

Fertiliser: you may find it useful to use Sulphate of Ammonia around the leafy plants and Growmore for a slow release fertiliser on other things. In future years you will be able to use your own home-made compost.

If you want Strawberries, these can still be planted but you won't get many fruits the first year. You will probably need 30 plants. Before planting the strawberries you may need to refer to the plan you drew last autumn. Specific areas of your allotment need to be allocated to "permanent" plants such as: fruit bushes, or strawberry plants or rhubarb; or to utilitarian activities such as compost making; or the occasional bonfire. It is useful too to have a garden shed with a water butt.

There will be further decisions to make - how are you going to maintain the quality of the soil, so that your annual crops remain well nourished? We suggested that in your first year you might well find it convenient to use chemical foods, but you may wish to grow organically, avoiding the use of concentrated chemicals. If so, it is vital that you rotate your crops, and that you turn your waste vegetable matter, including potato peelings etc. from the kitchen, into compost to feed the ground for the next year - even the ash from the bonfire can be used to good effect. The Society has leaflets on both these topics.

A useful starting book is:

Practical Allotment Gardening: A Guide to Growing Fruit, Vegetables and Herbs on Your Plot (Hardcover) by Caroline Foley (Author), Clive Nichols (Photographer)

Wildlife: friend or foe?

Your new allotment may be home to many different kinds of wildlife. You'll probably welcome a robin searching for grubs or tortoiseshell butterflies feeding from bramble flowers, but what about the white butterflies homing in on your cabbages or blackbirds eyeing up your raspberries? Left uncontrolled, many creatures can play havoc with a crop, but for every pest there is at least one predator species ready to step in and tackle it on your behalf. Spraying against pests will often kill predators as well and allow the next generation of pests to multiply unchecked.

Physical barriers can discourage pests without harming beneficial wildlife. Horticulture fleece can keep root fly off your carrots. Mini-greenhouses, made from clear bottles with the top cut off, help transplanted seedlings establish quickly, and also keep pests away when the plants are at their most vulnerable.

Brightly coloured flowers such as marigolds will attract hoverflies to your plot. The adult hoverfly feeds only on nectar but its grubs feed on aphids - a major plant pest. Blue tits feed their young on caterpillars, so putting up a nest box may save your cabbages.



BRIDPORT AND DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS SOCIETY



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Information Leaflet 2 The New Allotment

Preparation - Autumn.

So you have got your allotment and you want to grow some decent healthy food. Now what? Do not hurry; it is only November, and you have all the winter to clear and prepare the plot for planting in the spring. Firstly, draw a plan to scale and mark on it any paths, trees, raspberry beds, rhubarb etc. - things that can be moved at a later date when you have time.

Now clear off any tins and glass and take to the re-cycling centre in South Street. Next collect anything you might be able to use later: canes, stakes, pots and the like. Then rake off the dead dry grass and old crops and stack in a loose heap out of the way, to be burnt later. Now you can start digging. Don't double dig the first year i.e. Don't dig more than one spit deep. Remove all perennial weeds with their roots. Things like dandelions, dock, thistles and of course the white roots of bindweed or convolvulus which spread readily. It is thus worth putting them in a separate heap to be burnt when you have a hot fire. They will compost down, but it takes a long time to kill them.

The soft weeds can be dug in i.e. groundsel, chickweed etc. - leaving the

surface rough. The birds will then be able to get at the grubs and wireworms, and the frost will break up the surface, making it easier for working in the spring. Unless you have plenty of time, I suggest you spend about 2½ hours per week on the plot, digging for only half that time. During the winter you will probably dig about 75 square yards. The rest can be covered with black plastic. Not old carpet, as the dyes used today contain toxins, and can pollute the soil or even affect your skin. Currants and gooseberry bushes can be planted during the next 2 or 3 months, and broad beans in early February; but remember, don't hurry or you may end up with backache. There is always another year ahead

The New Year

Hopefully by March you will have completed clearing your new allotment. With a rather wet winter you might feel that you are a bit behind. Don't worry! There is still time to sow seeds; nature will let them catch up. This is however, going to be a busy time of the year.

Broad Beans should be planted as soon as possible. A Runner Bean trench should be prepared: dig the trench and lay strips of newspaper in the bottom with house-hold waste. This helps to hold the moisture. Don't sow until April at least.

Hopefully you have bought your seed potatoes. They should be laid out in trays in a

cool dark place, say the shed, so that they chit (that is make shoots). Do not let these shoots get too long. Plant the Earlies as soon as you can; possibly by Easter if the weather is suitable. Do not earth them up until the growth breaks the surface. Main crop Potatoes take up a lot of space and the ones in the shops are cheap by the autumn. So are they really a cost effective use of the space? The later potato crops are also susceptible to a particularly unpleasant viral blight disease, which could readily spread to your tomatoes.

Spring—Prepare the soil for your seeds.

Carrots, Parsnips. Beetroot. Sow lettuce seed in short rows; transplant when about 3 inches high; sow the seed at 3 week intervals for a constant supply. The same applies to Radishes.

Soon will be the time to sow seeds of Sprouts, Curly Kale and Cabbage. These all need a long growing season, Sprouts for example will not mature until the autumn or winter. They can be transplanted out after the potatoes have been dug.

For the next few months through the spring and summer it is important to hoe as soon as the weeds show. Don't wait until they are inches high otherwise it is a 'hands and knees' job.