

GIY Calendar

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January



January

Preparation

If you didn't do so earlier in the winter, spread well-rotted manure or compost over vegetable beds and cover selected areas with cardboard, black plastic or carpet to start warming up the soil. The soil in raised beds will warm two weeks at least before open ground which will make it easier to grow in later in the spring. For those beds which are not covered or for open ground, turn over the soil if the weather is good. Keep off the beds to prevent soil compaction - use timber planks to stand on for access. If you have not already done so order/buy your seeds, spuds and onions. Chit seed potatoes - put them in a container (e.g. used egg carton or empty seed tray) and leave them in a bright warm place.

To do List

Prune fruit trees and bushes if necessary, to improve their shape and remove winter damage to the bushes (it's best to complete this job before Spring when the sap begins to rise).

Consider netting the bushes after pruning (fruit netting can be bought in DIY stores and garden centres - it's worth it unless you want your fruit to become a nice treat for local birds) and dress the ground around with a potash feed (or use wood ash), which encourages fruit growth.

Check the pH of your soil - you can buy a soil pH testing kit in any garden centre. Lime your soil now if required (for acid soils) - ground limestone or crushed chalk are the most common forms. The addition of lime is particularly important in your brassica bed. Scrub seed trays with hot soapy water in preparation for sowing - dirty old seed trays can harbour disease.

Sowing Seeds and Planting Out

Finally, we can sow some seeds. On a sunny windowsill indoors, in a heated greenhouse or on a heating mat: sow celery, globe artichokes, celeriac, leeks, onions, lettuce, tomatoes, peas, aubergines, peppers/chilli-peppers. In polytunnel or greenhouse: beetroot, Brussels sprouts, summer and autumn cabbage, carrots, leeks, lettuce, radish. Outside: Weather permitting you can try planting out broadbeans, spinach, kohlrabi, onion and shallot sets, Jerusalem artichokes, parsnip and early pea varieties. Now is a good time to plant fruit trees and bushes. It's also a great time to start planning a herb garden - get root cuttings of perennial herbs i.e. Mint, Fennel, Thyme etc. from fellow GIYers. Buy seeds for the annual herbs like basil and coriander.

Harvesting - what's in season?

Winter cabbage and cauliflowers, Brussels sprouts, spinach, kale and leeks.

GIY Calendar

February



February

Preparation

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Harvesting - what's in season?

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March



March

Preparation

March is officially the first month of spring. Hurrah! It is a key month in the food grower's garden and the first of three exceptionally busy months for the GIYer. Continue to prepare ground - there is still time to prepare a plot or make a raised bed to grow vegetables this summer. Remove the covering from covered beds that will need to be used for planting in March. Fork or rake over the soil and break up large clods of earth. Avoid treading on the soil. In mild weather you can start to harden off hardier seedlings by moving them outside during the day. Don't forget to bring them back in at night. Don't be fooled by the slight warmth in the air - March can still bring occasional frosts which will cause havoc for some seedlings and plants, such as potato plants. Keep an eye on the weather forecast and cover new seeds with fleece if you think a frost is due. You can buy horticultural fleece in most garden centres.

To do List

Once you sow seeds you need to protect them from your nemesis, the slug. Start your daily slug patrols and lay beer traps.

Don't let new-season weeds take over your plot - now's the time to get on top of them by hoeing. Hoe your entire veggie patch once a week if possible.

Last chance to prune apple trees and perennial herb plants like thyme and mint etc.

Top dress over-wintered crops such as onions, spring cabbage etc.

Use good quality compost or well-rotted chicken manure - this will give the crops a good spring boost.

Sowing Seeds

Always check the individual details on seed packets - more often than not, the information on the back of a seed packet will tell you the vast majority of information you need to know about growing that particular vegetable. Sow indoors on a sunny windowsill or heated greenhouse: lettuce, aubergine, pepper, chilli-pepper, cucumbers, celery, celeriac, fennel, sweet corn, basil, leeks, summer cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, parsley, courgette, French beans. Sow outdoors or under cover: broad beans, red cabbage, carrots cauliflower, spinach, kale, Brussels sprouts, onions, leeks, turnip, peas, radishes, early lettuce, and asparagus. It's worth growing the following flowers because of the benefits they bring to your veggies: calendula (marigold), centaurea (cornflower) and nasturtium. These pretty annuals will help deter aphids and whitefly while attracting beneficial lacewings and ladybirds. Take the pain out of springtime sowing - consider a seed growing group with friends.

