



Bishop's Waltham Gardening Club

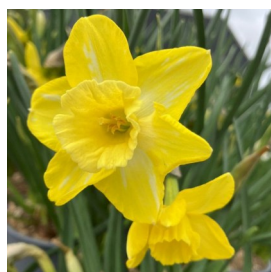


BWGC

Registered Charity No.
1169353

Is Spring really round the corner?

After the usual mixture of everything that Nature can throw at us, we are now hoping the cord of Winter that ties us to cold nights, dark days and little in the way of gardening is receding daily. With the daffodils bravely starting to wave at us from the road verges, roundabouts and hedgerows, we really do feel that around the corner Spring is waiting with all its promises. Sadly, it doesn't all happen overnight, and it does seem to me that the seasons are moving round, with later Springs, but also later Autumns. It always strikes me as odd that 'Global Warming' doesn't seem to give us much, other than this movement of seasons and wet, wet, wet Winters and cooler



Springs. Milder they may be, but we need those crisp frosty days to invigorate the soul. Also, quite a few plants and seeds need that cold as well. Rhubarb loves being frosted, and even strawberries need it to kick them into flowering when the time is right. Some seeds won't even grow without the frost to split their hard cases.

Just waiting to welcome us.

On the allotment, probably one of our first thoughts concerns potatoes. Hopefully the ground has been prepared and manured in the Autumn, but it's never too late. What variety? Early Mid or Late? Well, our 'Shop at the Shed' can help you there with a variety of choice, and plenty of advice from our fellow gardeners. There's the added bonus of 'buy only what you want' rather than having to buy several packs in the Garden Centre. Suppose you have space for nine spuds. Well, you can try 3 each of early, mid and late.

See the list of potatoes stocked from 1st February -when the shop opens for the new gardening year- at the end of this newsletter. Next month, as you are ready to plant your first earlies, we will include a list of fertilisers and useful gardening product. This list is not exhaustive, so pop into the shop and look round, and get treated to a refreshment and a biscuit!

Let's make it the year when we really DID support our own shop, making it the first call for reasonable prices, good banter and a warming cuppa! Like virtually ALL of the services provided by YOUR Gardening Club, anyone you see is a VOLUNTEER.

Returning to the subject of potatoes, most of you will know that the idea of 'chitting' is to get some decent, healthy small shoots on the potato whilst the ground is still unsuitable (either too wet, too cold – or both!) Place them in a cool spot, perhaps end up in an egg box and the shoots at the top will be the growth points, so leave about three and rub the others out.

Much is made of digging a trench etc., etc., but it doesn't suit everyone, so if you have a long-handled bulb planter, or something that will 'dib' a hole about 25cm deep, just make a hole, and drop the spud in, making sure those shoots are at the top., then refill the hole. Perhaps a sprinkle of our potato fertiliser from the Shop in the top 5cm of soil, and job done. First and Second Earlies; Salad type and Maincrop will see you through the year, especially if you carefully store the maincrops. No need to worry about blight yet, that will be featured in the Summer Newsletter.

One other thought is that you can put a seed potato in a small pot with some compost. Put the 'spud' on top (with the 'eyes' upmost) and fill compost to halfway up. This will encourage roots to start as well as the shoots if kept in a cool, frost-protected place. Maybe worth a try for one of each variety and see if this one grows quicker/better than the others.

WELCOME BACK.....

To our first—and BUMPER—Newsletter of 2025. A very Happy New Gardening Year to you all.

In this issue....

- Broad Beans;
- Soil;
- Our Shop at the Shed;
- Potatoes;
- Fertilisers;
- 'Damping Off';
- Tomatoes;
- Competition;
- Blight;
- Singles and Doubles;
- Mr Mole's Problem Page;
- Rhubarb Chard;
- Eight-Ball Courgettes;
- Strawberries;
- Lettuce and Bolting;
- Columbine;
- Kallettes;

And more!

Bean' having problems?

