



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

Composited off the Internet
By Gareth Richards

Fruit & Vegetable Growing Guide for January

January is generally a very cold month with hard frosts freezing the ground although there are no guarantees with British weather. Looking through my diaries, snow isn't that likely for a prolonged period but you never know.

Sowing & Planting in January on the Vegetable Plot

There's nothing to sow or plant outside with the possible exception of garlic and even shallots if the weather is mild but there are a few things you can start off under glass or even on a south facing window sill. Tomatoes and aubergines can be sown. They will do best in a heated propagator to get them going.

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.

Another option is to use grow-lights. I've never been keen on these as they used to use a lot of energy just to gain a little time but the new LED lights are so much more efficient I'm beginning to change my view.

Onions from seed can be sown in January but unlike tomatoes who like it hot, you want the temperature around or slightly below 15C for onions. Watch out on sunny days, it may be cold outside but the temperature can shoot up in the greenhouse or coldframe.

Order Your Seed Potatoes

Get your order in for seed potatoes and start chitting them. If you leave it too long you may not be able to get the varieties you want.

Growing Potatoes in the Greenhouse

If you've a greenhouse and it's fairly warm, you could try growing 2 or 3 seed tubers in a bag of compost in the greenhouse. See growing potatoes in bags in the greenhouse A lot depends on your location, I'd leave it until mid-February at least here and early March in the colder areas of the north.

General Garden Tasks for January

In an ideal world, you'll have the plot dug over, limed or manured if required and the leafmould slowly forming in a cage. In the real world, any decent days are used in a last ditch effort to catch up!

On lighter soils and in dryer areas of the country, I'd strongly recommend a bean trench. See Growing Runner Beans.

As I stated for December, it's the traditional time to get your seed orders in. Don't forget we've combined seeds from a number of suppliers on this website so you can pick out different varieties and compare prices. See Vegetable Seeds

Fruit

Resist the temptation to try out the new secateurs Santa brought you on stone fruits like cherry and damson, which should be summer pruned although you can still prune apples and pears etc as they're dormant.

Bare rooted trees and bushes can still be planted until March

January Greenhouse Tasks

Ventilate on warmer days to prevent moulds getting established. Ensure vents and doors are closed firmly if the weather gets rough

Keep an eye out for loose clips and panes and repair as soon as you possibly can.

Harvest

Heeling in Leeks

Leeks left standing will be fine whatever the weather but you may find them hard to get out of frozen ground or taking up ground you want to dig or manure. In that case draw a shallow trench, dig up your leeks in good weather and trim the roots. Lay them in the trench at an angle so most of the leek is out of the trench and cover with loose soil. When you want some, just pull without any strain,

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. You may even have some scorzonera roots along with winter radish.

Kale and winter cabbage at least should be available and Brussels Sprouts which may well go through to March. Celeriac may have stayed in the ground and even celery may have been kept under a thick mulch.

There's not much in the way of a salad about but you enjoy some corn salad (AKA lamb's lettuce) along with claytonia perhaps with some grated fresh carrot from an over-wintering variety like Eskimo

Pile in the leaves and leave them alone for a year. You will find the pile reduces by two thirds at least, so keep filling the bin as more leaves fall. If you have one those marvellous garden vacuum mulchers that suck up leaves and chop them, you will find the leaves rot down much more quickly.

Try and keep things tidy to avoid providing winter homes for pests waiting for the spring but a little untidiness on the edges is not a bad thing as conversely it can provide shelter for predators .

Fruit

Take hardwood cuttings of soft fruit. Gooseberries, red, white and black currants, worcesterberries, jostaberries and vines can all be propagated by cuttings inserted in the open ground now. Choose sturdy well ripened shoots of this year's growth cutting them just below a bud and trimming to just above a bud.

For black currants take them about 8-10 inches (200-250 mm) long, 12-15 inches (300-380 mm) for the other fruits. Insert them into the soil to about half their length. It is customary to grow all except blackcurrants on a short stem – so remove the buds from the lower part of the cutting. All the buds should be left on blackcurrant cuttings.

