compost and water well. When the shoots have grown to around 8cm, 'earth them up' by covering them with another 10cm of compost. Do this every couple of weeks, gradually rolling the bag back up to its intended height. This stops the potatoes from being exposed to light and developing green patches.

If you don't make your own compost it can get expensive buying compost to earth up potatoes. I've experimented with several options of alternating compost with grass clipping, straw or bedding from my horse or chickens and woodchip delivered free at Charlestown. All were successful and it's certainly worth experimenting!

Dawn Tinsley

Diaries unearth benefits of allotments

Ben Spencer
Science Editor

The clocks have gone forward, the days are getting longer and spring is in the air. For more and more people, it is time to get planting.

Gardening saw a surge in popularity during lockdown as millions picked up trowels and bedded-in blooms. Now new research has put a figure on the amount of effort required to grow vegetables.

Researchers at Sheffield University have calculated that an average of 24 minutes work is required to produce each kilogram of fruit or veg grown on an allotment. Their findings, published in the journal *Sustainability*, suggest it's not a bad deal compared with a weekly slog around a supermarket.

The researchers asked 163 allotment holders to keep diaries and found that each kilogram of produce required

17 litres (30 pints) of water, 0.2 litres of topsoil, 2.2 litres of manure and 1.9 litres of compost.

The diaries, summarised in a paper published in the *British Food Journal*, showed the physical benefits – the gardeners made 87 visits to their plots each year, on average, travelling 86 miles to and fro – as well as the mental. One participant wrote: “The plot is my safe place. It's my mental health balancer. Peaceful but sociable, a place to connect, to disconnect. My little piece of the planet.”

Miriam Dobson, the lead author on both papers, said allotments “provide tenants with a huge spectrum of benefits beyond fruit and vegetables”. She added: “Providing more people with space to grow their own food would have a far-reaching positive impact.”

Separate research sheds

light on which crops give the best yield. French beans yield 6.5kg of produce per square metre, courgettes 6kg per sq m, tomatoes 5.1kg, squash 3kg and potatoes 2.6kg. Sweetcorn, which is tricky to grow, produces just 670g per square metre.

Jill Edmondson, of Sheffield's Institute of Sustainable Food, believes that the growing global population and increasingly fragile international supply chains means we have to start

using more green space in our cities to grow food.






Edmondson is on a waiting list for an allotment plot – along with 100,000 others, according to the National Society for Allotment and Leisure Gardeners.

She calculates that if every green space in Sheffield were used to grow fruit and vegetables, it would comfortably provide the city's 500,000 inhabitants with their five a day. Even using a tenth of the space would give 90,000 people enough fruit and veg.

She points out, however, that 65 per cent of allotment land has been lost since the 1950s. It is estimated there were 300,000 plots in 1996, but the number has declined since. “There is growing evidence of the important role that growing food in cities and towns could play in local and even national food security,” Edmondson said.

TOP OF THE CROPS

Yield – kg per square metre

	French bean	6.48
	Courgette	5.96
	Tomato	5.12
	Runner bean	3.28
	Squash	2.94

Article in the Sunday Times

Andrew Gregory

Readers Recipes



Rhubarb Crumble Muffins

Ingredients

175g caster sugar
175g rhubarb, halved lengthways then diced
2 tbsp sunflower oil
1 egg
1 tsp vanilla extract
125ml buttermilk
200g plain flour
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda

For the crumble topping

50g light muscovado sugar
50g plain flour
25g porridge oats
1 tsp ground cinnamon
50g butter

Method

Heat oven to 220C/200C fan/gas 7.
Line a 12-hole muffin tin with muffin cases.
Stir the sugar and rhubarb together and set aside while you make the crumble topping.
Mix together the muscovado sugar with the flour, oats and cinnamon, then rub in the butter until clumpy with your fingertips.
Stir the oil and egg, vanilla and buttermilk into the sugary rhubarb.
Now, add the flour, baking powder and bicarbonate of soda and stir well.
Quickly spoon into the cases, then scatter each with a thick layer of the crumble mixture.
Bake for 15-18 minutes until golden.



Rhubarb Bread & Butter Pudding

Ingredients

400g rhubarb
150g golden caster sugar
300ml whole milk
300ml double cream
½ tsp vanilla extract
3 large eggs, plus 1 egg yolk
250g bread (soft white sliced/rolls or brioche)
35g butter
200g ricotta
1 lemon and 1 orange, zested

Method

Trim the rhubarb and cut it into 3cm pieces.
Heat the milk & cream, add a pinch of salt & bring to the boil, add the vanilla.
Beat the eggs, extra yolk & the rest of the sugar together in a bowl. Pour the warm milk & cream onto this.
Heat oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4.
Butter the bread.
Mix the ricotta & icing sugar.
Spread the buttered bread thickly with ricotta.
Sprinkle the citrus zest on top, then layer these slices with the rhubarb in an ovenproof dish.
Pour the egg & cream mixture through a sieve & leave to sit for 30 minutes).
Put the dish in a roasting tin. Add enough boiling water to the tin to come halfway up the sides of the dish. Bake for 40-45 minutes or until puffy and set on the top & golden in colour.

Toni Graham



Genoves

This is a recipe from Napoli my city, it's easy cheap and tasty.

Ingredients

3 lb onions, finely chopped
1 carrot, finely chopped
1 stalk of celery, finely chopped
1 1/2 lb beef for stewing
3-1/2 oz) salumi (salame, pancetta and/or prosciutto)
White wine
Salt and pepper
Olive oil or lard

Method

Cover the bottom of a large pot, preferably either terracotta or enamelled cast-iron, with a generous amount of olive oil or lard. I usually compromise and melt just a spoonful of lard in olive oil to give it that special savoury flavour.

Add lots of finely chopped onion to the pot, along with a carrot and a stalk of celery, both chopped finely as well. Then add a nice, large piece of stewing beef, my favourite is chuck, for its rich flavour and some finely chopped bits of salumi (salame, pancetta and/or prosciutto) along with a glassful of white wine or water.

Season the ingredients well with salt & pepper. Cover & allow this mixture to simmer over very low heat for about 3 hours, uncovering the pot and stirring from time to time, and adding a bit of water if needed to keep the mixture moist, until the meat is fork-tender and the onion is well reduced and melted into a kind of 'cream'. Raise the heat and allow the onions to caramelize until they are nice golden brown colour—but be sure not to burn them. Remove the beef for another use, possibly as a second course. The remaining onion cream is your sauce. Use the onion sauce to dress ziti or other stubby pastas. If you like, serve with grated parmesan or pecorino cheese. (I prefer the former over the latter).

Alessandra Nappo Oddy



Rhubarb and Strawberry Meringues

INGREDIENTS

450g Rhubarb, cut into 4cm chunks
100g caster sugar
Grated zest of 1 orange
1 tbsp of strawberry conserve
2 Eggs, separated

METHOD

Preheat the oven 180C/fan 160C.

Put the rhubarb in an oven proof dish and sprinkle over 50g of the sugar.

Grate over the orange zest.
Cook in the oven for 45 minutes until tender or cook in the microwave for 10 minutes on full power, stirring half way through the cooking time or until just tender.

Allow the Rhubarb to cool slightly and then stir in the jam and the egg yolks. If it is too warm the eggs will scramble.

Divide the mixture between 4 ramekins.

Place on a baking sheet and cook for a further 10 minutes until slightly thickened.

Whilst the rhubarb is cooking whisk the egg whites until stiff.

Add half the sugar and whisk again.

Gently fold in the rest of the sugar.

Return to the oven for 10 minutes until the meringue is puffy and golden.

Serve immediately.

Toni Graham