

Avon Mill Garden Centre

'The kitchen garden'

cultivate your kitchen plot with Jo Stopher



March

■ Outside

Finish digging or preparing soil, ensure all perennial weeds are gone. Hoe through any annual weed growth.

Start to cover beds with fleece, black plastic or cloches to warm up the soil. Do not cover soil if frosty.

Cover a crown of rhubarb with a forcing pot or a bucket & insulate with straw to get a crop of sweet, pink, early tender shoots. The shoots grow in the dark.

Feed cabbage & other brassicas still cropping in the garden with quick nitrogen fix eg pelleted chicken manure.

Start to plant onion sets in prepared ground, put bird scaring device around sets to deter them from pulling the bulbs out of ground.

Plant out early potatoes if conditions are right.

Sow parsnips now instead of February when it is often too cold. Use fresh seed every year to get successful germination.

■ Indoors

Chit potatoes in warm dry place if not already done so in Jan/Feb.

Grow early potatoes in bags or pots for very early crop

Sow in cells, trays & pots – tomatoes, carrots, beetroot, broad beans (if not sown outside previous autumn), spring onions, radish, cauliflowers, summer cabbage, spinach, chard, leeks, lettuce, peas. Sow early varieties where

available as they will germinate quicker. Sow half rows or trays & then sow next batch of same varieties in two-three weeks.

Sow peas in lengths of plastic guttering & suspend in shed or greenhouse to deter mice.

In greenhouse or tunnel check for signs of mice, white fly, spider mite & deal with them! Start to ventilate on warm days.

Be prepared to cover up seedlings etc. on cold, frosty nights with fleece or use empty plastic containers or bottles as mini cloches

Successional sow the seeds which were sown earlier or buy plug plants to harden off to plant outside next month.

Sow herbs in pots directly where they are to grow or in cells for transplanting – basil, parsley, dill, coriander, fennel etc. Never sow or plant dill & fennel together. Split mint plants put some in green house for forcing early. Make new mint cuttings in cells.

April

■ Outside

NB Be guided by the weather, only sow or plant if the conditions are favourable, it is better to wait until the weather is right, than sow/plant early & lose those plants.

Keep hoeing prepared ground to keep annual weeds under control & to improve the tilth of the soil.

Plant out onions sets & shallots.

Continued overleaf

Plant out 2nd early & main crop potatoes. Reduce shoots on main crop to 3 or 4 to get bigger potatoes. Start to earth up new potatoes.

Give broad beans sown outside last autumn a potash feed to deter 'chocolate spot'. Wood ash is perfect sprinkled around the new plants. Also surround with prickly cuttings to deter mice & be prepared to cover new shoots at night with fleece if frost is forecast.

Sow outside, the same types of seeds sown inside last month. This will give you the third succession. Change varieties to suit time of year. Cover with cloches or fleece if needed.

Broadcast a small patch of mixed salad & endive leaves mixed with rocket which can be 'cut & come again' throughout the summer for small leaf salads.

Plant out brassicas with a collar around to deter cabbage fly. Use enviromesh cloches to deter cabbage white butterflies

Sow carrots mixed with spring onion seed the scent of the onion confuses the carrot fly. Also sow early and cover with fleece and tuck into soil or surround rows with clear plastic barrier 12" high to stop the fly from getting to the carrots. If still a problem with later sowings use an enviromesh cloche to grow carrots under.

Start to plant out cell grown seedlings when hardened off. Protect at night for first week if possible or use cloches to start them off.

Plant out early peas & put up supports either twigs or netting. Plant a few sweet peas in with your peas to attract insects.

Sow seeds of salad type plants e.g. lettuce, rocket, radish on a regular basis throughout the summer to get a succession. Plant these as a fast growing catch crop between slower growing plants.

Prepare trenches and pits for beans. Put in newspaper in the bottom to hold moisture. Over a couple of weeks put your veg trimmings, deadheads, well-rotted manure in the open trench. By the end of the month finish off with some fresh compost, firm ground ready for planting french & runner beans etc.

Make a variety of frames or wigwams or even arches over two beds for climbing vegetables to scramble over.

Make your vegetable garden attractive not just to insects but birds & humans as well. A few Sunflower plants dotted around will be loved by all. Let the children and grandchildren help. Give them their own patch to look after. They will delight in eating their very own vegetables.

■ Indoors

Sow Sweet Corn in deep modular trays.

Sow climbing nasturtiums & Morning Glory to plant in the greenhouse or tunnel or in the veg garden over arches with runner beans or with beans on frames or wigwams. These will attract beneficial insects for pollination and will also attract cabbage white butterflies who will lay their eggs on the nasturtiums instead of your cabbage. It also makes the vegetable garden look interesting.

Sow another batch of herbs in pots, you can never have too many.

Sow single cells of courgettes, marrows, aubergine, chillies, summer and winter squash, pumpkin, cucumber etc.

Sow deep cells of different types of beans.

If you did not sow Tomatoes earlier in the year or any other vegetables buy plug plants now for the greenhouse or garden. Keep in doors for a week and then harden off all plants prior to planting outside.

Prepare & plant the tunnel or green house with all indoor summer crops. Plant amongst the crops small french marigolds (tagetes) to deter white fly and the poached egg plant (*limnanthes douglasii*) to attract bees & hover flies etc.

Encourage toads into the tunnel or greenhouse – put in quiet corners some terracotta pots on their sides or a large stone securely propped up so the toads can live underneath in the day & spend the night devouring your slugs! ■

Happy growing, and eating!