

STAA Newsletter April 2021

Hello all Sheet and Tilmore Allotmenters,

After a horrible Jan & Feb, the weather has started to pick up and everything is busy again. Leeks are still being harvested, onions and broad beans growing and potatoes are mostly in. It will soon be time to get that hoe out again. Though I was recently planting my potatoes in the snow when half an hour earlier I'd had to take my jumper off as it was too hot – so who knows what the weather will do this year.

If you are not a member of STAA (£5) then you won't be benefitting from all the stock available from Abi at the Shed on Mill Lane, Sheet, half price seeds from Kings Seeds in November; a 10% discount from Southern Fruit Trees; public liability for your plot and other wonderful things. See website for details. <http://sheetandtilmore.weebly.com/>

Every year prizes are awarded for Best Newcomer (entry mandatory), and best kept plots (entry voluntary). Now come on – it's a £50 CASH first prize, £20 and £10 shed vouchers for 2nd and 3rd place respectively. But you have to be *in it to win it*. So do enter – just contact the membership secretary David Mogg.

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To contact any member of the Committee please follow this link:

<https://sheetandtilmore.weebly.com/the-committee.html>

SECRETARY VACANCY

This year we have a vacancy for the position of Secretary. So if you would like to join our vibrant team then please contact a member of the committee. The role of the secretary is on the website and the link is:

https://sheetandtilmore.weebly.com/uploads/9/3/7/1/93717838/secretary_roles_responsibilites_2017.pdf

RHS Sowing and planting advice April/May/June

APRIL	MAY	JUNE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal time to plant pot-grown fruit trees and bushes. • Chit and plant out second early potatoes in the first half of the month, main crop potatoes in the second half. • Sow seed outdoors for beetroot, carrots, Swiss chard, summer cauliflower, kohlrabi, lettuce, leeks, radish, turnip, spring and pickling onions, peas and perpetual spinach in well-prepared soil. • Try sowing unusual vegetables such as salsify, Hamburg parsley, or scorzonera. • Sow seed indoors of marrows, courgettes, pumpkins and squash. Also sweet peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, celery, celeriac, salads and globe artichokes. • In very mild areas sow dwarf French beans and sweet corn outside under cloches or fleece at the end of April. In cooler areas wait until May. • Sow a seedbed of brassicas to provide transplants of sprouting broccoli, cauliflowers and cabbages for planting out in June or July. • Transplant broad beans grown in pots. • Plant shallots, onion sets and garlic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant out alpine strawberry seedlings sown in early spring. • Sow French beans, runner beans, squash, cucumbers and pumpkin seeds directly into prepared beds outside. Be alert to late frosts (for which a covering of horticultural fleece should provide sufficient protection). • Sow sweet corn outside in blocks, at least 45cm (18in) spacing, with two seeds per hole. The strongest seedling can be selected later. • Sow cauliflowers and purple sprouting broccoli for harvesting next winter. • Try sowing some unusual vegetables such as kohlrabi (like a large white above-ground turnip), scorzonera and salsify. • Witloof chicory can be sown this month, to have some ready for forcing next winter. Sow in drills directly outside. • After all risk of frost has passed, plant out tomatoes, courgettes and pumpkins that were previously sown under cover. • Other young plants can be planted out once conditions are suitable, and once they've been hardened off (acclimatised to the colder outdoor conditions) for 10 to 14 days. • Brussels sprouts for next winter should now 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transplant outdoor melons under cloches, pinching out the growing point. • Move forced strawberries outdoors. • Continue sowing salad crops, such as beetroot, Chinese cabbage, pak choi and radish. Leafy salad crops may do better when sown in partially shady sites since hot dry weather can lead to bitter tasting leaves. • Sow French, runner and broad beans, peas, squash, sweetcorn, and outdoor cucumbers directly into prepared beds outside. • French beans are best sown in traditional rows, 45cm (18in) apart, at 15-22cm (6-9in) spacing. • Sweet corn works best planted in blocks, at least 45cm (18in) spacing, with two seeds per hole. Any seeds sown earlier under cover can now be planted out into the same block pattern. Sow before mid June and only in southern districts. • Runner beans need well-prepared ground and suitable supports (often a frame or wigwam of bamboo canes tied together with twine) for the shoots to twine around and grow upwards. • Courgettes, marrows and pumpkins can still be sown outdoors in early June in southern districts. • Although most winter brassicas need to be

