



A more digestible Guide to Jobs to do on the
Allotment in February

Composited off the Internet
By Gareth Richards

Fruit & Vegetable Growing Guide for February

February, being the last of the winter months , often has a sting and ends up being the coldest month. So, more than any other month, this one you need to play according to local conditions. It's best to hold off than try to sow in waterlogged, near frozen ground that will most likely rot any seeds. Watch out for good weather in early February, in my experience it means the end of the month will be wicked.

Sowing & Planting in February on the Vegetable Plot

The seed potatoes should be with you by now, but it's too early to plant outside so I'd chit them. Chitting is the process of pre-sprouting before planting. Some authorities say it benefits maincrops but not earlies, some say it's of no benefit, and some it is of benefit to all types. My attitude is that nobody says it does harm and as the seed tubers are with me I may as well chit them.

When you get your seed potatoes you put them in a cool but frost free place where they get some light but not direct sunlight. The potatoes will then grow short, stubby shoots to get them off to a fast start when planted out.

Some people suggest rubbing off all but three shoots to help get larger potatoes with the main crops. I don't do this myself – knowing my luck, I'd lose the remaining three at planting!

There's a lot of information here on growing potatoes

If the weather allows, you can direct sow your broad beans in February along with early peas such as Feltham First and Meteor for a May / June harvest. This early in the year your best chance would be to start your peas in the greenhouse or a coldframe and plant later.

Conventional advice is often to sow parsnips now, but I believe their reputation for poor germination rates is due to being placed in cold wet soil and I have had much better germination rates by sowing in March or even April.

Jerusalem artichokes and shallots can be planted now, although shallots will benefit from covering with a cloche.

Under Cover in Greenhouse, Coldframe and Polytunnel

If you have a greenhouse, you can get an early crop of lettuce, rocket and radish away in there. You can utilise cloches outdoors but success will be more dependent on the weather.

Time to sow your summer cabbages such as Greyhound and Primo, as well as turnips and spinach.

Onions from seed should be started now. They need about 15 degrees C to get them going so you may be best using the windowsill in a cool room to start them off.

With a heated propagator or using windowsills you can start off aubergine and peppers, chillies and tomatoes I have often found better results by waiting until March, which I put down to day length, but many people feel this is the right time.

As I said for January, the big problem at this time of year is available light. Covering cardboard with aluminium foil and standing it to the north side of the seed tray will reflect extra light and help prevent leggy, drawn seedlings without the expense of special horticultural lights.

Fruit

Planting & Pruning

There is still time to finish planting fruit trees and bushes, especially raspberries and other cane fruits.

Early this month you can prune apple and pear trees while they are still dormant. It's also time to prune gooseberries and currants. With currants shorten the sideshoots to just one bud and remove old stems from the centre of the bushes.

Protection & Forcing

If you are in a sheltered area and grow early flowering fruit trees like nectarines, peaches and apricots, protect the flowers with horticultural fleece against frost. You can also use old net curtains for this job.

Forcing Rhubarb

Rhubarb can be forced for an early crop of the sweetest stalks. Just cover a crown or two with large buckets or even an upturned black bin and insulate the outside with straw or manure for added heat. The stalks will grow in the dark.

In years gone by there were specialist forcing pots for this task, but a large one like the one in the picture with a lid could set you back £60!

The drawback is that this process takes a lot out of the crown, and it won't recover for a couple of years.

The professional growers in the famous Rhubarb Triangle dig up their crowns and take them into huge dark warm sheds to produce forced rhubarb. Once the season ends, these exhausted crowns are discarded as it will take them longer to recover than to grow new crowns.

General Jobs on the Plot

If you have finished all the major tasks, such as digging over, creating leafmould heaps etc you will not have a lot to do in February but if like most of us you are scrambling to keep up, this is your last chance before spring.

Double-check the greenhouse, ensure the glass is firmly secured and replace any cracked panes etc. If you've not managed to give it a thorough clean, now is the time before it is pressed into service.

Check last year's potato bed for any volunteers (left over small potatoes) and remove them to avoid passing on disease problems and blight.

You're going to be using your pots and seed trays next, so this is a good opportunity to wash out and sterilise them so your seedlings will get off to the best possible start.

This year's potato bed will benefit from a good application of compost or rotted manure that can be forked in or rotavated in to get them away.

You can cover soil with dark plastic sheeting, fleece or cloches to warm it up for a couple of weeks before you start to sow and plant.