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Planting Out

Have you been chitting your spuds? Plant your first early seed potatoes, as soon as weather conditions allow. Paddy's Day traditionally but wait until the soil is warm and weather has improved. Don't worry if that's not until April. Plant asparagus crowns, globe artichokes and Jerusalem Artichoke tubers.

Harvesting - what's in season?

Winter cabbage and cauliflowers, Brussels sprouts, spinach, kale and leeks. March was officially called The Hungry Gap because of the dearth of fresh vegetables. The efficient GIYer thumbs their nose at the notion of a hungry gap and this month is enjoying (from the ground and from storage) onions, leeks, parsnips, potatoes, some varieties of lettuce, mint, sprouting broccoli, kale, rhubarb, chard, the first of the spring cauliflowers and cabbage, and spinach (perpetual, spinach beet). Under cover in the polytunnel or greenhouse you could also be harvesting lettuce, rocket, cauliflower and carrots (ready now from late autumn planting).

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April



Preparation

April is the banker month. No, not those bankers - if poor weather in March has hampered your outdoor work, then April is the month to catch-up. Fork over and rake the soil in preparation for the crops.

To do List

Two words: Weeds. Slugs. You need to stay on top of them both.

Check your early spuds regularly and 'earth-up' as required - this means drawing up soil around the stems to prevent the tubers from going green from sunlight.

Water your tunnel/greenhouse - things can get pretty warm on a nice sunny April day and seedlings will dry out quickly.

As the weather improves, ventilate during the day. Cabbage root fly attack brassicas by laying eggs at the base of plants.

Cut discs of soft material, like carpet underlay and lay flat around the base of the plant.

Depending on the weather, cabbage butterflies will also soon be laying eggs.

Check the undersides of leaves and scrape off eggs before they hatch. You will need to keep this vigilance up in the coming months - collect the caterpillars and feed to hens.

Sowing Seeds

Indoors on a sunny windowsill: lettuce, tomato, pepper, chilli-pepper, cucumber, celery, celeriac, fennel, basil, leeks, cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, parsley, courgette, marrow, globe artichoke. Indoors in small pots for planting outdoors later: beans (dwarf French and climbing French), runner Bean, sweet corn and pumpkin. Outdoors: broad bean, pea, beetroot, cabbage, spinach, Brussels sprouts, parsnip, spring onion, leek, carrot, radish, broccoli, turnip.

Planting Out

Hardening off - seeds raised indoors/under cover, need to be acclimatised outdoors before planting out. Begin by giving the plants less heat and water and more light and air. Bring them outside during daylight hours on good days for at least a week. You can now get your second earlies and maincrop spuds in to the ground. Last chance to plant onion sets until late autumn (when you can sow over-wintering varieties). Plant out cabbage plants when they are 15/20 cm tall into well prepared soil that has been manured. Water the plants well the day before and lift each plant with as big a root ball as possible. Firm the plants in well and water. Plant out tomatoes in to the greenhouse/tunnel soil before the middle of the month. If space is at a premium, use plant pots to grow herbs and strawberries.

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Harvesting - what's in season?

Stored fruit and vegetables are likely to be a distant memory at this stage and new crops are only starting to trickle in which makes April a tricky proposition. The middle of this month might see the first asparagus and the first early spring cabbage. The other two star performers this month are sprouting broccoli and rhubarb. You could also be harvesting leeks, spring cauliflowers, kale, spinach and chard, lettuce, carrots (in polytunnel), radish, spring onions and wild garlic.

Pick huge bundles of tender young nettles - divert around 5oz to the kitchen for a delicious nettle soup and use the rest for an organic fertilizer. Nettles are extremely high in nitrogen so if you soak a large bucketful in water for a week, you produce a brilliant nitrogen-rich fertilizer which will be hugely beneficial for any plants which need leafy growth, for example lettuces, cabbage, kale etc. Put a kilo of nettles in a Hessian bag and soak in 20 litres of water and leave it to stew for a month or so. It gets pretty stink so put a lid on top. Mix one part nettle liquid with ten parts water when applying to plants.

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May



Preparation

Finish preparing remaining beds for early summer sowing. May is the time to get those outdoor beds ready for early summer transplanting. Fork over and rake. Don't tread!

To do List

Earth up potatoes as the plants develop - covering stem with soil encourages potato growth.

Put protective barrier around your carrots to thwart the dastardly carrot root fly.

Regularly hoe weeds and mulch.

Water outdoors if required and also continue your watering and ventilation routine in the polytunnel or greenhouse.

Support tomato plants as they grow and remove the side shoots as they appear (in the angle between the stem and the trusses). As plants start to flower, tap the flowers to spread pollen and improve fruiting.

Be vigilant for pests and diseases (e.g. carrot root fly, aphids, caterpillars, rabbits, slugs and snails).

Support your pea and bean plants - twiggy sticks, pea netting, timber supports with chicken wire, or existing fence or hedge.

Pinch out the growing tips of broad beans plants to help prevent Blackfly.

Sowing Seeds

May is the last chance to catch up on seed sowing. It's a good month for sowing, especially if you get the seeds in before the middle of the month and many of the crops you sow in May will catch up with seeds sown in earlier months.

Indoors for planting on later: basil, dill, coriander, courgette, cucumber, sweet corn, melon, pumpkins, marrow, summer savory (great companion herb for growing and cooking with Broad Beans).

Outdoors: winter cauliflower, cabbage, kale, spinach, sprouting broccoli, leeks, beans (French, Runner, Climbing French), beetroot, parsnip, turnip, swedes, radish, lettuce, peas, broccoli, rocket, carrots. You could also try an extra harvest of early spuds by planting an additional row wherever you can accommodate them.

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Planting Out

Harden off and begin to plant out seedlings you have lovingly raised indoors - e.g. tomatoes, cucumber, peppers, chilli-pepper, celery, celeriac, brussels sprouts, sprouting broccoli, cabbages, sweet corn, leeks. Sweet potatoes - not related to the humble spud (and therefore not susceptible to blight!) they prefer a sandy soil and do not like a rich soil. They must be harvested before the first frosts in winter and like pumpkins, left to dry for about ten days in the sun before storage.

Harvesting - what's in season?

May is another tricky "gap" month as stores continue to dwindle. You may however start getting some new spuds, particularly if you sowed an early crop in the polytunnel back in February. Continue picking asparagus, radish, rhubarb, cabbage, cauliflower, spinach and chard. May is likely to see the first real bumper salad leaves like lettuce and rocket - as well as the first garlic, beetroot and globe artichokes. The end of this month sees the first of the real (i.e. out-doored reared, grass fed) spring lambs.

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June



Preparation and To do List

Watering and weeding duties step up a notch - the tunnel/greenhouse in particular will require a good deal of water from now on. Watch the weather and water outside as required. Water in the morning if possible. Add a good dressing of mulch around plants to reduce moisture loss and keep down weeds. Continue to earth-up potato plants to prevent the spuds becoming green. It's time to get really seriously vigilant with your tomato plants - mulch, water and continue to remove side shoots that appear in the leaf axils. Train the plants carefully on strings or strong canes. If gooseberry and red current bushes are very leafy, start summer pruning by shortening back the new growth. Tie up beans and peas to stop them falling over - mature pea plants become like a canopy and could take off in the wind, bound for next door's garden. Stake everything that grows tall - raspberries, peas, beans, tomatoes etc. Net soft fruit against birds - it's worth the effort. They will eat your entire crop practically overnight if you let them. Thin beetroot in rows to single plants - for large roots space about 10 cm apart - for mini-beets space at 3 cm. Eat the leaves in salads - but sparingly.