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant Jerusalem artichoke tubers. • Plant asparagus crowns. • Pot up tomato seedlings when they develop true leaves above the more rounded seed leaves. 	<p>be ready for transplanting after early or mid-spring sowing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant out artichokes that were previously sown under cover. • Self-blanching celery can also be planted out towards the end of the month. • Ridge cucumbers can be sown indoors now, for planting out in early June. 	<p>sown earlier in the season, Calabrese, turnips and kohlrabi can be sown now for an autumn crop.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start treating potatoes and tomatoes against blight. • Celeriac and celery can be planted out early this month. A well-prepared site with lots of organic matter dug in is essential. • Outdoor ridge cucumbers can be planted out early this month. They benefit from a site that has been enriched with lots of organic matter to help retain water. • Plant vegetables sown indoors earlier in the season, including winter brassicas and sweet peppers. Peppers can only be planted out when all risk of frost has passed, and ideally beneath cloches. • Gaps between winter brassica plants can be used for quick-maturing catch crops, perhaps radishes or gem lettuces. • Plant out artichokes that were previously sown under cover. They can be grown as perennials (in which case they need 90cm spacing), or as biennials (45cm spacing is sufficient).
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Lifted from <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/in-month/april> etc.

BUY YOUR SEEDS AT 50% DISCOUNT

Well, if that headline grabbed your attention I'm afraid that for this season at least you are too late, but save that thought and be ready for next autumn, when we will hope once again to provide you with a tantalising catalogue & offer you the chance to buy your seeds from Kings at half price.

Many of you again took the opportunity to pore over tempting pictures of lovely vegetables and flowers as you perused the last catalogue in the warmth & comfort of your own homes during late autumn & early winter, imagining next season's growing on your allotment.

Our orders were sent off earlier than usual this year, but Kings were unfortunately unable to provide us with their usual quick turnaround of orders & warned us immediately that allotment association orders were taking 8 weeks to fulfil. Well, at least we were forewarned, and the generous discount & ease of ordering without travelling to a garden centre probably outweighed the minor inconvenience for some of not having their seeds quite as early as they would have liked.

Covid & the need for social distancing measures certainly caused the company some problems this year, but I have appreciated your patience & understanding in difficult times and now all orders are complete, with raspberry cane orders finally delivered at the end of March.

We have all appreciated being able to escape the confines of our homes during yet another lockdown to visit our allotments and plan the next season's growing. Last summer it was a real joy to walk around & see the plots bursting with produce & flowers & judging by the size of orders sent to Kings this year we are due for another such treat. Happy growing!

Ros Smith

The SHED at Mill Lane, Sheet

The majority of SHED products stocked are now organic, including the specialist fertilisers. We are moving towards peat free composts, so please do visit and treat your plots to a few bits and pieces. Everything we sell is roughly cost price and represents excellent value.

The SHED is open on Sunday mornings from 10 to 12pm on the following dates:
April 18th, May 2nd, 9th, 16th and 23rd

A full list of stock and prices and details of where we are can be found on the STAA website. <https://sheetandtilmore.weebly.com/trading.html>

This year we are also providing a seed swap box. Please come and help yourself and leave seeds that you no longer need in exchange. All sorts are available including flower seeds.

Please Note: This year the SHED has expanded its range of stock so if you haven't been there do check out the list on the website and give Abi a visit. She also currently still has some potatoes available.

Adhurst Estate allotments Orchard Area

Adhurst Estate Allotments have an orchard area, where **anyone** can rent a top fruit tree "space" of 4m by 4m for £5/pa and plant their own tree there.



Currently 150 trees have been planted, (must be something to do with the price of fruit!) including apples, pears, quince, cherries, plums, apricots, peaches... so pollination is not a problem, and we have 3-4 bee hives next door!

For more information please contact David Petche dpetche@btinternet.com

Sowing and Growing

Observations from a novice

What a panic it was last year when everyone turned to growing 'stuff' in their gardens and it became almost impossible to get a packet of leek seeds anywhere. Then when the garden centres re-opened there was such joy and excitement. So this year, it is not surprising that many people's window sills are now covered with trays and trays of sown seeds, all in varying stages of growth.

Some seeds I have found impossible to even germinate. Parsnips are my main nemesis. Year after year I would sow parsnip seeds outside only to have absolutely nothing to show for it. It wasn't just that I probably hoed through them all when I forgot where my row had been, or that I sowed them at the wrong time because I quickly learnt to sow them on exactly the same day and time that my neighbour did. They would end up with a fine strong row of parsnips and I would still have nothing. When I asked what the secret was I was told in hushed tones "See that packet of seeds . . . well, I put them in the ground." To add insult to injury I would quite often get a single, rogue parsnip spring arrogantly up in the middle of my potatoes and last year, although I refused to sow parsnips, I actually got about 5 coming up where I had sowed them 3 years previously. A good tip I did get from our Chairman was to mix in some radish seed because they germinate very quickly and will at least remind you that's where you sowed your parsnips. Parsnips take about a month to germinate by which time your radishes will have been pulled up and eaten. I have gone off parsnips now anyway.

I have been talking to a lot of people about getting a head start by sowing and growing seeds in seed trays at home and there does seem to be a few general rules that can be followed:

- Use poor soil as you want your seedlings to hunt for food and develop a good root system.
- Some seeds benefit from a deep pot – eg. Broad Beans and Sweet peas
- You need to keep them warm – so use a propagator or put tray into a plastic bag.
- Once most of the seeds have germinated, remove plastic bag or take out of propagator.
- To avoid seedlings getting too leggy you can put them outside during the day if the temperature is in double figures. Don't forget to bring them in at night.
- Once the seedlings have at least one set of proper leaves you can re-pot them.
- Try not to handle them by the stem as it's easy to bruise – hold the leaves instead.
- Plant them in soil up to the first set of leaves.
- Try and water them from the bottom to avoid damping off problems (the top goes yukky)
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David Mogg has added this very good information:

Put a centimetre or two of a richer John Innes compost at the bottom of a pot/tray, then a multi-purpose compost like the Sinclair that we have at the SHED and lastly a centimetre or two of John Innes seed compost on the top; the theory is that once the roots get down there is a richer compost to get them growing well and since the composts are sterile there is less chance of rotting off.

David also waters from the bottom with cooled tap water from a kettle, again less chance of rotting.

Of course you can always sow your seeds straight into the ground and let nature take its course.

I came across this little ditty for when you are sowing beans which encourages you to put 4 into each growing position because you need "One for the mouse, one for the crow, one to rot and one to grow."

Whatever else you do – enjoy your allotment!

Alison

Vegetables to sow now

This month you can start to feel confident that spring is here and sowings made now will provide crops for harvesting through into autumn. Many can be sown directly into your vegetable plot; others need extra warmth to start them off.

The more cold-sensitive vegetables should not be planted out until after the likely date of the last frost in your area. After this will be the ideal time to plant the vegetables into their final positions; work back from this date as a guide to when to sow them.

Young plants kept in the house too long can become drawn or leggy. Be sure to harden off indoor-raised vegetables for a week or two before planting them out.

Vegetables to germinate now on a sunny windowsill, in a heated propagator or in a heated greenhouse (towards the end of the month and into May, these can be sown in an unheated greenhouse):

- ❖ courgettes
- ❖ cucumbers
- ❖ French beans
- ❖ melons
- ❖ pumpkins and squashes
- ❖ runner beans
- ❖ sweet corn
- ❖ tomatoes

Crops to sow directly, or in modules outdoors until ready to transplant:

- ❖ beetroot
- ❖ brassicas
- ❖ carrots (sow direct)
- ❖ Swiss chard
- ❖ lettuce
- ❖ onion sets (sow direct)
- ❖ radishes
- ❖ spinach

Plants by post

You can find new treasures to grow by buying mail-order, but be sure to check exactly what you will receive and when.