Harvest

Leeks may well be standing ready but if a long freeze seems likely you can dig some up and heel them in to dug ground for easy access – unless we have deep snow!

Parsnips and swedes in the ground can come up when you are ready, cover with fleece or straw to stop them freezing solid into the ground.

The cabbage family should be providing some sustenance with early purple sprouting broccoli, kale and Brussels sprouts still being available. Beet leaves (perpetual spinach) and chards may be available.

Other crops you may have: scorzonera, chicory, endive, celeriac, celery and Jerusalem artichokes.

Growing in a Polytunnel in February

What to sow, plant and harvest from your polytunnel in February

In your greenhouse or tunnel you may now be fooled that spring has arrived. Your tunnel or greenhouse can easily warm up to 20°C during sunny spells. You also notice that the days are getting longer and your gardening itch is starting up again.

Anything you have missed from the January Polytunnel section can still be done now, it will be even safer. February is also the time to sow all your exciting warmth loving Mediterranean vegetables – tomatoes, peppers, chillies and aubergines.

Sowing in the Polytunnel

Direct sowing into bed

All throughout February you can sow the following vegetables directly into the beds:

Beetroot (Pablo F1, Boltardy)

Carrots (Namur F1, Amsterdam Forcing)

Oriental brassica salads (various types)

Peas, Mangetout (Sweet Horizon)

Radish (Short Top Forcing) – small quantities at regular intervals

Turnips (Milan Purple Top) – small quantities at regular intervals

Planting into beds

Throughout the month you can still plant the first early chitted potatoes (Homeguard or Sharpe's Express). Don't forget to cover the shoots with fleece during frosty weather.

You can still plant early strawberries into your tunnel or greenhouse.

Early spring planted garlic can be planted now.

Sowing into modules/pots (18-20°C)

In February you can sow the following vegetables into modular trays and place them in your propagator or warm, south facing windowsill in the house:

Aubergine (Black Prince F1) – 5 seeds per 7cm pot, for pricking out

Cabbage (Hispi F1 or Pyramid F1) – 1 seed per cell

Calabrese (Green Magic F1) – 1 seed per cell

Cauliflower (for mini cauliflowers) – 1 seed per cell

Celery (Victoria F1) – broadcast in a tray for pricking out later

Chilli peppers (various varieties) – 5 seeds per 7cm pot

Coriander, Dill and Chervil – 5 seeds per cell

Kohlrabi (Azur Star) – 1 seed per cell

Leeks (Roxton F1) – 2 seeds per cell

Lettuce (various types) – 1 to 3 seeds per cell

Mangetout peas (Sweet Horizon) – 4 seeds per 7cm pots

Onions (Golden Bear F1) – 4 seeds per cell

Oriental salads (mizuna, rocket, tatsoi, etc.) – 5 seeds per cell

Pepper (Roberta F1, Bell Boy F1) – 5 seeds per 7cm pot, for pricking out

Perpetual spinach and Swiss Chard – 1 seed per cell

Scallions (Parade or Ishikura) – 5 to 10 seeds per cell, depending on how many you like in a bunch

Tomato (Sungold F1 & others) – 5 seeds per 7cm pot, for pricking out

Harvesting from the Polytunnel

As the daylength increases in February your overwintering salads are starting to come into their own. You may even have a glut and enough for the whole neighbourhood. The over-wintered perpetual spinach and Swiss chard are also cropping well now.

You can harvest:

Salad rocket, wild rocket, various mustard leaves (Green Wave, Green in the snow, Red Frills, Green Frills), tatsoi, pak choi, corn salad, winter purslane, cress, mizuna, mibuna, komatsuna, texel greens, baby spinach, beet leaves (Bulls Blood) and possibly even some lettuce leaves.

General greenhouse/polytunnel maintenance

Water lightly, once per week.

Ventilate as much as possible.

Continue planning. The more organised you are the less work there will be later.

It's a good time to dig in well-rotted manure or compost into empty beds. Remember each bed needs to be fed every year. Do not manure the carrot bed – it's better to do it after the carrots are harvested.

Cover up the emerging potato shoots with fleece or cover completely with soil if frost is forecast.

Clean and wash plastic or glass and all pots and trays if you haven't done so earlier.

Replace cracked panes of glass and repair any rips in the plastic with special tape.

Set up your heating bench and replace the sand.

You can pre-warm the soil by covering some empty beds with black plastic especially if you plan to direct sow an early crop.

How to Contact the Editor

If you have comments or you know I have given wrong advice then please contact me by email at

info@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

If you have something to contribute or have a say on allotment life, then please use my email to send your contributions.

