

Magazine Issue no. 4  
February 2026



Dear Fellow Allotmenters,

February is mostly recognized for Valentine's Day, flowers, and, depending on where you are, being incredibly cold!

Oddly enough, even though it's just another month, there's a lot of history behind this month of romance and love. If you were born in February, your birthstone is an amethyst, and your flowers are violets and primroses. The western zodiac signs in February are Aquarius which is until February 19th, and Pisces, which starts February 20th.

Over time, the length of February kept changing. At one point, it had as little as 23 days. The name of February comes from the Latin word "februum," which means purification. February was named after a purification ritual which was like an early Roman spring cleaning festival.

In Welsh, February is sometimes known as "y mis bach," which means "little month." February and January were the last months added to the Roman numeral calendar. The Saxons called February "Sol-monath" which means "cake month," because they would offer cakes to the gods during February.

Thanks for reading

Gareth Richards ( Treasurer )

Elizabeth Flats Allotments, plot 14

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# Your February Gardening Checklist

Although February can be one of the chilliest months of the year, it's a great opportunity to stay productive in the garden.

## General Garden Tasks

**Organise and Clean** : If you didn't quite finish the tidying from last month, now's your chance. Clear away debris, and get your tools cleaned and ready for action. A sharp, clean tool is a gardener's best friend.

**Stock Take** : Double-check your gardening supplies—pots, compost, seeds, and tools. Now is the time to order anything that might be running low, from compost to plant food.

**Garden Plans** : Start thinking ahead about the seasons to come. Sketch out your garden layout, consider crop rotation, and plan where each vegetable or flower will go.

## Vegetable Garden Tasks

Even if the soil is frozen or soggy, there's plenty you can do to prepare for the growing season:

**Broad Beans** : In mild, well-drained soils, sow broad beans directly under cloches. In wetter areas, sow under cover to avoid leggy growth.

**Early Cauliflowers**: Start sowing early cauliflowers undercover. These can be a bit tricky in cold months, but with a bit of care, you'll have healthy seedlings ready for the spring.

**Jerusalem Artichokes** : Time to plant Jerusalem artichokes in well-prepared soil. They're hardy and will thrive with a little early attention.

**Lift Root Vegetables** : If you haven't already, lift parsnips, swedes, and other root vegetables from last year. This frees up space for the new crops coming in.

**Early Potatoes** : In colder regions, start early potatoes in pots. In milder climates, plant them under cloches outside to give them a head start.

**Tomato Sowing** : If conditions are right (i.e., warm and bright enough), now's a good time to sow early tomato seeds, so they have a head start when spring arrives.

**Weed Control** : Keep on top of weeds around onions, garlic, and early cabbage. These will thrive better with minimal competition for resources.

## Flower Garden Tasks

Flowers can bring colour and life to your garden even in the dead of winter. February is an ideal time to start preparing your flower beds for the season:

**Dahlia Tubers** : If you're growing dahlias, now's the time to check on your stored tubers. Any damaged ones should be cut away, then plant them in trays with compost, leaving the tops exposed. Keep them warm and humid for best results.

**Sweet Peas** : Pinch back any sweet peas you've started to encourage stronger growth as they continue to develop.

**Sow Hardy Annuals** : Sow hardy annuals like calendula, cornflower, and Californian poppy. In areas with mild weather, you can sow them directly outdoors, but colder climates may need a greenhouse or propagator.

## Fruit Gardening Tasks

The fruit garden needs attention this month to ensure you're set up for a fruitful year:

**Fruit Tree Planting**: If you have new fruit trees, bushes, or canes, finish planting them now. This is the best time to get them established.

**Prune Raspberries**: This is the last chance to prune autumn-fruiting raspberries. Cut back any canes that fruited last year to ground level, then mulch and fertilise to encourage fresh growth.

**Strawberry Cloches**: If you grow early fruiting strawberries, consider

covering them with cloches to speed up the growing process and enjoy an early harvest.

## Greenhouse Tasks

Your greenhouse will be a key player in your February gardening tasks, helping you start seeds in a controlled environment:

**Hardy Annuals:** : Sow hardy annuals like sweet peas, calendula, and cornflower in your greenhouse or unheated house. These can tolerate lower temperatures and will be ready for spring planting.

**Ventilation:** : Keep venting your greenhouse as you did in January. Proper ventilation helps to prevent fungal issues and keeps humidity at bay.

**Prepare for Spring :** While you may not be sowing many tender crops yet, now's a good time to prep your greenhouse for the busier months ahead. Clean windows and shelves to ensure maximum light exposure.

## Overall Tips for February Gardening

**Make the Most of Available Light :** With the days still short, keep an eye on light levels. Young seedlings can easily get leggy if light is too weak, so rotate your pots or use artificial grow lights if necessary.

**Soil Prep:** If the weather allows, use cloches to warm up the soil for early sowings. Early peas, beetroot, and lettuce can all

benefit from being planted early under the protection of cloches.

