

short cold days and long dark nights.....

Winter is a good time to prepare for next spring. Think about ordering seeds and seed potatoes, tidying the shed, cleaning the greenhouse, collecting plastic bottles for mini-cloches, cleaning plant pots, repairing frames, and planning next year's crop rotation.

VEGETABLES

Sow indoors

Lettuce, radishes, round varieties of carrots, spinach, salad onions and turnips. Place on a windowsill or in a propagator.

Plant outside

Garlic cloves, e.g. Thermidrome and Printantor.

Harvest

Jerusalem artichokes, perpetual spinach, brussels sprouts, winter cabbage, savoy cabbage, carrots, celeriac, celery, chicory (non-forcing and forcing varieties), endive, spinach, kohlrabi, lettuce, kale, leeks, parsnip, radish, salsify, scorzonera, swede, turnips

FRUIT

- * Plant rhubarb crowns
- * Cover established rhubarb to force early shoots
- * Cut down canes of autumn-fruiting raspberries post harvest and burn to prevent fungal diseases spreading.
- * Plant bare-rooted fruit trees and bushes this month.
- * Support young trees with stakes and ties.
- * Winter prune young apple and pear trees.
- * Place grease bands around tree trunks to prevent winter moths from climbing trees and laying eggs.



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UK man dies of paraquat poisoning

Thirty six year old Philip Ward, died after getting up in the night and accidentally drinking the weedkiller paraquat from a drinks bottle. Mr Ward had been drinking alcohol and did not realise the bottle was filled with the illegal weedkiller. It had been left by his father, Michael, who had been using it the day before, an inquest heard. He had been using it in the garden on August 5 this year when the telephone rang. He put the weedkiller on the worktop but forgot about it.

The deputy coroner for Derby and South Derbyshire, Louise Pinder, recorded a verdict of accidental death. Paraquat, the active ingredient in many herbicides, is banned in the EU but is available in developing countries and in the US.

Paraquat is one of the most widely used herbicides in the world and in most countries where it is registered it can be used without restriction. But in the developing world paraquat poisonings are commonplace and severe poisonings are fatal. Death is by respiratory failure, there is no antidote and death can take up to a month. There is a strong industry lobby to keep paraquat registered. A 2002 ban on paraquat in Malaysia was overturned in 2006 after pressure from industry.

Paraquat was banned in the UK in 2007 and even storing old bottles is illegal. If you have any bottles or packages of old pesticides your local authority may have dedicated disposal facilities. Look on www.pesticidedisposal.org for a list of disposal facilities provided by UK local authorities.

UK man dies after drinking paraquat from drinks bottle, Aidan Radnedge, Metro 10 December, 2010
For more information on paraquat see <http://www.panap.net/en/p/post/pesticides-info-database/518>



GENERAL TASKS

- * Cover bare ground with leaves, weed cloth, straw (or similar) to prevent soil erosion. Beds to be dug first in spring can be covered with polythene so prevent them from becoming waterlogged and so allowing you to dig them earlier. Don't dig if the soil sticks to boots/tools as it will destroy the soil structure.
- * Collect fallen leaves and store allowing them to break down to form leaf mould, an excellent soil supplement.
- * Collect remaining crop residues or other organic matter and add to the compost heap.
- * Put out bird seed and fat balls for the birds.
- * Cover compost bins to keep the rain out and heat in.
- * Set up water butts to collect rain water from roofs.
- * Remove yellowing leaves from winter brassicas.
- * Check stored crops removing any showing signs of rot.
- * If your pond freezes frogs can be deprived of oxygen. Floating a small ball in it will keep a small area clear.
- * Protect cauliflowers curds by bending their inner leaves over them. This keeps them white and delays their opening.
- * Net winter brassicas to protect them from pigeons.
- * Earth up spring cabbages to protect from high winds.

CROP ROTATION

A technique fundamental to growing healthy crops is that of crop rotation. Many crop plants are related (they are in the same family), and so, are susceptible to attack by similar pests and diseases. The principles of crop rotation require that related crops are planted together in a block on different land each year. This minimises the spread of disease and removes food from pest species reducing their number.

To design a successful crop rotation scheme it is important to know which crops are related. Here is a basic guide.

Solanums	potatoes, tomatoes, peppers
Brassicas	cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, brussels sprouts, radish, turnip
Cucurbits	cucumber, melon, courgettes
Alliums	garlic, leeks, onions
Legumes	peas and beans
Chenopods	beetroot, chard, spinach
Asteraceae	lettuce, artichoke (globe and Jerusalem), chicory, endive, salsify, scorzonera
Apiaceae	carrots, celery, celeriac, fennel, parsley, parsnip

PLOT 1

Solanums, cucurbits in spring, alliums in winter

PLOT 2

Peas and beans

PLOT 4

Apiaceae

PLOT 3

Brassicas, asteraceae

A typical 4-year rotation

Suggested planting for year 1 is indicated in the diagram. Rotate anti-clockwise in each subsequent year.

Rotating crops in allotments can be difficult due to space limitations and the proximity of different blocks in the rotation. Try your best. Winter is a good time to make your crop plan for the coming year.

Make a start controlling garden slugs

Slugs eggs laid in autumn can survive over-winter in the soil. They occur in clusters of around 10 to 30 and appear like small (2-3 mm in diameter) glistening pearls. Destroy any you find while digging.



Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) is an independent non-profit organisation working nationally and globally with individuals and organisations who share our concerns. PAN UK projects enable us to work effectively towards specific targets to enable us to:

- ❖ Eliminate the hazards of pesticides
- ❖ Reduce dependence on pesticides
- ❖ Promote alternatives to pesticides

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