I am going to process the magazine issue once a month, so if there are comments you would like to make they can be answered in future editions.

I would like to add that most of the articles are taken off the web and some well known gardening and allotments magazines have been read in the making of our magazine content.

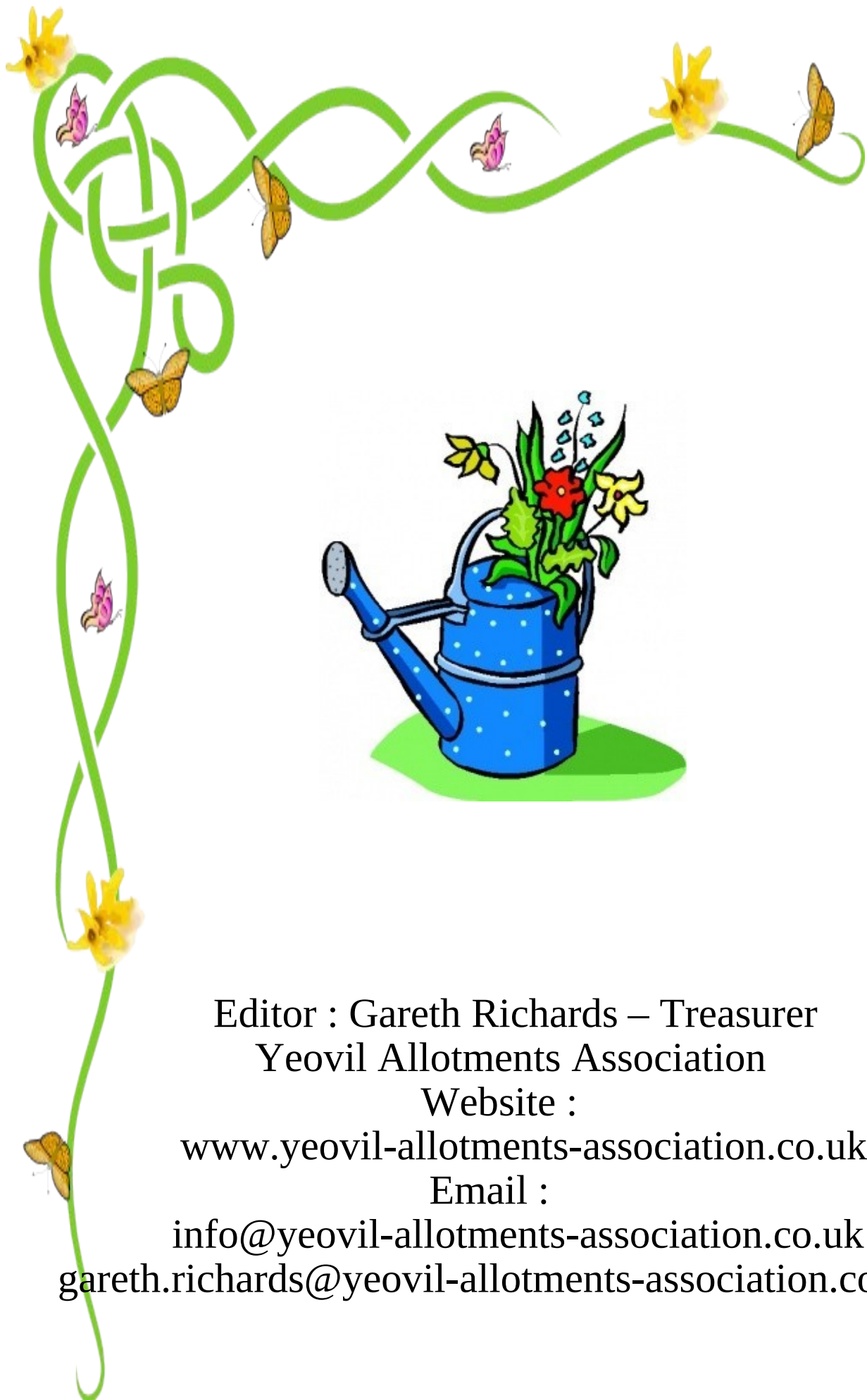
We also have our own website at :

www.yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

where you can find this magazine as well as a catalogue

Happy Allotmenting and best wishes,

Gareth Richards
Treasurer
Eliz Flats, Plot 14



Editor : Gareth Richards – Treasurer
Yeovil Allotments Association

Website :

www.yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

Email :

info@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

gareth.richards@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk