



Bishop's Waltham Gardening Club

MARCH (INTO SPRING 2025) NEWSLETTER;

Diary entry; 26 March; Speaker event - James Grieg of Stem and Green Flower Farm, **“Growing sustainable and Seasonal English flowers”**

It's at St Peter's Church Hall, Free St, BW, SO32 1EE 6.45 for 7.00pm start.

Well, with the longer days, a bit more warmth in the sun (when we see it) and ‘all systems go’ for a great gardening year ahead, we can plan for those delicious ‘home-grown’ crops. Hopefully, you have already bought your Potatoes from our shop but don’t forget the special Potato fertiliser to get them going through their growing season. ‘Homes and Garden’ says, “Potatoes are a hungry crop that need lots of nutrients throughout the growing season. A failure to fertilize potatoes properly is a common issue among growers and it impacts any potential harvest.

A proper feeding regime is easy to establish and regularly applying a feed high in phosphorus and potassium will ensure you get the biggest and best tubers”



If you have ‘chitted’ your seed potatoes, then the early varieties could go in now but there is no point unless we are having milder weather. If it’s cold then leave them until the soil warms a bit -they will catch up.

The picture shows well-chitted seed potatoes.

An egg box is ideal to keep them apart and avoid problems.

Our February ‘bumper newsletter’ -still available on our website- gives lots more info about varieties, when to plant and this edition has a list of the various fertilisers available at our Shop.

RHUBARB, RHUBARB!

- No, it’s not taken from our Trustees’ meeting! It’s about one of the easiest crops to grow – as John Harrison of the weekly ‘Allotment Garden’ explains...Rhubarb is an almost indestructible perennial plants to grow, but is also a fairly large plant with a deep root system so is not suitable for close spacing or containers. However, it can be grown in open based containers. Rhubarb leaves contain oxalic acid, which is poisonous, but are safe to compost. Only the stems are eaten. Avoid feeding the leaves to livestock.” Your plants are probably growing well now and, having had exposure to frost which they need -Norway is a huge supplier- you are looking forward to those tasty stems, ideal in pies with cream, ice cream or custard (actually, I would choose all three!). John adds.. *“Knowledge tells us that rhubarb is a vegetable and the tomato a fruit. Wisdom tells us which to pour custard over!”* Now is an ideal time to plant a variety purchased from a reputable supplier.

JOBS FOR MARCH

1. The RHS website lists plenty of things to keep you busy this month, such as Pruning Bush and Climbing Roses; Plant Onion Sets & Shallots (you did get yours from our Shop, didn’t you?) Also read our February newsletter; Plant Summer Flowering Bulbs -such as Gladioli, Eucomis and Lillies, and there’s more..... [Lift and divide overgrown clumps of perennials](#)
2. [Plant early potatoes](#) see February Newsletter, and above.
3. [Mow the lawn on dry days \(if needed\)](#)
4. [Cut back herbaceous perennials and ornamental grasses that have been left standing over winter](#)
5. [Keep a few dandelions in your garden to support early bees, particularly pantaloons](#)
6. [Start off dahlia tubers in pots or trays of damp peat-free compost](#)
7. [Prune Buddleja to a low framework of stems to encourage new flowering growth.](#)

Patience is still a great virtue and one which us gardeners don't have in abundance as we just want to "get out there and grow". However, as always in our wonderful climate, in the same way that 'one Swallow does not make a Summer' a couple of fine days do not warm up the soil, or prevent the next day from being cold, wet and frosty. So, wait until the soil is warmer. Parsnips have a long growing season and they like the frost to sweeten them. BUT that's only when they have been growing in the soil for many months. The seedlings must have warm soil, so perhaps May is not too early -and certainly not too late! *A lovely crop, but the seedlings need warmth>>>*

Use fresh seed and sow in light, free-draining soil. Germination is erratic.



And some fertiliser to improve crops and soil.....

The detail such as 7:5:2 represents Nitrogen – Phosphorus – Potassium. If you saw, 7-7-7 on a bag of fertilizer it would translate as Nitrogen (N): For green leafy growth; Phosphorus (P): For healthy root and shoot growth; Potassium (K): For flowering, fruiting and general hardiness
The order never varies though the numbers do.

Fertilisers available at the Shop at the Shed

-any quantity, not pre-packed as in Garden Centres-

BONEMEAL; NPK 4-20-0. Slow release, organic source of phosphorous to promote strong root growth.

Sulphate of Potash; Provides Potassium and Sulphur in soluble form.— **and keep away from your eyes.**

LIME; Useful to raise the PH and lower the acidity of the soil. Adding manure to the soil each year will lower the PH and make it more acid.

