

ANDERSON'S ALMANAC

Pete Anderson has compiled this month by month guide to the jobs that need doing on the allotments.

January

Continue winter digging if conditions permit. Purchase seed potatoes and set them to chit in trays in a light, frost-free position. Order seeds if not done in the autumn. At the end of the month, plant winter broad beans. If rhubarb has become spindly, dig up and replant next month.

February

Prepare ground for seed bed. Remove any weeds from autumn-dug ground. Plant shallots and garlic. Early peas may be sown under cloches or fleece. Prune gooseberries, red and white currants. Towards the end of the month, top-dress around spring greens, gooseberries, and rhubarb if not mulched. Plant rhubarb – give it two to three weeks exposure out of the soil if you are moving it.
To be continued in the next newsletter.....

March

Around the middle of the month, plant first early potatoes, second earlies being planted at the end of the month. The seed bed may be sown around the middle of the month if conditions permit. This includes cabbage, sprouts, broccoli, leeks. Sow in their final growing positions peas, broad beans, onions, radish, parsley, parsnips, spinach, swedes, turnips, beetroots, carrots. Carrots will need protecting from carrot root fly by either a tall barrier around them, or by covering with a mesh tunnel. Both need leaving in position until autumn. In a greenhouse, sow celery and African marigolds for companion planting with brassicas to reduce whitefly in summer. Cut down autumn-fruiting raspberries when new growth appears.

April

Plant maincrop potatoes, bearing in mind that they are not frost hardy and will benefit from being protected by frost when they have sprouted above ground. Any delayed sowings should be made now, e.g. parsnips, which require a ground temperature of 9 degrees before they will germinate. Keep the seed bed weed free. In the greenhouse, around the middle of the month, sow marrow, courgettes, cucumbers for outdoors and outdoor tomatoes, but in all cases check seed packet notes. Prick out the African marigolds into trays, also the celery. Runner beans and dwarf beans may be sown in pots for planting out later after frosts have finished. Sweetcorn can be sown in pots for planting out. Rhubarb may be ready.

May

Potatoes will need earthing up when about 9-12 inches tall. Pea support should be put in place. About the middle of the month, direct sowing of runner beans, French beans, and sweetcorn can be made. Successional sowing of peas, beetroot, lettuce and spinach can be made. Keep checking the seed bed, and when sufficiently advanced, plants may be put in their final position. Check strawberries and remove any runners, and put straw or matting in place to keep the fruit off the ground. Net when the fruit has set. Thin out parsnips.

June

Keep plot weed free by hoeing or hand weeding. Harvest crops when ready. Finish planting out from the seed bed. Plant out all the greenhouse grown plants as frosts have now finished. Water as required, avoiding watering over plants in bright sunlight. Do not water over the leaves of courgettes/marrows as this will encourage mildew. Early potatoes are ready as soon as they are in bloom – but not all varieties bloom! Spray against potato blight and repeat at two week intervals.

July

Keep hoeing and keep harvesting crops as they mature. Shallots and garlic should be lifted and stored. If growing cordon tomatoes, remove side shoots that emerge between the stem and leaf stem. Cut down to ground level summer fruiting raspberries that have finished fruiting. Runner beans should flower this month, water when beans have set. Onions should be starting to die down this month: allow the stems to bend over at the neck and let them die off. Then you can lift the onions, but make sure they dry off before storing them. Sow spring cabbage and turnips, according to vendor's instructions, for winter use. Finish pulling rhubarb.

August

Harvest crops as they are ready, and water in dry weather. A good weekly soak is much better than little and often, except for tomatoes and cucumbers which need to be kept moist at all times. Cucumbers are the one crop that benefit from the leaves being watered over. Finish cutting back summer fruiting raspberries. Cut back blackcurrants after fruiting. Strawberry runners can be planted in pots in situ: once they have rooted they can be cut from the main plant and planted out to form new plants. Strawberry plants need to be renewed every three years to ensure fruit is maximised. Watch out for caterpillars on brassicas from now on.

September

Continue harvesting crops as they mature. Maincrop potatoes should be ready for lifting this month. If the top growth is still green, then cut it off. When the remaining stem has dried, wait 2 weeks to allow the potatoes to harden, and then dig up. Plant out spring cabbage to final position, and thin out turnips. Order manure if required (after the Henley show!).

October

Possibility of frost this month, which will finish off non-hardy plants like runner beans, courgettes, marrows, french beans, tomatoes, cucumbers etc. Early brussel sprouts and leeks may be ready this month. Autumn fruiting raspberries should be harvested, but do not cut these down until spring.

November

Continue winter digging. Harvest crops as required. Remove bean poles and store. New fruit bushes can be planted this month, and cuttings from gooseberries can be taken. Leaves should be swept up, and can be used on the compost heap (but poplar tree leaves should be burnt). Burn any rubbish or plants that have had a virus on a day with no wind. Next season's seed catalogues become available, and order seeds before Christmas to avoid the Christmas mail.

December

Harvest winter vegetables. Continue winter digging if conditions permit; generally this is difficult between mid December and the end of January. In severe weather, protect emerging winter broad beans - these should stand a minimum temperature of -5 degrees. Sit at home on Christmas day and remember all the lovely vegetables and fruit you have harvested over the year with a drink!!!