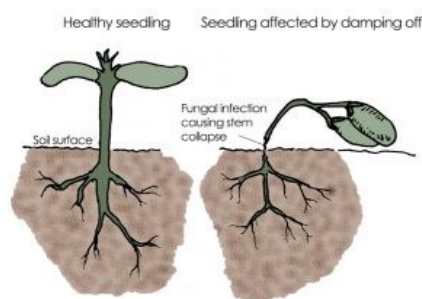
Runner and French Beans, whilst being of a size that's easier to handle, often germinate erratically. **Broad Bean Tips;** Keep your plants well watered, particularly as the flowers begin to set. Hoe between rows regularly to remove weeds. Pinch out the growing tips after the first flowers have set pods to deter blackfly and encourage further pods to set.

Just what IS "Damping off".

The official RHS view is...Damping off is a disease of seedlings caused by several different fungi and fungus-like organisms. This disease causes emerging seedlings to collapse, often submerged in a mass of white fungal growth. It is particularly a problem when sowing seed indoors or under glass.

Edinburghgardenschool.com Q; Would you like to enter this world cold and wet? A; Not flippin' likely!

No, of course not, and seeds don't want to, either. Some actually need the cold to get them started by splitting the husk, but not wet as well. Others -most, in fact- want a protected environment, slightly warm and with a touch of moisture. Damping Off occurs if you ignore these points and that expensive seed and compost is all wasted. One simple task is just to read the seed packet, as it will tell you what the seeds require. There are treatments -more expense!- that might *prevent* it, but nothing will *cure* it, and it spreads so quickly, too. so timing is important as later sown seeds will grow quicker and with better flowers/crops as there is no check to their progress.



How to avoid problems, not just for this but for all seed-sowing....

Edinburgh garden School again...*Gardeners can reduce the risk of damping off in a number of ways. Good horticultural practice is particularly important:*

- Sow seedlings thinly to avoid crowding ; ensure good air circulation around seedlings
- use clean gardening tools ; remove infected seedlings as soon as possible and burn
- raise seedlings in commercial growing compost, which is usually free of

harmful fungi

- use new pots and trays whenever raising seedlings, and ensure re-used pots are thoroughly cleaned
- never reuse pots and trays in which damping off has been a problem

Use mains water if possible when irrigating seedlings, if possible, as water butts can harbour organic debris infected with harmful fungi.

Tomatoes a bit tall and gangly?

Worry not, even though it may even be too early to plant them in a greenhouse. Their stems have hairs, and these will grow into roots and anchor the plant if you re-plant in a larger pot and sink the plant into the compost -leaving plenty of room for root growth, of course- and fill to cover some of the stem, but NOT the leaves. Then you have a shorter stem above the soil, but plenty of probable roots below. It might well be worth putting a thin stake in to assist, but be careful not to damage the roots so put the cane in before planting. Don't over-water, though, and keep in a decent temperature, 18c -64f- is ideal.



<<<Ring any bells??? 'Leggy' plants.

There's such a variety of sizes and types -including 'grafted'- that a visit to the RHS website might help you choose. If you are growing in 'Growbags' you may put a few holes in the top and bottom to aid drainage and let air get to the compost. Don't make these holes too big as the compost will dry out too quickly and growing and mature tomato plants need plenty of water -and don't overlook (or overdo!) the fertiliser. Above all, remember they need LIGHT -as much as you can get!- as this is the ONLY way they can get strong stems and leaves.

Carrot Capers; There were 4 pages of advice on the Allotment Garden Weekly



Newsletter from John Harrison, but I have taken the main points; The seed likes loose soil, so till the soil 30cm deep, and neutral acidity. Soak the seeds in warm water for 24hrs. Water the seedbed really well. Sow them 1/2cm –max– deep as they need light, so maybe cover with sand or vermiculite. They need constant moisture, so water gently but thoroughly, daily and even more in very hot weather. Perhaps cover with fleece to retain moisture, but remove as soon as the seedlings appear. Beware of slugs! The ideal temperature for germination is 27c, but will also do so in much lower figures, but wait for warmer soil and maybe cover with a cloche., even so 1-3 weeks is the germination period. After

germination a fine mulch will help as it will retain moisture. Perhaps sow a few radish in the drills, to mark them clearly.

Onions and friends. Another article from the Allotment Garden and, again, 4 pages worth, but these are the main points. They are classed as biennials, taking two years to mature. In it's first year, the onion concentrates on growing its bulb—the part we eat. It's called its 'vegetative stage', as it grows leaves and stores energy in the bulb, which swells in response to the change in day length following the solstice. If left in the ground over winter, it then enters its reproductive stage in the second year so, instead of focusing on the bulb, it uses stored energy in the bulb to produce a flower stalk and, eventually, seeds. Onions BOLT when they prematurely start to produce a flower stalk instead of focusing on forming a large bulb. This usually happens when onions experience stress, especially from temperature fluctuations. Also, in a cold spell after a warm spring they are tricked into thinking (!) that they have gone through the 2-year cycle already.



Planting too early or too late can also lead to bolting. Too early can get cold stress, too late and it might rush to bolt before fully developing. Inconsistent watering can also trigger bolting, they prefer a constant moisture level. Once it bolts, the bulb stops growing and wants to produce seed. You can still use the onion, but it won't keep. So, what to do? Onions from seed are more resistant to bolting, although most people prefer onion 'sets' and take the risk accordingly. All round, it does seem that sets are best. If they are heat-treated, this will reduce the tendency to bolt, and can be planted earlier, allowing a longer growing period. They tend to produce larger bulbs, too.

If you spot an onion starting to bolt, snap off the central flower head stalk. The bulb will be O.K., and may continue growing but will usually end up smaller and it won't keep.

We will be stocking white onion sets from 1st February, and there will be plenty of Onion Fertiliser and Potato Fertiliser to get those plants growing strong and healthy. So visit us at.....

The SHOP AT THE SHED

*Open every weekend from
1st February 10am-12noon*

The Shop is at our Allotment site in Albany Road

POTATOES; No mystery, read on!

See page 10 for our selection of varieties

Early; Plant in March for June/July harvest -eat straight away)

Second Early; Plant in April for July/August – eat straight away

Maincrop; Plant in April for Sept/Oct and can be stored

Our fun ‘Potato Competition’ will be run again this year. Pick your spud from the box in the shop, pay your 50p and nurture the little devil until it’s time to dig up all its produce in July. Get a wheelbarrow to carry it all to the shop for the ‘Big Weigh In’ and scoop that massive cash prize.... Or not!

Looking around the allotments, one can see multiple ways of protecting one’s crops. With the long ‘tunnel’ usually with hoops covered with polythene or similar, this is ideal for a row of plants. For a block of plants, perhaps lettuce as you don’t want too many maturing at one, or for several trays of seedlings, the ‘Popadome’ seems interesting. Nothing, of course, is cheap these days and gardening IS a hobby, that a treating yourself to something useful and long-lasting -not necessarily this product- would be worth it in the longer term. Alternatively, just nag all around you for a decent Birthday present!!!

Oh, how we miss those lovely juicy tomatoes, grown in our own gardens or allotment. If blight was a problem for you in the past, the ‘blight resistant’ varieties are for you. For a few pennies more, try the ‘grafted’ plants as they get away faster, grow speedily and seem to produce hefty crops. However, nothing will succeed unless you treat the plant properly. I must admit that I have never been a great fan of ‘growbags’ though I can’t deny either their popularity or the fact that they do work! I think it goes back to the days when they seemed to be full of black, peaty wet ‘stuff’ and I always felt it would affect the flavour. Who knows! The other problem was in trying to keep the plants upright, especially later on with a good crop. How galling it was when one came down after breakfast to see the main stalk lying on the ground with a super crop of green tomatoes! Too late!

Nowadays there are better Gro-Bags, they are not filled with ‘peaty stuff’ and one can get frames that hold the plants erect. You can even get bags you fill with your own multi-compost, such as the excellent product -approved by the RHS- that we stock at the ‘Shed’. My other reservation was the actual depth of the ‘soil’ It just didn’t seem deep enough, or even ‘enough’ to serve three greedy plants. I still have some bottomless pots from the time when I grew them in a different way.

From Potato to Tomato..... Well they come from the same family but there the semblance seems to end!

Cherry Tomatoes, probably best for an early crop

You could also try using those potato bags, too, especially ones that can be reused again and again.

Ring Culture. A wooden box (or a plastic mushroom box) is lined with , full of grit, the pot on top filled with multi-compost and the plant placed so it was resting on top of the gravel. Its drinking roots would go into the gravel which I kept VERY wet, the feeding roots grew in the compost and this was kept just moist, with regular feeding. I got some good results.

Now I might try those pots on top of the Gro-bag to give the plants extra growing/feeding space. If the plant is put into the Gro-Bag soil, you can earth it up as it grows, and gradually fill the pot. This will give the plant extra stability and, more importantly, a much better root system as the stem will produce roots from those 'hairs' that we see all around the stem. Cherry tomatoes are probably the best for an earlier crop.

For support, there are various products, such as those from Amazon. If the bags are on the soil, then make your own structure with canes. Make it as if you are erecting a frame for runners -but not so high!- and place vertical canes in the bag. ready for planting the tomatoes -doing it afterwards could damage the root system.

It's fairly common knowledge that you pinch out those side shoots as the plant grows but you don't need to do this for the 'Tumbling Tom' or similar varieties that are ideal for hanging baskets, or anywhere where they can hang over an edge.

Greenhouse crops, especially tomatoes, are liable to many soil-borne pests and diseases. Ring culture, where bottomless pots rest on a bed of porous aggregate (such as gravel), prevents root diseases and also allows roots access to a large volume of consistently moist material.



One way or ring culture using Gro-Bags.



An example of a ring-culture pot. The bottom is usually completely open allowing the 'drinking' roots to grow into very moist compost or gravel, whilst the 'fruiting shoots' can grow away into the sunshine and warmth without any draught problems.

Sowing seeds? Then water the drills first before placing the seeds. Cover in DRY soil, and this will keep moisture in.



... more clearly than any other colour, and some of

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

Mr. Mole's Problem Page

Q; Just what IS 'Biodiversity'?

A; Biodiversity is all the different kinds of life you'll find in one area—the variety of animals, plants, fungi, and even microorganisms like bacteria that make up our natural world. Each of these species and organisms work together in ecosystems, like an intricate web, to maintain balance and support life.

Q; So, What is all this about 'No Mow May'?

MM's reply; gardenorganic.co.uk have an excellent explanation and it encompasses the idea that, by not mowing in May, you are encouraging wild flowers to grow and set seed to the advantage of pollinators. They also plead that you leave a part of your lawn permanently unmown to go wild so that, again, the pollinators can thrive. My problem is that, by leaving the grass unmown, this creates the problem of just how one can cope with 60+cm high grass which, when mown, leaves bare patches where the 'thugs' have smothered the finer grass that we need to show a 'green sward' (as they say in posh circles and Frinton-on-Sea). Also, leaving wild flowers and grasses to sort themselves out merely lets the thugs take over. BW In Bloom will tell you that their wildflower plots do take quite a bit of managing. It's very much a personal choice and I can see the sense, but can you imagine the allotment site when there has been a 'No Mow May' in operation during what is probably the best 'growing' month for grass? My devilish side says it's only for the 'Armchair Gardener' who also upholds 'Just leave it January'; 'Forget it February'; 'Mower's conked out March'; 'Aching back April'; 'Just leave it June' Just too hot July'; Awfully busy August; 'Such a chore September'; 'Oh it's holiday October'; 'No chance November'; Decidedly too wet December'.



It has been pointed out that the 'naughties', such as slugs, snails, ticks etc., hide in the longer grass. **The benefit of 'No Mow May'?. It's your choice.**



Like most things, it's just common sense!

Q; Why did my carrots grow legs, but my parsnips were OK?

A; Parsnips cope with more recently manured ground better as they are slow growers. Carrots are quick growers, so make sure you add compost and manure several months before sowing.

Q; My beetroot did really well last year, but this year the crop is poor. I have a raised bed, and did grow them in a different part.

A; A hot dry summer will always overtake regular watering, so that can be one reason, but maybe the original soil in the raised bed has been a bit exhausted, which can be cured by topping with well-rotted compost or manure now, plus some Growmore. Later in the season maybe add some chicken pellets, and maybe a liquid feed if growth is still poor.

Q; What are 'Inorganic' and 'Organic' Fertilisers?

A; Via the RHS website, Examples of **inorganic** fertilisers include: Growmore, Miracle-Gro All Purpose Soluble Plant Food, Phostrogen All Purpose Plant Food, Sulphate of Ammonia, Sulphate of Potash, and Superphosphate and Tomorite Concentrated Tomato Food.

Mr. Mole has one question for you, however... A few years ago, much was made of the 'Framberry' -a strawberry lookalike, tasting of a mixture of Strawberry and Raspberry. Does anyone grow it now? If so, please let me know the result.

If you have any questions about gardening -or views on the above-, please write in to Mr. Mole at our website, and he will try and get the answer from fellow 'allotmenters' based on local conditions and experience. Email BWGC-INFO@bwgc.co.uk



Chard & Perpetual Spinach

Chard or perpetual spinach can be sown until the end of July and is probably one of the easiest and most productive leafy vegetables you can grow. The plants will keep producing leaves right through the season and will most likely survive the winter before resuming growth in the spring. They will go to flower in late April when you will need to re-sow but you will have got your money's worth by then.

Rhubarb Chard [and comment; via andrew@quickcrop.com](#)

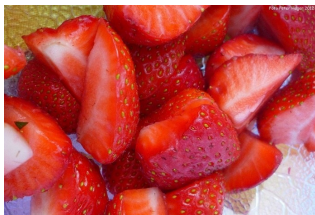
Some people can be put off by chard's bitterness (more pronounced if plants have been thirsty), a good trick is to drizzle with balsamic vinegar which balances the flavour.

Courgette, again from Andrew

It's too early to grow courgette, even in the warmth as they can't really go out until June but if in 'tunnels' the plants will grow and fruit very quickly in the extra warmth. A handy variety that I am growing this year is '8 Ball' whose round fruits make a delicious stuffed courgette when scooped out and filled with whatever floats your boat.

Courgette 8-Ball [courtesy of](#) and comment by [andrew@quickcrop.com](#)

A wider spacing when planting will result in a longer cropping period, well into Autumn if the weather allows. It will look enormous when planting but a 1 metre spacing will give the longest fruiting season.



The Strawberry Year according to Gardener's World. April: plant new plants from bare-root runners;

April to June: plant pot-grown plants. **June to July:** net plants and place straw or mats around the plants. Harvest the fruits. **July to August:** once fruiting has finished, remove netting and clear straw

or mats away. Start propagating from runners. **September:** plant fresh plants from home-grown runners or plant bare-root, mail order runners. Of course, the advice will vary according to weather conditions and variety.

Which is the sweetest strawberry of all? Well, it depends on which firm you ask!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Planting bare-root strawberries in pots; RHS advice; "...And you need to get the soil level just to the tops of the roots. Spread the roots out nicely in the pot. Hold the plant steady, just loosely scoop the compost, shake so the soil gets around the roots, then firm." **I didn't realise that they need exposure to cold weather to get better flowering!**

KALETES- courtesy of and comment by [andrew@quickcrop.com](#)

Kalettes are a cross between kale and Brussels sprouts and yield large numbers of miniature kale plants packed along a tall stem in the same manner as their sprout parent. The flavour is somewhere between the two and very good making Kalettes or Flower Sprouts as they are sometimes called, one of the stars of the winter garden. The plants are tall and vigorous and give large harvests in the dead of winter. Sow in early June for Autumn/Winter crops. Worth a try???



Did you grow CUCAMELON? Whether outdoors or in, they can provide an excellent crop, so please tell Mr Mole how you got on. If you want to try them this year, look at Sutton's brochure and get 50% discount using our special code.

<<< A 'handy' little crop of tasty cucamelon.

A bolt from the Blue...And Green!

Lettuce is always a great crop, with 'cut-and-come-again' varieties becoming ever more popular. Plant in friable soil -mix some sand in if necessary, don't crowd the plants, and choose the right time of year- Strangely, they don't like too much sun, or they will bolt. You know this when the centre starts growing up like a spire. It is a natural part of the plant's life but a bit of shade and good watering should prevent that, also leaving them too long in the soil will do the same.

'Bolting' is a natural process of lettuce

This photo from EQRoy/Shutterstock



Ppppppick up a Parsnip..... or a Beetroot.

There's not enough warmth in the soil, nor will there be until June, but Beetroot for instance, can be grown in small pots and then planted out as they are swollen stems, but you can't do the same with Parsnips as they are swollen roots and, once the large tap root is damaged, that's it!

Straight up, this could be an answer to your Columbine problems.

Ever thought of putting canes in to grow Columbine? Probably not as it's the last thing one would think of. However, they ARE climbers and will wind themselves round the nearest plant. Put some canes in and they will gladly climb there instead, BUT you can then get to the roots easier and without damaging your plant by ripping the long shoots away from your plant. Put the canes in, even if you can't see the Columbine and, when it does appear, it will make for your canes. Crafty, eh!

