

March 2020

Issue 10



Chairman's Chatter

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Looking after your soil

Whether you are a new plot holder or very experienced, we all take soil for granted at our peril – we know many people already make great efforts to improve and look after their soil. Just ask anyone who has just expended all the effort involved in spreading a trailer load of manure across their allotment why they think it is worth it.

Worms are an indicator of agricultural soil health, being affected by acidity, water logging, compaction, tillage, rotation and organic matter management. They are the chief engineers of soil structure and consuming leaves and other plant material which they then excrete to undergo finer decomposition by their microbial colleagues.

As they consume organic matter and mineral particles, earthworms excrete wastes in the form of casts, a type of soil aggregate. Charles Darwin calculated that earthworms can move large amounts of soil from the lower strata to the surface and also carry organic matter down into deeper soil layers.

He also established that a large proportion of soil passes through the guts of earthworms, and he calculated that they can turn over the top six inches (15 cm) of soil in ten to twenty years.

Increasing focus on managing soil

Scientists have long known that biodiversity — as much as physical and chemical characteristics like friability and acidity — plays a key role in soil's ability to support plant life, including agricultural crops. But they are still scratching the surface of what makes soil tick. The topic is particularly topical in the UK, where soil health is a key part of the government's new Agriculture Bill that will come in as a result of Brexit.

The bill retains plans to introduce an environment land management scheme (ELM) - agricultural subsidies that reward farmers for providing public goods such as clean water and biodiversity - but stresses the importance of "protecting or improving the quality of soil".

Interestingly it has more to say on soil management than food quality! Watch out for that chlorinated chicken and other "alternative standards" that might be appearing in your shopping basket soon.

Stay safe.

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Coronavirus

Coronavirus

Well I managed to write a Chairman's Chatterings without mentioning Coronavirus but we can't ignore the impact of it.

Information is available from

- * The National allotment Association [here](#) about the measure we should all be taking while taking our daily exercise on the allotment.
- * If you want to reassure yourself that, as of 24th March 2020 it is OK to visit your allotment then the video can be seen here: [Michael Gove](#)

Ctrl + click to follow the links

We all know that allotments are a great way of getting fresh air as well as looking after your physical as well as mental health.

Cookery Corner - Rhubarb crumble cake

If there is an upside to the very wet weather we had in February, it is that your rhubarb is having a very good season.

If you want a tasty, feel good recipe, to use some of that rhubarb we suggest you could try this Rhubarb crumble cake:

Ingredients

250g pack of butter, softened

250g golden caster sugar, plus 1

tblsp

2 tsp vanilla extract

5 large eggs

300g plain flour, plus 7 tblsp

2 tsp baking powder

1 tsp ground cinnamon

300g rhubarb, washed, trimmed and finely sliced

Method

- * Heat oven to 160C/140C fan/gas 3 and grease and line the base and sides of a deep 20cm round cake tin with a little of the butter and baking parchment.

- * Put the butter, 250g sugar and vanilla into a big mixing bowl. Beat until light and fluffy with an electric whisk. Beat in the eggs, one by one, then fold in the 300g flour and baking powder.
- * Spoon out 85g of the batter, and stir the extra 7 tblsp flour and cinnamon into this with a cutlery knife so it becomes crumbly.
- * Fold the rhubarb into the rest of the cake batter and scrape into the prepared tin. Scatter over the crumble mix followed by 1 tblsp sugar.
- * Bake for 1 hr 15 mins, until a skewer poked in comes out clean – you'll need to lay a sheet of foil on top after an hour if the cake is browning too much.
- * Cool for 15 mins in the tin, then finish on a wire rack.



Seasonal Tips—April/May

April

Top tasks for April - with April being a lean month for harvesting but it is a good month to get ahead by sowing seeds indoors or outside in a cold frame.

Harvest the first asparagus of the year along with spring cabbages and cauliflowers, sprouting broccoli and any remaining leeks and kale

Plant second early and maincrop potatoes and the last of your onion sets

Earth up first early potatoes

Prune cherry and plum trees

Sow and plant in April

Carrots, beetroots - most root crops can now be sown outdoors

Courgettes, pumpkins and other squashes - sow indoors ready for planting out next month

French and runner beans - sow a few seeds in pots and keep in a heated greenhouse

Leaf vegetables - spinach, swiss chard can all be sown outdoors now

Leeks and Onions - sow leeks outdoors now

Sweetcorn - has a long growing season so its worth getting a crop off to an early start by sowing seeds in pots indoors

Plant - asparagus crowns, globe artichokes, herbs, peas and broad beans, potatoes, lettuce and other salad leaves

May

Top tasks for May - only transplant tender seedlings when the last chance of frost has gone. harden off any plants grown indoors before planting out and be aware of the possibility of a night time attack from slugs.