Browsing catalogues and websites for new cultivars or old favourites is a pleasant pastime for many gardeners. Before placing your order, always read closely the plant description and notes provided by the nursery. Be confident you have understood correctly what size of plant (or pot) to expect; what quantity (especially if buying bulbs or tubers); and whether the plant will come with compost around the roots or not. A 'jumbo plug' might sound impressive, but it is still a small plant.

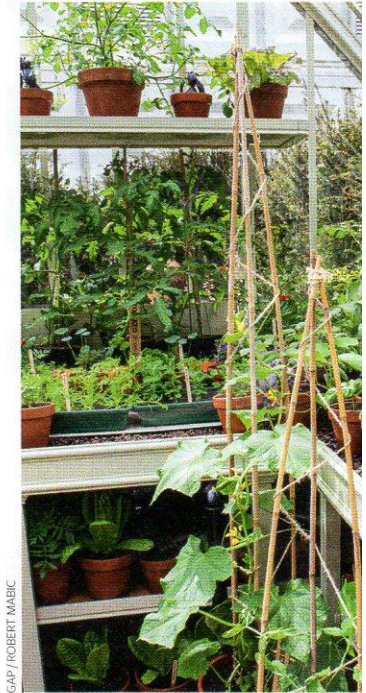
Also bear in mind the appearance of plants can vary depending on the time of year – don't expect an herbaceous perennial to have leaves in winter, for example. Check delivery charges and when to expect plants. Some may come within a few weeks, but others may not be sent until autumn or winter.

When your plants arrive

Most suppliers send tracking updates – try to be in when the plants arrive, and if you have concerns about the state of the packaging as you unwrap, take photos to send to the supplier should the plants have been damaged in transit. Remove all packaging from around the plants so air and light can get to them, taking your time untangling any jumbled shoots. Check to make sure the labels match your order.

See if any instructions are included about what to do next with your plants. They could well be in need of watering, potting up and hardening off. If they came with bare roots, pot up or plant out as soon as possible.

Many plants, especially young ones, will need weather protection. A greenhouse, conservatory or a cool windowsill may be the best place for a few days or weeks, before moving them outdoors to harden off after the last frosts in your area.



GAP/ROBERT MABIC



Check the sizes of plants when you order to avoid disappointment: even 'jumbo' plugs may not be as large as you expect.

RHS Garden Magazine.

Chairmans Tip: If growing your tomatoes in Growbags placed on soil, push the supporting cane right through the Growbag and into the soil. The Growbags can then drain and the tomatoes can extend their roots into the soil if they need to.

WE ARE AN ARK

ARE YOU?

We are now living through an extinction event which could lead to so many of our beloved animals and plants simply vanishing. We all know so well that 30 years ago, there were hedgehogs everywhere – now, people are so excited to see just one.

We CAN all help with this in our own small way – by having an ARK in your garden at home, or on your allotment. Anyone who has a wildlife area on their allotment is already helping – just by allowing nature to take over some small part of the land you personally take care of.

It is called Arking, which is the same principle as re-wilding but on a much smaller scale. Our Arks in our gardens and allotments would be relatively small so we can't recreate wild, balanced landscapes such as those being restored on a large scale through re-wilding processes. However, every little helps.

The 3 main aims of the organisation WE ARE AN ARK are:

1. To raise awareness of the extinction event we are experiencing.
2. To create safe and abundant havens for as many wild creatures as possible.
3. To give as much land as possible back into nature's hands..

The '**Half earth**' theory proposes to give half the earth back to nature, to wilderness. So at least half of gardens are simply left to re-wild. Just leave it be, let it heal. Every tiny patch of earth matters. If you can't manage to re-wild half of your land, then any that you can spare, even just the boundaries, is all welcome and important.



To find out more how you can get involved and make a difference:

<https://wearetheark.org/>