**Keep an Eye on the Weather:** This time of year, can be unpredictable, so be prepared to cover sensitive plants or bring seedlings indoors if a cold snap hits.

February might still bring cold weather, but it's an excellent time to get your allotment prepared for the growing season ahead. While the ground may still be too frozen for some tasks, you can still take advantage of sheltered spots to start early sowing under cloches or in greenhouses. Tasks like planting early potatoes in pots, sowing peas or broad beans under cover, and preparing soil for the warmer months are perfect for allotment owners. Take this opportunity to plan, tidy up, and ensure your allotment is ready for the bounty of spring and summer!

Bottom of Form

# At the office

H	B	S	I	M	I	K	T	E	Z	B	A	C	P	G	V	L	A
Q	G	T	E	C	O	M	P	U	T	E	R	R	O	S	A	J	P
L	R	U	R	P	G	H	E	H	L	M	J	E	M	T	B	L	E
M	A	L	V	A	Z	D	I	F	I	P	A	B	R	A	A	M	C
A	B	S	A	V	M	R	E	B	R	R	K	P	S	P	G	O	A
G	C	P	C	V	S	T	P	S	I	O	E	S	O	L	I	P	L
N	P	A	R	A	A	E	M	R	K	S	Y	U	D	E	R	A	E
O	R	N	U	R	N	L	B	W	U	G	B	H	E	R	A	H	N
L	I	Q	I	B	A	N	D	S	H	L	O	O	K	M	S	L	D
I	N	Y	A	E	V	I	E	A	E	P	A	L	P	M	O	U	A
A	T	M	L	N	M	A	R	R	A	R	R	T	A	A	L	R	R
S	E	D	Q	A	K	J	I	R	N	A	D	F	Q	R	P	D	O
J	R	U	E	L	O	R	Q	U	I	D	E	A	P	K	E	E	N
K	Y	O	N	O	T	E	P	A	D	S	R	V	N	E	U	L	R
R	S	E	T	P	U	Y	N	A	R	C	I	S	O	R	S	I	T
N	B	I	N	D	E	R	I	V	M	K	C	H	A	I	R	A	M
L	D	S	F	V	C	A	M	P	A	N	I	L	L	A	S	O	E

- |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|
| COMPUTER | KEYBOARD | CALENDAR |
| SCANNER  | PAPER    | PRINTER  |
| STAPLER  | NOTEPAD  | CHAIR    |
| BINDER   | DESK     | MARKER   |



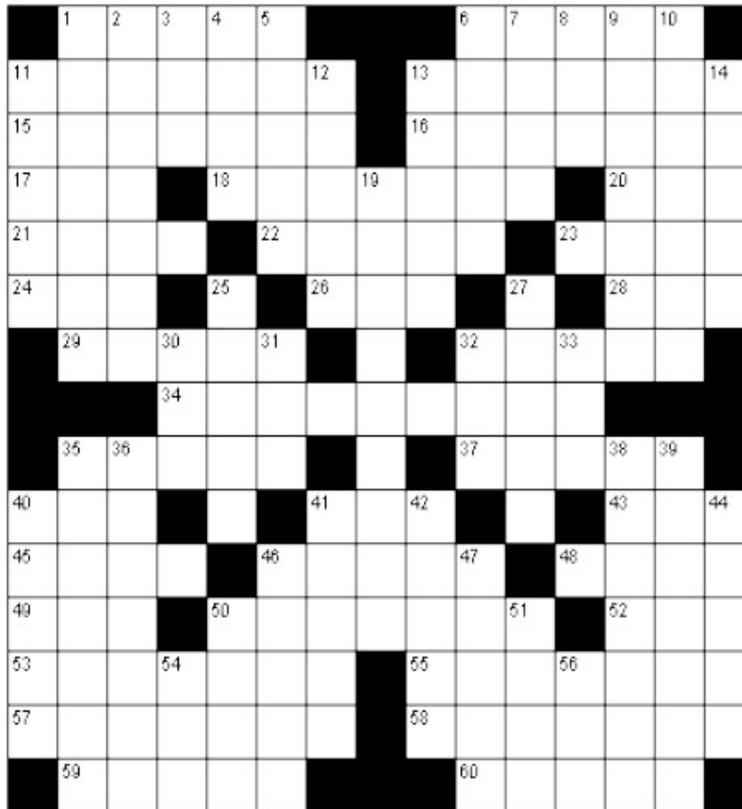
# Forest Animals

A	W	F	Z	O	Q	A	R	U	F	J	P	L
Y	S	Q	U	I	R	R	E	L	M	Q	G	Z
O	T	P	J	F	E	X	T	O	E	D	A	U
S	T	V	K	B	L	R	A	C	C	O	N	F
O	B	Q	U	T	I	H	P	S	Q	J	L	O
R	A	B	B	I	T	D	G	F	P	C	U	B
L	D	R	E	T	D	W	W	O	L	F	X	Q
L	G	E	A	F	L	L	Z	X	H	W	O	P
U	E	N	R	U	K	D	A	Z	T	I	W	Y
A	R	F	B	R	S	E	D	V	N	Y	L	E
K	O	H	E	D	G	E	H	O	G	A	O	C
P	G	F	V	S	A	R	R	W	M	E	F	S

