



## Chairman's Chatter

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Welcome to a new season.

We have marked the start of the new calendar year, the trading shed has reopened and seed catalogues are being eagerly searched for ideas and plans.

Those with organised thinking have already taken delivery of a trailer load of manure.

If you are keen, organised or even both and are looking to plant or sow in the hope of a head start – you will be wishing that the soil temperature rises above the magical temperature of six degrees centigrade (other magical temperatures are available, it depends who you read).

Furthermore new folks are wandering round the site looking to choose a newly available plot. If you see people wandering around, maybe clutching a piece of paper with vacant plot numbers on please be friendly and help them find their possible new plot.

### A big thank you

Thank you once again for keeping the skip green and respecting the need to not mix other landfill waste with that which can be composted. The material from the skip will go away for commercial composting that will take less than a month to turn our waste material into valuable compost.

Making compost in this scale is not like us turning our heap with a fork or corkscrew turner. The largest commercial compost turners are capable of turning over 2,500 cubic meters of compost an hour to aerate it – that is the volume of a fifty meter long Olympic pool! It is then sold to gardeners or allotment holders like us – which is why they don't want any non-green matter in the waste stream.

### How to learn a little



Regular readers of these pages will know I have a bee in my bonnet about the plight of our black and yellow friends.

The use by commercial agriculture of nicotine based insecticides called neonicotinoids has badly affected our bees. The good news is that these chemicals were banned for a period by the EU in 2013 and the government is now looking to extend the ban.

If you want to learn from a more reliable source than my ramblings, can I recommend a talk at Reading University on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2018, details here <http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/the-forum/event/public-lecture-the-bees-needs-how-to-save-the-worlds-pollinators/>.

If you have not been before, these talks cover a wide range of topics, are given by researchers or lecturers at the university and are free. They are definitely aimed at the lay person but can provide a real insight into a topic in the course of an evening. Booking is recommended but not compulsory. I hope to see some of you there.

Happy growing.

Richard Tredgett

Plot 46

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## Seasonal Tips - February/March

The weather in **February** can swing from one extreme to the other. from grey days with persistent rain or sleet to a sudden spell of bright, sunny days. Provided the ground is not frozen or too wet to work complete your winter digging and incorporate as much organic matter as you can. Never work the soil when it is too wet and sticky and clings in lumps to your boots. You do more harm than good by walking on it and working it when it is like that. And that applies also to sowing seeds, for seeds sown in cold, wet soil will rot instead of germinating, or they will make but poor growth.

If you haven't got your **Seed Potatoes**, do so at once.

Set them up to sprout (rose end uppermost) in shallow boxes (egg boxes are ideal) in a cool (though frost-proof), dry shed, where they can get plenty of light and produce the short, sturdy shoots that make for earliness and high yield. Don't let them get even slightly chilled, for that's enough to kill the "eyes".



Now is the time to plant onion sets and shallots if the soil is not too wet, protect from birds by covering them.

Broad beans can now be sown directly outdoors.

**March** - As winter begins to recede, sowing and planting outdoors can start. Probably the most useful thing you can do this month is begin preparing beds for sowing and planting. Remove any weeds that have survived the winter, rake the soil thoroughly and apply some fertilizer.

First early potatoes can be planted now.

Carrots (Early Nantes), beetroot and parsnips can be sown, if possible cover them with fleece at night. A tip for parsnip seed - chit on damp kitchen towel (paper) they can be sown at the correct growing distance in the ground once the tiny root appears, sowing using this method does away with the need to thin the seedlings and you can see that the seeds are going to grow.

Sow early peas (Feltham First or Meteor) under fleece or plastic tunnels. Or you could sow some in guttering, in the greenhouse, to plant out later, just slide them into a shallow trench.

Most of the brassicas as well as leeks can be sown this month outside, if its not too cold. Keep your brassicas netted and watch out for slugs.

Finish winter pruning gooseberries, blackcurrants, blueberries and autumn raspberries.

Protect the blossom on fruit trees from any frost with fleece.