Earth up rows of potato plants to ensure tubers underground are not exposed to light

Cover strawberry plants with cloches overnight for an early crop. remove cloches during the day

Protect tender plants against sudden frosts, be ready with cloches and fleece

Net fruit bushes to protect them from birds

Sow or plant in May

Brussels sprouts, summer, autumn and red cabbage plants and cauliflowers - all these plants grow quite large therefore space out well across the plot, don't crowd them

Celery - begin planting out this month

Courgettes, marrows, pumpkins and squashes - plant out in soil that has been enriched with plenty of organic matter.

Globe artichokes - this month is your last chance for propagating artichokes by dividing and taking offsets from established plants

Leeks - May is normally the first month to start transplanting out leek plants

Sweetcorn - start planting out, plant in blocks'

Quick growing veg

Salad leaves: Sowing to harvest: 21 days. Try 'cut and come again' mixed seeds or mix your own, with a mixture of loose-leaf lettuces seed, including 'reds' and oak-leaf types.

Radishes: Sowing to harvest: 25 days. Try 'French Breakfast' or 'Scarlet Globe'

Spinach: Sowing to harvest: 30 days. It's ideally suited to our cool and wet climates, try F1 Amazon seed. Remember to keep soil moist and harvest little and often to prevent bolting.

Carrots: Sowing to harvest: 50 days. Choose a quick-growing finger-sized variety and you can expect sweet, crunchy roots in just six weeks. Sow at least 45cm (18" in old money) or in a bath to help defeat carrot fly. Try Amsterdam Forcing 3

Dwarf green beans: Sowing to harvest: 60 days. Best grown in small blocks, where neighbouring plants provide support. If you are caught out by an unexpected cold snap, cover the plants with fleece until it is warmer.

Try Safari (Kenyan type) or Compass (Haricot Vert type)

Launching Suttons Seeds by Post

The drive to grow is particularly strong at this time of year and we want to be able to support you in doing this. We are offering a Suttons Seeds by Post Service with the usual 25% discount on price. Please see our email with order form and full list of seeds in stock, sent in the last couple of days.

Payment by Bank transfer only: Bank Account 82629309, Sort Code 09 01 51. As the envelope will be a large letter, please add £1 to cover postage.

Here is a sample of the seeds we stock, please see our Email with Full Seeds in Stock.

Name	Variety	Sow	25% Discount Price
Beetroot	Bolthardy	Mar - July	£ 1.30
Beetroot	Globe 2	Apr - July	£ 1.15
Carrot	Amsterdam Forcing 3	Early Jan - July	£ 1.85
Carrot	Autumn King 2 organic	Mar - Jul	£ 1.50
Carrot	Early Nantes 5	Feb-Jul	£ 1.50
Carrot	F1 Resistafly	Mar - Mid Jul	£ 2.10
Courgette	F1 Tarmino	Late Apr - May	£ 1.85
Courgette	Sure, thing hybrid	Apr - May	£ 1.50
Cucumber	F1 Burpless Tasty Green	Apr - May	£ 2.10
Cucumber	Telegraph Improved	Early Feb - May	£ 2.10
Leek	Blue Green Autumn Neptune	Mar - Apr	£ 1.15
Salad Leaves	Lollo Rossa	Mar - Jul	£ 2.10
Salad Leaves	Leaf Salad Winter Mix	Feb-Oct	£ 2.10
Rocket	Dragons Tongue	May - Jul	£ 1.50
Parsnip	Tender & True	Feb - May	£ 1.15
Spinach Perpetual	Perpetual Leaf Beet	Mar - Jul	£ 1.50
Sweet Corn	F1 Swift	Early Apr - May	£ 1.85
Sweet Corn	F1 Earlibird	Early Apr - May	£ 1.85
Sweet Corn	F1 Moonshine	Late Mar - May	£ 3.00
Tomato	Gardener's Delight	Mar - Apr	£ 1.85
Sunflower	Giraffe	Mar - Early June	£ 2.25
Broad Bean	Robin Hood - dwarf	Mar - May	£ 3.00
Dwarf French Bean	Safari (Kenyan Bean)	Apr - Early Jul	£ 2.25
Runner Bean	Enorma	Apr - Jun	£ 2.25
Peas	Early Onward FE	Mar - Jun	£ 2.10
Peas	Hurst Green Shaft SE/M	Mar - Early Jun	£ 2.10
Peas	Kelvedon Wonder	Mar - Early Jul	£ 2.10
Peas	Oregon Sugar Pod MT	Mar - Early Jun	£ 2.10
Peas	Douce Provence	Feb - Jul & Oct - Mid Dec	£ 2.10