

05/01/04 - Jobs for the month (May 2004)

1. The rain has given the grass a great spurt of growth and it's a battle now for control. Once it reaches the length where it lays over, it is twice as hard to mow or strim. If you've got the strimmer or mower out why not check whether your neighbour needs help?
2. All newcomers are advised to clear and dig as much as possible so that when the compost arrives you can add it to make your soil more fertile and easier to work. Remember that the basic soil type on our site is clay. It will grow good crops, but as the season advances and the ground dries out, undug
3. At the moment, with the rain, the clay exhibits its other natural form which resembles plasticine. If you are planting, remember that your weight will compact the soil so use a board if possible to distribute the load. When you are finished, working backwards, use a small rake/fork to remove your footprints and leave the surface even.
4. Many plot holders are planting sweet corn, beans, courgettes and even tomatoes. Don't be discouraged if they look poorly. They won't really thrive until it warms up a bit. If a frost is forecast, you'll need to give them some protection!
5. There are lots of plots with potatoes showing through. We still could get a frost but most potatoes can survive a slight touch of frostbite.
6. On our site, with its large population of resident slugs, it's good to use a potato with some resistance to slugs. (I guess this just means they find some less to their taste). First earlies Sharps Express and Accent are fairly unattractive to our slimy friends. Second earlies Kestrel, Yukon Gold and Maincrop Spey, Nicola and Majestic are also not slug favourites.
7. Any trailing cane fruit such as loganberries, tayberries, balckberries etc. should have had their number of canes reduced and securely tied in. If you don't thin out the number of new shoots you will get a crop of berries larger in number but smaller in size. Doesn't make for efficient picking! Boysenberries are particularly prone to producing far more canes than required. Harden your heart and cut them out!
8. Check your blackcurrants for big bud. Pick these monstrosities off and destroy them. They contain a small insect which spreads a virus through your bush and reduces the yield drastically.
9. If you are planning to grow the super sweet varieties of sweet corn, remember that they are more difficult to germinate. They have extra sugar which lowers the starch content. This starch is needed for

germination. Wait till the weather warms up or give them extra heat onto the seedtray.

10. Our site is rich in wildlife and we love it on the whole. Remember our many little squirrel friends and their grounded cousins, the mice, when planting beans, corn or peas directly into the soil. You may arrive next visit to find a row of little holes with no thank you note for the free food. It is extra trouble to germinate these in a seed tray in safety, but they do transplant well and it saves on Kleenex and buying more seed!

11. All the small seeds can be planted now - carrots, parsnips, beetroot, spring onions etc. You need the soil to be friable (crumbly) so it can be brought to a fine tilth. The soil on the lower allotments is too wet at the moment, but there's plenty of time!

12. It's not too late to plant onion and shallot sets. If you've been keeping off your wet soil to avoid compaction, don't despair. It can't keep raining! Can it?

13. Similarly there's plenty of time for potatoes to go in. Don't worry if they've got shoots. They'll survive! This is one tough vege until it gets to blight time of year!(which isn't yet)

14. If you're planting brassicas (cabbage family), you could put some lime on the soil as they like it. Lime will also make clay more friable, as will compost, but don't put them in together.

15. If you're new and you'd like some of your neighbours rhubarb, just ask.

16. Remember, your plot is 10 rods. This is an old Imperial Measure which doesn't easily translate into metric. Let's just say it's a big piece of land. You have plenty of room, so give your plants a fair go and space them out. You have to try to think of their full grown size and the fact that you have to move among them. If you allow for this when planting out, your spacing will look ridiculously generous. This means you've got it about right!

17. This is a great time of year to have an allotment so let's all enjoy it. If you need a plot plan giving your neighbour's names, or would like help, or introductions email WASHA (click on the Contact Us section).