It's a good time to split rhubarb, dig up the old crowns and split from the top down with a spade into three or four. Leave on the surface so they get frosted before planting out in early Spring,

Check any ties and staking are secure for young trees or windrock can check growth or even kill off the tree. You can plant bare rooted fruit trees and bushes in December and prune apple and pear trees.

Growing in a Polytunnel in January

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

January can be the beginning of your creative gardening year in your greenhouse or polytunnel. It's the first awakening of the year. You can start off new seedlings on your propagator and sow and plant the first vegetables into the ground. I always think that the first sowings and plantings are the most special and you are not yet in a rush and can still relax and enjoy the work.

Buy yourself a garden diary and take note of when and what you sow, which varieties perform well, what crops do well and which ones can be improved. A garden diary is as good as any university – it helps you to learn from your own experience and nothing can surpass your own local knowledge that is specific to your own soil and site.

You should also order your seeds, seed potatoes, onion sets and garlic bulbs now if you haven't done so yet. It's always handy to have them ready when you need them.

It's also time to plan your indoor cropping. It is a lot more confusing than growing vegetables outdoors as you can get a number of crops per bed per year. You may plan a bed at a time and try your best to fit them in some sort of rotation in order to prevent a build-up of soil-borne pests and diseases.

Sowing in the Polytunnel

Direct sowing into beds

The only crops I sow directly into the tunnel or greenhouse soil in January are early carrots (Namur F1 or Amsterdam Forcing) and early forcing type radishes (Short Top Forcing). I usually sow them at the very end of January. Obviously delay the sowing if it is very cold. The beds can be pre-warmed a couple of weeks beforehand by covering with black plastic which is removed a couple of days before sowing. After sowing the crop can be protected from the cold using a fleece. You can mix in a few radish seeds with the carrots. The radishes will quickly germinate and will indicate where the carrot row will be. This enables you to hoe between the rows.

Planting into beds

Towards the end of the month you can plant your first early chitted potatoes (Homeguard or Sharpe's Express). You can start chitting your potatoes in December. It's important that you will have some fleece handy for covering up your emerging potato shoots to protect them from frosty spells.

In late January you can plant strawberries into your tunnel or greenhouse. The plants come from well-established runners from the previous year which were potted on and left outdoors until now. These will produce an extra early crop of delicious strawberries from April onwards.

Sowing into modules/pots (18-20°C)

Towards the end of January you can sow the following vegetables into modular trays and place them in your propagator or warm, south-facing windowsill in the house:

Ventilate on sunny days.

Cabbage (Hispi F1 or Pyramid F1) – 1 seed per cell
Coriander (Leisure) – 5 seeds per cell
Chervil (Massa) – 5 seeds per cell
Dill (Dukat) – 5 seeds 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 – for planting outside in April
Oriental salads (mizuna, rocket, tatsoi, etc.) – 5 seeds per cell
Scallions (Parade or Ishikura) – 5 to 10 seeds per cell, depending on how many you like in a bunch
Harvesting from the Polytunnel
Even in the coldest month of January you'll be able to harvest some healthy greens. You can get a wonderful salad bowl from the salads you have sown last September or October.

These include: 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

Clean and wash plastic or glass panes and all pots and trays.

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

Set up your heating bench or propagator.

Keep the soil moist but not too wet.

You can pre-warm the soil by covering some empty beds with black plastic especially if you plan to direct sow an early crop. This is the best time to prune your grapevine (if you have one).

Grapes could easily take over any tunnel or greenhouse, so be ruthless with the secateurs. Prune back all shoots from the last year and only leave a little stub with one or two buds on it. The new grapes will form on the new growth.

If you haven't done so yet, clean your tools and rub boiled linseed oil onto the handles and a mixture of old oil and diesel to get rid of rust on metal blades.

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.

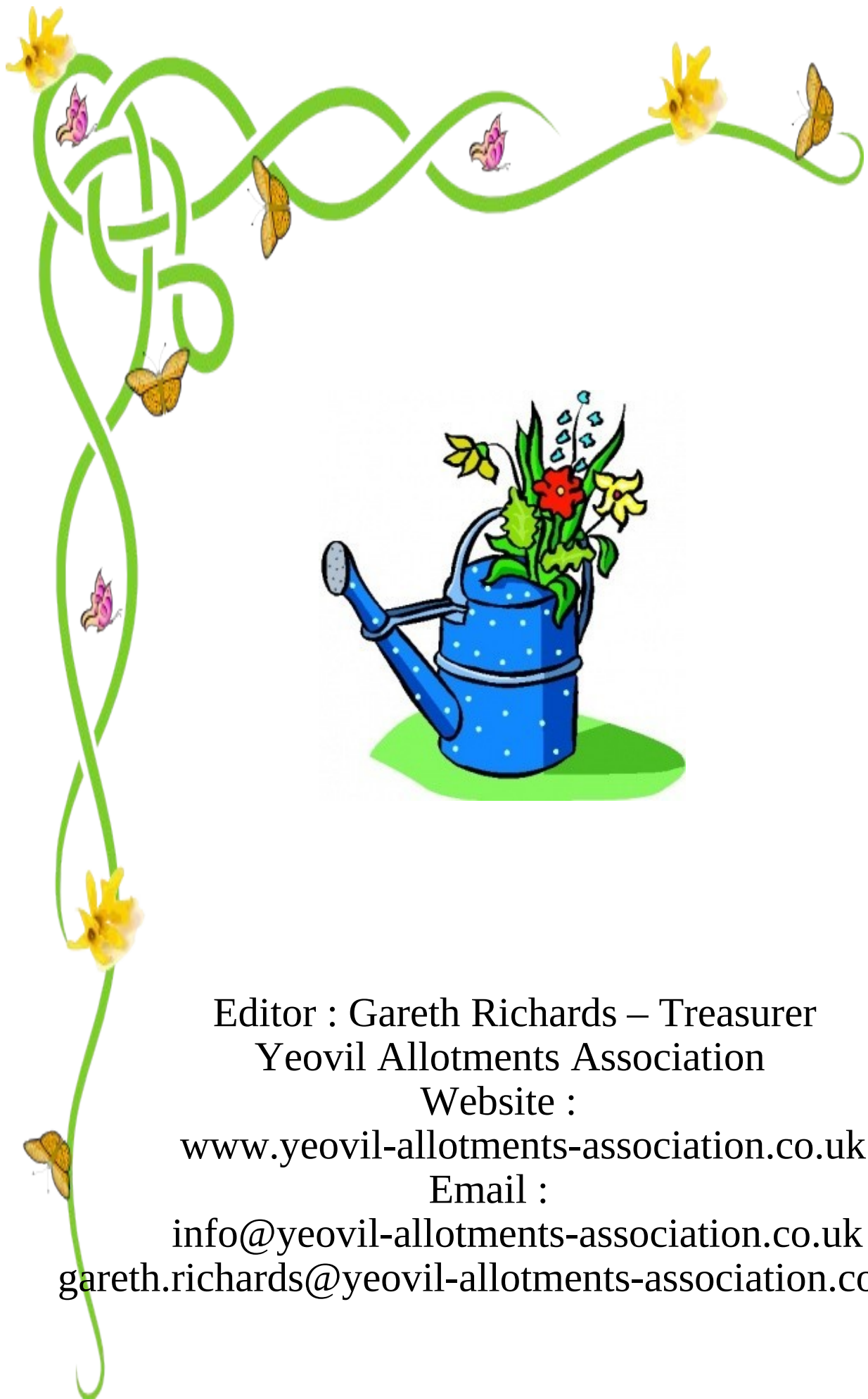
We also have our own website at :

www.yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

where you can find this magazine as well as a catalogue

Happy Allotmenting and best wishes,

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