Sowing Seeds

Remaining sowing can most likely be done outside. Sow courgettes, pumpkins, summer and winter squash, fennel, chicory. Succession sowing is vitally important to keep a regular supply of produce coming. So continue sowing: beans (French and Runner), kale, pea, spinach, spinach beet, summer broccoli, carrot, swede, leek, lettuce, Brussels sprouts, beetroot, chicory, endive, turnip, kohlrabi, fennel. Sow Parsley now to provide a late supply in Autumn and some of the plants can then be lifted, potted and brought indoors for Winter use.

Planting Out

It's time to plant out pretty much anything else which has been raised indoors or undercover and needs transplanting, e.g. leeks, Brussels Sprouts, cabbage, autumn cauliflower, calabrese, sprouting broccoli, celery, celeriac, cucumbers, pumpkin, courgettes, marrows, runner beans, aubergine.

Harvesting - what's in season?

June is a busy month for the GIYer but it's also the month when we really start to see some payback - the first broad beans and peas as well as new potatoes, new carrots, soft fruit like gooseberries, cherries and strawberries. You may even see the first tomato (but more likely in July). Herbs are in full flow. Harvest broad beans, peas, kohlrabi, cabbage, cauliflower (month end), spinach, spring onion, shallots, salad leaves, elderflower, rhubarb, salad leaves, onions, carrots, beetroot, garlic, sea-kale.

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July



Preparation and To do List

Any ground that has finished cropping must be quickly cleared away to take more vegetables - this is the essence of a productive veggie patch.

Write down your successes and failures - make a note of when things were sowed, transplanted, harvested etc. These records will be invaluable for next year. GIYers have great plans but poor memories!

Use your produce - eat it, freeze it, process it, exchange it, give it away. Do not let it rot in the ground or end up on the compost heap.

Continue to water and feed plants and practice good weed control.

Continue to pinch outside shoots on your tomato plants and remove the lower leaves.

Earth up brassicas such as Brussels sprouts - these plants will grow tall and require a good deal of support.

Prune raspberries and gooseberries when they have finished fruiting and apply a mulch. Cut down legume plants that have finished cropping and compost them. Leave the roots in the soil as they fix nitrogen in the soil.

Keep an eye on the blight forecast and spray potatoes if required.

Sowing Seeds

Continue successional sowings and use quick maturing varieties for autumn use – Swiss chard, lettuce, rocket, salad onions, radish, turnips, peas, French Beans (dwarf), carrots (Amsterdam forcing is a good variety for late summer sowing).

Sow for winter use (yes you read that correctly - it's time to start thinking about growing things that will crop in winter) - spring cabbage. Hungry Gap kale, parsley, perpetual spinach, chicory and coriander.

Planting Out

Anything left in pots!

Harvesting - what's in season?

July is a peak month for produce - enjoy it!

Pick early and often as some vegetables stop producing if not continually picked.

First crops of French and runner beans, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, courgette and aubergine, marrows, beetroot, globe artichokes.

Continue to harvest new potatoes, calabrese, cauliflower, cabbage, spinach, carrots, turnips, shallots, garlic, radish, spring onions, salad crops, strawberries, raspberries, tayberries, currents (black, red and white), gooseberries, loganberries, peas, broad beans.

Ask yourself - do you really need to go to the supermarket?!

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August



August

Preparation

Green manures are plants which are grown specifically to improve soil fertility and useful at times when beds are empty (as is often the case in August). Grow directly in the bed and then cut down and dig in to the soil, improving the soil structure and nutrient level as well as preventing the leaching of nutrients. Green manures include mustard, buckwheat, radish, rye, alfalfa, clover and vetches.

To do List

Give pumpkins plenty of water and apply a high-potash liquid feed.

Nip out the growing points to encourage the fruits to swell. Put something under fruits if they are resting on soil to prevent the underside from rotting.

Cut back any herbs that have finished flowering to encourage fresh growth.

Continued vigilance is required with your brassicas. Netting the plants is the most effective way of keeping butterflies and the cabbage moth away. Lift the netting regularly and remove eggs and caterpillars from leaves.

Keep weeding - in particular; don't allow weeds to go to seed as they will produce lots and lots of other weeds!!

Keep watering - mulch around plants to retain moisture in really hot weather. Keep an eye on your apple and other fruit trees - prune if they have made too much new growth.

Sowing Seeds and Planting Out

Continue succession sowing. Sow spring cabbage, red cabbage, winter spinach, salad onions (in polytunnel for spring crop), autumn salad mix, endive, parsley, onion seed, Chinese vegetables. Plant strawberries now for a good crop next June. Propagate rosemary, sage and mint from cuttings now.

Harvesting - what's in season?

August is truly a month of plenty in the garden so enjoy! As vegetables and soft fruits continue, they are joined at the end of this month by tree fruits like apple and plum. Pick Beetroot regularly as they reach the size you require - if left to grow too large they will lose their tenderness. Each sweet corn plants will produce two beautiful yellow cobs. Pick them as soon as the 'tassels' wither to brown and when a creamy liquid squirts out of the grains when you squeeze. Cook immediately.

Continue to harvest beetroot, tomatoes, carrots, cabbage, cauliflower, peas, broad beans, french and runner beans, salad leaves, radish, turnip, potato, onions, peppers and chilli-peppers, aubergine, globe artichoke, courgettes, cucumber, gooseberries, raspberries and currants. With the abundance of fresh produce, consider storing some for winter use, e.g. freeze, make pickles and chutneys from onions, cauliflower, green beans, tomatoes, cucumber, apples, plums. Make special vinegars from excess herbs, onions, chilli-peppers and garlic. Make jams, curds and jellies from strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, gooseberries, currents (Red/White/Black), beetroot and mint.

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September



September

Preparation

Lift crops which have finished growing and remove weeds from empty ground. Dress "bare" soil with manure, compost or plant green manures. If your compost heap is ready, empty out to make way for new material. If not turn it over every few weeks to improve the decomposition rate. If you want to put in new fruit trees/bushes this autumn, this is a good time to start researching and preparing ground for planting in Oct/Nov.

To do List

Wasps can be a real problem as fruit ripens. Wasp traps made from jars of sugary water or leftover marmalade/jam jars are effective.

Pick up any windfalls or damaged fruit as it attracts wasps.

Continue to water pumpkins and winter squash plants which are still growing until end of month.

French Bean pods are too tough to eat now so you can leave the pods on the plants to seed - save for next year.

Remove old canes of summer raspberries once they have finished fruiting.

Continue to water regularly but be careful not to over water the foliage of tomato, aubergine, pepper and chilli-pepper plants as it could encourage grey mould.

Give a good soak once a week to celery, celeriac, marrows, courgettes, pumpkin, runner bean and leeks.

Start removing surplus leaves from your tomato plants which allows air to circulate around the plants and sunshine to fall on the fruit (which helps them to ripen).

Continue to check for pests and diseases in the greenhouse/polytunnel and in the garden.

As the nights cool down, close up your greenhouse or polytunnel earlier to preserve heat.

As the stems of asparagus begin to yellow, cut them back to 10cm high.

It's a busy time in the kitchen converting that hard-won harvest into fuel for the winter - make soups, jams, chutneys; freeze, dry and store. Do not put excess veggies on the compost heap!

Sowing Seeds and Planting Out

Last month for sowing perpetual spinach and oriental salads - they will be really worth it in the New Year when there's almost nothing else to eat, so get sowing! In the polytunnel/greenhouse sow lettuce, mustard, cress, basil, coriander, parsley, radish, dwarf early pea (e.g. 'Feltham First'), broadbean, cauliflower (seed, for planting next spring) rocket, chicory, onion seed and garlic.

Outside sow white turnip seeds which will crop around Christmas, and autumn onion sets, e.g. 'centurion' and 'sturon'. Plant out strawberry runners as early as possible this month. Pot up some strong parsley plants in a large pot for winter use. Spring cabbage plants can be put in this month, in a sunny spot. Woody herbs such as sage, rosemary and thyme often root where their stems touch

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the soil - separate these out and plant to give them time to establish before growth stops for the winter.

Harvesting - what's in season?

Summer vegetables and fruit are joined by those more traditionally associated with autumn/winter, e.g. parsnips, swedes and celeriac. Lift your onions once the foliage withers and dies - leave them to dry out in the sun or in the polytunnel/greenhouse (but eat a few immediately to savour the taste). The great autumn tree fruits - apples, plums, pears - are now ripe. Pears should be picked when ripe and then stored for several weeks before eating. Continue to harvest salad leaves, tomatoes, shallots, radish, potatoes, carrots, turnips, beetroots, cauliflower, cucumbers, peppers and chilli-peppers, french and runner beans, courgettes, spinach, leeks, red cabbage, summer cabbage, aubergine, sweet corn. Go blackberry picking!.

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October



October

Preparation

Pot up herbs so that they can be grown inside for use during winter. Continue to lift crops that have finished harvesting and clean up the beds. By now, green manures sown in late summer will be ready to be dug in to the soil. You can also sow over-wintering green manures now. Try and find a good source of farmyard manure if you don't have your own - cow, horse, pig, sheep and chicken manure are great sources of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. If you are going to cover empty beds down with manure for the winter, the earlier you do it the better. October/early November is ideal.

To do List

Pull up crops which have finished harvesting and compost.

Plant fruit trees and bushes.

Tidy away canes and supports that you used for your peas, beans etc and you should be able to use them next year. Leave them in the ground or throw them in a corner, and you probably won't.

If you have a pond, stretch a piece of netting over it to keep leaves out.

Start collecting leaves for leaf mould.

Start storing vegetables like carrots and beets - only store perfect specimens. Try process the rest.

Check apples regularly to see if they are ripe - early ripening apples generally don't store that well.

Cut autumn fruiting raspberry canes down to the ground.

Sowing Seeds and Planting Out

You can sow hardy varieties of peas and broad beans later this month for an early spring crop but only do so in well-drained soil. In the polytunnel get a crop of cauliflower and carrots going over the winter. Plant selected varieties of garlic and winter onion sets. The former will benefit from a good frost so it's traditional to plant before Christmas.

Harvesting - what's in season?

Depending on the weather, the harvest may well continue in to October - it's also a month when you are still harvesting many of the great autumn fruit and vegetables - pumpkins, squashes, courgette, apples, pears etc. It's the last hurrah however for peas, French and runner beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, peppers and chilli-peppers. Continue to harvest wild mushrooms, elderberry, blackberries, apples, sloes, pears, peas, French and runner beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, peppers, chilli-peppers, carrots, parsnips, swedes, celeriac, turnip, beetroot, potatoes, celery, marrows, pumpkins, squash, leeks, cabbage. Your root crops like carrots, parsnips, swedes, celeriac, turnips and beetroots, as well as your main crop potatoes should still be thriving. You can leave these in the ground for another while yet and use them as you need them, or lift and store if you prefer. Start to fall back in love again with old winter reliables such as chard and spinach. They will shortly become your very best friends.

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November



November

Preparation

Thoughts really are now starting to turn to next year's growing. If you are planning to cover down your beds for the winter (which will keep the worst of the bad weather off them, suppress weeds and prevent the rain from leaching nutrients from the soil), you need to get working on it. It's also a good time to prepare new ground for spring. Buy yourself a good spade.

Or alternatively try cutting back the grass, then cover the area with about five layers of newspaper and then a layer of compost. Next Spring you should be able to dig straight into this new patch and prepare it for planting. Start investigating seed catalogues for next year.

To do List

'Earth up' vegetables that will be buffeted by the winds and storms over the winter such as cabbage, cauliflower and particularly Brussels sprouts.

Tie Brussels sprouts and sprouting broccoli to canes and apply mulch. Continue to tidy up beds, removing crops, digging in green manures etc.

Divide up your rhubarb if you want to propagate and cover it with a thick mulch of manure.

If you grow perennial herbs outside, it's a good idea to move them to a sheltered spot.

Continue to weed ground dug over since a crop has been removed - they say "one years seeding is seven years a weeding"!

Prune apple trees - you are aiming for a goblet-shaped open tree. Prune any crossed and damaged branches, and those that are growing in towards the centre of the tree. The key is to improve circulation of air around the tree. Don't over prune as this will mean much leafy growth next year and little fruit.

Mulch raspberries, loganberry and tayberry plants if you haven't already done so.

Take cuttings of currant bushes from current season's wood. Cutting should be 25cm long.

Sowing Seeds and Planting Out

As per last month's calendar you can sow broad beans outside now for an early crop next spring. It's important to use over-winter varieties such as 'Aquadulce'. To avoid broad beans seeds rotting before germination, make small newspaper cups and germinate them indoors first. The polytunnel/greenhouse has its own microclimate - continue to sow carrots, red cabbage, rocket, mixed salad leaves, lambs lettuce, perpetual spinach. Next summer's garlic does best if it's planted before Christmas - plant outdoors in well prepared soil in a sunny spot. Some varieties of onion seeds and sets can over-winter and will be ready to harvest in early summer. Again choose a well drained soil, otherwise they will rot. Keep an eye on them for frost heave.

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Harvesting - what's in season?

Early frosts can kill off tender vegetables but you can continue to harvest perpetual spinach, cabbage, cauliflower, potatoes, swede, parsnips, apples, pears. Start harvesting leeks (very tasty if cut really fine and sauteed in some butter), winter cabbage, kale, artichokes, Brussels sprouts. Time to lift carrots and turnips or at least cover them with a good layer of straw to keep them warm.

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December



December

Preparation

Continue digging over cleared vegetable beds and adding well-rotted compost or manure. Get Educated - book yourself on a course over the winter! Start a Gardening Diary (gardeners have great plans but bad memories). Start planning what you would like to grow next year including at least one previously untried vegetable. Work out what crop rotation system you are going to use. Study and compare the various seed catalogues carefully before deciding on the best varieties to grow to suit your needs. Start a Compost corner or heap. If you don't already have one, plan a fruit garden/area to include at the very least some soft fruit like raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries and currants; and some fruit trees like apple, plum and pear.

To do List

Good garden hygiene helps greatly in the prevention of disease carry-over from one year to the next so remove yellowing leaves from any crops remaining and rake up fallen leaves.

Slugs are a problem year round so slug control remains a necessity (though actual slug patrols probably don't).

It's particularly important to keep them in check in the polytunnel or greenhouse.

Mice can be a problem at this time of the year and crops sown in the ground like broad beans, garlic etc can be vulnerable. Protect them under cloches.

It's a good time of the year to add lime to your beds (particularly the ones that will take brassicas next year), so buy a pH testing kit if you don't already have one, and test your soil.

Keep an eye on your stored veggies and discard anything that's rotting.

Do interesting things with leaves! Store in bags to make leaf mould or use as cover for bare soil (keep weeds down and prevents drying out).

Sowing Seeds and Planting Out

If you haven't already done so plant garlic - it should be in the soil by the shortest day of the year. Bring herbs like mint, chives, lemon balm, parsley, thyme indoors by lifting and potting them up. Chicory can be forced - dig up the roots, pot them up and place them in a dark warm place. The chicons should appear in about a month..

Harvesting - what's in season?

In general terms it's back to winter vegetables (and stores, if you have them) but you can try bucking the seasonal trend by continuing to harvest winter salad leaves (if you were canny enough to plant them!) like corn salad, land cress and mizuna. You should still have at least some produce left in the December garden for example, winter cabbages, Brussels sprouts (of course), leeks, kale, Jerusalem artichokes, carrots, celery, turnips, parsnips, winter cauliflowers, swedes and celeriac. Continue to harvest spinach and chard, and from your stores you can enjoy pumpkins and squashes, potatoes, onions, apples, beetroot and garlic. Happy Christmas!