Do you have a new plot? Well, it's so tempting to dig it all over, get rid of the weeds and then get planting. Hold on a mo.! By digging you have probably loosened the soil to the benefit of weed seeds and possibly roots of some of the weeds you have removed. There is a thought that, by waiting a couple of weeks, all those seeds etc., will germinate and start growing. If you then remove any roots, hoe the plot, rake over and remove those small weeds, you can then plant/sow without getting a jungle of weed infested vegetables later on. Beware, also, if you are tempted to rotavate. You may end chopping up weed roots which will then develop into separate plants and give you a real headache later. Just a thought!

Supercooling slugs (courtesy of andrew@quickcrop.com)

One of the reasons I like hard frost is that I always thought it helped control the coming season's slug numbers by freezing eggs but I read recently that this is not the case. It seems slug eggs are able to survive and remain viable below -10°C by using a process called 'supercooling' where they are able to cool below freezing without becoming a solid. Bang goes that benefit.

Of course, supercooling is also observed in plants where starch in cells is converted to a sugar solution to lower their freezing point. This accounts for the particularly sweet flavour of parsnips or carrots after frost but also applies to many other vegetables including Brussels sprouts, kale, winter cabbage, swede to name but a few. If only my feet could be a clever!! (Mine, not Andrew's)

POTATO BONANZA

A broad selection of Scottish seed potatoes is in stock.

Cover all your needs! Unlike Garden Centres, you can choose how many potatoes you want, just one, or mix the varieties and pay the same price per KG. **Choose from;**

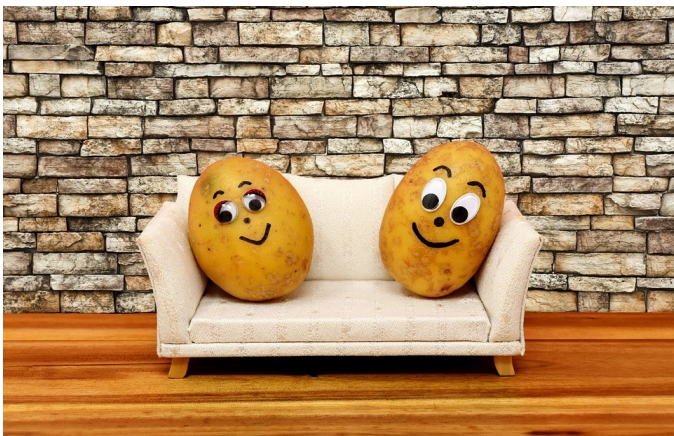
CHARLOTTE; A popular second early salad variety which produces good yields of uniform potatoes. Tubers are oval, have yellow, smooth skin with a creamy-yellow flesh and a waxy texture. They are delicious hot or cold. Some resistance to Potato blackleg. (RHS) It's the most popular Salad Potato in the U.K.

ORLA; A first early, which can be left to bulk up as a second early or even maincrop, with a great taste that's best suited to boiling. Skins are thin and light brown, getting tougher the longer it's in the ground and the flesh is yellow and slightly waxy. (RHS) High yields and suitable for boiling, mashing, baking, roasting and chipping. (Jamieson Bros,) Good disease resistance and suitable for; boiling, baking, roasting and chipping. (Web)

SETANTA; NEW THIS YEAR; One of the most blight resistant potato varieties available in the UK. A great variety for the allotment grower and good for boiling, mashing, baking, roasting and chipping. (Jamieson Bros,)

CARA; A high yielding maincrop which produces lots of uniform, rounded, pink and white tubers with a floury white flesh. The potatoes have a sweet taste and are a great all purpose variety which stores well. It also has excellent disease resistance. (RHS)

DESIREE; This early maincrop potato has oval red-skinned tubers with pale yellow flesh that keeps a firm texture when cooked and store well once harvested. They are good all-rounders and are particularly good as a baking potato, making these firm favourites. (RHS) Also try them roasted, sliced into chips or wedges or used in salads, but can also be used in mash.



WOW, surely you can't go wrong with this selection? Use them together with our great value Potato Fertiliser. All available from 1st February.