BLOOD FISH & BONE: NPK 6-6-6; A fine-ground organic based fertiliser, enriched with Potash and other plant nutrients to give a balanced feed.

VOLCANIC ROCK DUST; Adds essential minerals and trace elements to help grow healthy vegetables.

GROWMORE; NPK 7-7-7; A balanced inorganic fertiliser with equal amounts of Nitrogen, Phosphorous and Potassium. A basic feed for all garden plants. A really good way to kickstart the growth for the new season.

PERLITE; A naturally occurring volcanic silica-based mineral. Encourages quicker germination, improved seedling growth and less checks when potting on. Can also be used instead of sand/grit in potting compost.

CHICKEN PELLETS; Organic Chicken Pellets are ideal for soil improvement and the planting and feeding of established plants. Chicken Manure is an effective non-chemical fertilizer..

POTATO FERTILISER; A must for your 'spuds' and maybe a better way to win the competition!!

Our 'Shop at the Shed' got off to a brilliant start on 1st and 2nd February. The weather was good, the coffee and cake welcoming and, if you didn't know, our seed potatoes have wings... they simply flew off the shelves!



See us at www.bwgc.org.uk and on Facebook 

And email us; General enquiries: BWGC-INFO@bwgc.co.uk

Allotment business: BWGC-allotments@bwgc.co.uk

Membership enquiries: BWGC-membership@bwgc.co.uk

<<Our new notice! Please take care.

Sowing and Growing Peas

- Sow seeds in late-February to June. Later sowings often suffer with powdery mildew, so choose a variety with resistance to it.
- Peas have nodules in their roots which enable them to produce their own nitrogen. They like a well drained soil, with a plenty of humus but do not need manure to be added before planting.
- For the earliest crop, cover the planting area with cloches a week before planting. Sow direct in late February–early March. Early sowings often avoid the Pea Moth that makes such a mess with tiny caterpillars eating the peas in the pods.
- Sow peas in a trench 15 cm (6 in) wide and 3–5 cm (2 in) deep. Place the peas into the trench 8 cm (3 in) apart in staggered rows. For further rows leave a space of the same size as the height of the variety you are growing. Taller varieties will therefore be much further apart than the dwarf varieties. Smaller areas can be sown in a block, 8 cm (3 in) apart each way. Some dwarf varieties will be self-supporting and will not need
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- Continued.....
- staking when grown in this way. They can also be sown directly into deep containers of multi-purpose compost in March and then in succession through to June.
- When the pods begin to form, feed with a liquid tomato feed. Support dwarf varieties with pea sticks or twigs inserted into the trench, or container, at the time of sowing. This support gives the peas something to climb and keeps the pods off the soil. Tall varieties can be supported on netting, or twine, attached to firm stakes inserted at intervals of 90 cm (36 in) or less, adjacent to the row. Make sure that the structure is firmly fixed, or a windy day can wreck the crop!
- If your soil is healthy, feeding is not generally required, but a feed of liquid comfrey fertilizer will be helpful as the pods form.

Harvesting Peas; Harvest May to August, as pods fill up.

- Peas develop upwards on the plant, so start to harvest from the bottom.
- Pick regularly as leaving pods on the plant will stop new ones from forming.
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PEAT FREE becomes even easier.. The RHS has launched a very useful advice line and the good news is that it is **OPEN TO EVERYONE**. RHS Peat Free Transition Co-Ordinator, Nikki Parker handles the calls at peatfree@rhs.org.uk and it could be your first step to ‘going peat free’.

Buying plug plants or larger ‘ready-made’ plants is an easy way but expensive. With probably dozens of seeds in a packet for £2-£3 or so, the cost of raising enough plants for a larger space may well seem the best way forward.

Always remember the extra cost of a decent compost and, possibly, the cost of heat. Of course a thermostatically controlled propagator will also add quite a bit more, but it will last for years. Around September, start giving loud hints that a wonderful Christmas present would be a propagator, and see if anyone is listening.

Even with the luxury of such equipment, seed raising is interesting, instructive and can be fun, but there are several pitfalls to overcome in our enthusiasm to get going. The inside may be warm, but the outside takes weeks to warm up and, with our weather, there is usually a cold ‘blip’ somewhere between.

Anyway, lets see what we can do to help.

Useful tips from GARDENING KNOW HOW

newsletter@email.gardeningknowhow.com

STARTING SEEDS TOO EARLY. There's nothing more discouraging for gardeners than precious seeds and seedlings failing to grow into strong, healthy plants. The sun comes out and we start our seeds indoors – weeks too soon. The seeds germinate, healthy plants start to grow and then they linger and decline, becoming leggier by the minute.