## Cookery Corner

### Leek, mushroom & goat's cheese strudels

This recipe from the BBC website uses up leeks that you may still have in the ground and are thinking need using up to free the ground for the new season. Richard has tested it and recommends it as tasty. If you use the appropriate goat's cheese it is vegetarian:

#### Ingredients

500g leeks, thinly sliced  
150ml vegetable stock  
175g chestnut mushrooms, sliced  
4 large sheets filo pastry  
1 tbsp olive oil  
85g soft-rinded goat's cheese or vegetarian alternative  
1 tsp poppy seeds

#### Method

1. Heat oven to 200°C/180°C fan/gas 6.
2. Put the leeks and stock into a large pan, cover and cook for 5-8 mins. until starting to soften.
3. Add mushrooms, cover and cook for 3 mins. remove the lid and continue to cook until the juices have evaporated. Tip the veg onto a large plate to cool slightly.
4. For each strudel, lightly brush half of each filo sheet with some olive oil. Fold the un-brushed side over to make a smaller sheet, 2 layers thick. Brush the edges with a little more oil, spoon a quarter

5. of the veg mixture along one edge. Crumble over a quarter of the cheese, fold over the pastry edges, roll up to seal the filling. Repeat 3 times.
6. Put the strudels on a baking tray, brush with any remaining oil and scatter over the poppy seeds.
6. Bake for 25 mins. until crisp and golden brown.



## HP Trading Shed

Time to sow your seeds

Once you have got your spuds chitting, your mind has probably turned to sowing seeds for the growing season. The H&P trading shed offers three ways to get your seeds from Suttons at a reduced price:

### 1. Buy them in the shed.

We stock a wide range of vegetable seeds in the shed to pick up with your compost and other purchases. We stock Suttons seeds and they are 25% off catalogue prices.

### 2. Order them yourself on line, on the phone or by post direct from Suttons.

We have Suttons catalogues in the shed to take away and choose from their full range. If you prefer on line go to [www.suttons.co.uk](http://www.suttons.co.uk) and order from their seeds and other products. Otherwise you can order on the phone or complete an order form and post it to Suttons with payment.

If you use our group scheme order code which is **GS1098D** you will get 35% off seeds and 10% off all other products.

Postage will be £1.99 if you just order seeds otherwise £4.99. The goods will be delivered to your home address. The group scheme order code is the same for all our members and valid for all of 2018.

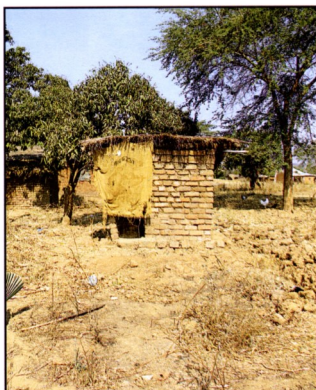
### 3. Browse the catalogue, complete an order form and hand it in at the shed.

If you prefer fill out an order form, drop it in at the shed and we will place the order for you. We will call you when it is received and you can collect it and pay for your order in the shed. Orders take one or two weeks to arrive. As with ordering yourself you will get 35% off seeds and 10% off all other goods with postage of £1.99 for just seeds and £4.99 if you order more than just seeds.

Any of these methods will get you a great choice of seeds at reduced prices.

## Toilet Twinning

This toilet has been  
**Twinning**



with a latrine at

Latitude: -10.959167 Longitude: 33.581361  
Lurarwe Village, Rumphu District, Malawi  
Latrine No. 90137



1 in 3 people worldwide don't have a loo. By supporting Toilet Twinning you are helping to flush away poverty.  
ToiletTwinning is a Registered Charity Number 268464 (England and Wales) and Number SC037624 (Scotland).  
[www.toilettwinning.org](http://www.toilettwinning.org)

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You may remember that our ambition was to raise £60 to provide a toilet in an area that did not have any facilities.

This was achieved and many thanks for donations of your small change. The photograph left shows the toilet that was provided in Lurarwe Village, Rumphu District, Malawi, a bit basic but none the less private.

The photograph will be displayed in the toilet on the plot.

## Manure Supplies

If you are looking to boost the fertility of your allotment then you could do a lot worse than get a pile of manure in and spread it across your plot. The new supplier several of us used last year was Mick whose mobile number is 07769 876908.

I have spoken to Mick in the last month who has a large supply of horse manure (about fifty tonnes!) at his base in the Hurst area and he is happy to deliver a load for £30. Be warned this is a large load and several plot holders split the manure and cost between them and still got a good quantity each (many wheelbarrow loads to spread).

## The Science of Crop Rotation

Crop Rotation has been used in farming almost since farming first started. Ancient farmers found growing the same crops in the same position caused a build up of pests and a reduction in fertility.

So the solution was to grow a winter crop, and then summer crop, and finally leave the ground for one growing season to recover. This three year system was commonly used in Europe until the 16th Century.

Crop rotation after the 16th Century was modified to a four year cycle by farmers in Belgium, where Wheat, Turnips, Barley and Clover produced a sustaining system to feed both animals and humans. Not only did the Clover provide animal feed, but it also fixes Nitrogen into the soil and enriches it in the process.

Forward to the modern vegetable garden and the need for replenishing the land and enriching it in the process is achieved by planting Roots, Alliums, Legumes and Brassicas.

A quick mnemonic to help remember the rotation plan, **R.O.L.B.**

The root crops are usually Potatoes, which by the action of sowing, growing and harvesting turn the soil over and prepare it for the next few years. Swedes, turnips and parsnips are included in this group.

The Onions have an anti-bacterial effect on the soil and they 'clean' the ground ready for the next year.

The Legumes have Nitrogen fixing bacteria in their roots, and lastly the Nitrogen hungry Brassicas benefit from all the love and attention lavished on the soil over the previous years and provide you with wonderful vegetables.

This is not a law and you aren't going to have crop failures and blight on your land if you plant the wrong things in the wrong bed. It's a guide of best practice and you should be prepared to break the rules.

### What fits into which groups?

**Roots:** Potatoes, beetroot, carrot, celeriac, celery, Florence fennel, parsley, swede and parsnip.

**Onions:** Onion, garlic, shallot, leek.

**Legumes:** Peas, broad beans. (French and runner beans can be grown wherever there is space).

**Brassicas:** Cabbage, kale, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, kohlrabi, oriental greens, radish, swede and turnips (Swede and turnips are brassicas too - look at the flowers and you can see why, many people think they are roots).

### Below is a basic 3 year standard crop rotation:

Move each section of the plot a step forward every year so that, for example, brassicas follow legumes and onions. Legumes and onions follow potatoes & roots and potatoes & roots follow brassicas.

Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Potatoes & roots	Legumes, onions	Brassicas
Legumes, onions	Brassicas	Potatoes & roots
Brassicas	Potatoes & roots	Legumes, onions

Tomato, pepper and aubergine are part of the potato family, they suffer from fewer problems and can be grown anywhere in rotation.

Certain annual crops such as (courgettes, pumpkins, squashes, marrows), salads (endive, lettuce and chicory) and sweetcorn can be grown wherever convenient, avoiding growing them too often in the same place.

Rhubarb and asparagus do not fit into the rotation.

If you have the space, leaving an area fallow for a season can be very beneficial, it allows the soil to rest and refuel or sow with a green manure.

## Another BIG thank you

Hopefully you have noticed that the plots currently closed off to mare's tail have been cleared to enable the council to progress.

My grateful thanks to the eight hardy souls who gave up a Sunday morning in December to dig, demolish and drag the large amount of non-organic matter from these plots.

This was left behind when plot holders were moved out to other plots at short notice to allow the council to attack the mare's tail.

## Dates for your Diary

**EAA EGM - Wednesday 18th April 2018, 7.30pm**

**Parish Rooms Radstock Lane Earley**

to discuss a proposal to merge with the Huntley & Palmers Horticultural Society.

Followed by **H&P Horticultural Society AGM**

**Green Fair - Saturday 4th August, 10am - 3pm**

Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve

**Annual BBQ, September, exact date TBA**