Ensuring you have the best growing equipment is a great place to start.

The good news is that most seed-starting mistakes can be avoided with a bit of knowledge. Here are the most common issues and their solutions.

Not knowing [when to start seeds indoors](#) is one of the most common seed-starting mistakes. We gardeners can hardly wait to get our hands dirty, and when the sun comes out and starts to melt the snowdrifts, we just can't restrain ourselves. Out come the seeds and before we know it, we've sown an entire vegetable garden on the kitchen table. The problem of course is timing. By the time the weather improves, your seedlings will have outgrown their containers and become leggy as they desperately try to stretch up to reach the available sunlight.

Look at the last frost date in your area for an idea of [when to transplant seedlings](#). Do not start seeds until about 6-8 weeks before this date. I did say “about”, so keep an eye on weather predictions as well.

Choosing the Wrong Seeds

Sometimes we get so excited we neglect to factor in our [USDA hardiness zone](#), which impacts the growing window. What might be gorgeous tomatoes in a warmer zone may require an additional few weeks of growing season that isn't available in your area.

Planting Seeds That Aren't Viable

The easiest way to know if [old seeds will germinate](#) is to try an [easy seed viability test](#), such as sprinkling them onto a damp paper towel. Some growers opt to test and grow seeds at the same time by [germinating seeds in paper towel](#). As well as being an easy way to start seeds, it's also mess free as no soil is required. Most seeds are viable for 3-4 years but that's dependent on how they've been stored. [Storing seeds](#) in a sealed container is the best option. Place the container in an area that is cool, dark, and dry.

Not Reading The Seed Packet

It's really important to read the [seed packet information](#) before planting. Sounds so obvious, but often ignored. Maybe your seed doesn't want to be molly-coddled indoors in the warm!

CHOOSING THE WRONG GROWING MEDIUM

This is another very common error. Some people assume you can use soil from the garden to start seeds but that soil often contains diseases or pests which will then be passed onto your new seedlings. Others used bagged potting soil but that is often too dense for fragile seedlings.

Seeds need consistent moisture to germinate, but the soil should never be wet or soggy. If the soil is too wet, seeds can rot and disappear. Therefore, use soil that is specifically made for starting seeds that allows water to move through quickly. This soil holds the appropriate amount of water to keep the soil moist.

Mixes often contain [peat moss](#) (or a more sustainable option), [vermiculite](#), [perlite](#), [mycorrhizae](#), [coco coir](#), [compost](#), [organic fertilizer](#), and lime. You can also make your own [soilless seed-starting mix](#) using a combination of some of these ingredients.

Insufficient Light

We've all had the leggy plants – and in this case taller is definitely not better. [Leggy seedlings](#) are the result of insufficient light. The poor seedlings are stretching their utmost to get better light. To put this into perspective, vegetable seedlings need 12-18 hours of light; something a sunny indoor window sill can't always provide.

That's where artificial lighting comes into play. Yes, you need it for the best results. There are tons of grow light options available. [LED grow lights](#) are a popular choice and often come with programmable timers – a great boon to forgetful people like myself.

Not Thinning

I know this is a hard one, but you must learn [how to thin seedlings](#). If you leave all the 6 or 8 or whatever beet seedlings in a tiny area, you're likely to get no beets. You need to thin the beets to one healthy beet for every 2-3 inches (5-8cm) of space. To make this easier, keep in mind that you can eat vegetable thinnings! They're yummy tossed into a salad.

When you thin your seedlings, I find it is better not to pull them out. If you do, you're likely to disturb the roots of your "keeper". Instead, gently snip the seedlings you want removed at the surface of the soil.

Well, that's plenty to think about, but what can you do when all those seedlings come up and there's too many for your own needs?

The ideal answer is to pot them up and grown on ready to donate to our **PLANT SALE on SATURDAY 10TH MAY. Hours 10.00 to 16.00 . (to be confirmed)**. It's a 'ONE-DAY EVENT' this year and it's held at the Albany Road Allotment's 'Shops at the Shed'. Last year we had around 1,000 plants. This year could be the best ever if we all start **NOW**. Perhaps propagate some cuttings; split up some of those perennials; separate some raspberry canes etc.,etc., etc., as there are so many things one could do to help your Club, provide others with a great choice of plants at a very reasonable price and, once all the buying is over, you can then relax with a tea/coffee and cake -again at reasonable prices. If the weather is kind you will be able to sit outside and have a chat and update with your fellow gardeners – it's amazing what one can learn in conversation with others.

There's a possibility of a BBQ as well, so watch this space!

Have a great gardening year. Let's hope for a really traditional Spring with warm days and bird song.