- OWL
- BADGER
- FOX
- HEDGEHOG
- RABBIT
- BEAR
- SQUIRREL
- DEER
- RACCOON
- WOLF



# Crossword no.6



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## ACROSS

1. "The Final Frontier"
6. Earthquake
11. Trash
13. Postal markings
15. False identities
16. Glowing
17. Sweetened chicle
18. The wide part of a river
20. Zero
21. French for "State"
22. 1000 kilograms
23. Dwarf buffalo
24. A division in a tennis match
26. 22nd letter of the Greek alphabet
28. Printing linear units
29. University administrators
32. Mild viral infections of the nose
34. Utter obscenities
35. Sandbank
37. Death notices
40. Traverse over snow
41. Neckwear
43. Decay
45. Possessed
46. Charming beautiful woman
48. Young salmon
49. Pointed tool for piercing holes
50. Killers
52. Frozen water
53. Upchucks
55. Makes
57. Present for consideration
58. Panics
59. Secret agents
60. Condemn

## DOWN

1. Toasted
2. A senior clergyman
3. Fabric made of camel hair
4. A portable container
5. Eliminate from the body
6. Trap
7. Ripple or current
8. 3 in Roman numerals
9. Examined quickly
10. Hangers-on
11. Instruments for indicating flow quantities
12. Sword
13. Pertaining to modern day Persia
14. Collection of maps
19. Sadly
25. Decoration
27. Combination (abbrev.)
30. Anagram of "Boa"
31. Actor \_\_\_ Mineo
32. Chief Executive Officer
33. Garland
35. Roasting pins
36. Peak
38. Betrayer
39. Witchcraft
40. Pointed
41. Flirt
42. Select by voting
44. Braid
46. Bestow
47. Strayed
50. Footwear
51. Withered
54. Consumer Price Index
56. Circle fragment

## Link to Brimsmore Garden Centre

We have a Gold Club discount deal with Brimsmore Garden Centre.

They offer all member's 25% discount on Spring bulbs for sale in October and then again a second deal for anything at the Centre that is not on special offer which can be used as many times as you want during January and February.

I have used it for compost in the past and the savings are quite good on your pocket. You can have the items delivered which is free within the Yeovil area or you can pick your items up at the Garden Centre.

Brimsmore Garden Centre website address :

<https://store.thegardensgroup.co.uk>

Email : [brimsmore@thegardensgroup.co.uk](mailto:brimsmore@thegardensgroup.co.uk)

Telephone no. : 01935 411000

Address : Brimsmore Gardens  
Tintinhull Road  
Yeovil  
Somerset  
BA21 3NU

## Where we meet

Johnson Park, Coronation Avenue, Yeovil. BA21 3DX

as well as

Brimsmore Gardens, Tintinhull Road, Yeovil, Somerset BA21 3NU

We generally meet twice a month. The last Thursday of the month is reserved for a committee meeting. We discuss all things related to the Association and deal with any matters arising.

We meet at 8pm on these nights in the lounge bar at Johnson Park Sports and Social Club. They have a car park

Minutes are recorded by our Secretary. The Chairman opens the meeting and directs us through the running order and as well as site supervisor's input there is a monthly Treasurer's report.

The other meeting night is a more social event and this takes place on the 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month. We can invite a speaker, you can buy a drink at the bar and there is a raffle normally run by Phillip.

Three times a year on the 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of the month we meet at Brimsmore Garden Centre for our social. We meet in the Apple Tree restaurant at 6.30pm. Some tea and biscuits are available for free. We try to have a guest speaker at these events or a talk on a garden topic and a raffle run by Phillip's wife.

These three events replace our said Thursday social meetings at Johnson Park.

Your annual membership card gives you the time and dates of meetings for the year ahead. Our membership night for renewals is every March and again a discount night is offered for any garden centre items which are not on special offer.

## Kings Seeds - Top Tips for Seed Sowing

- **Use seed sowing compost, not multi-purpose.** Multi-purpose compost often contains too much feed which can damage or kill young seedlings before they grow.
- **Water with fresh tap water.** Avoid using saved rainwater for seeds and young seedlings, as pathogens can build up in water butts and containers which can affect germination. Rainwater is fine to use on established plants.
- **Maintain the correct temperature.** Ensure the seeds are kept at their ideal germination temperature.
- **Monitor the water levels.** Some composts may appear dry on the surface but are moist beneath. Certain seeds such as peas and beans tend to rot off if they are overwatered, yet if they are too dry, their seed coats may not break down properly, preventing germination.
- **Water the drill directly when sowing outside during a dry spell.** It is important when sowing seeds direct into the allotment soil when the soil is dry, to always water the seed drill first before sowing. Draw out the seed drill, then give a thorough watering so the base of the drill is really wet, then leave to drain for a few minutes before sowing the seed onto the wet soil. Once sown, the seed is then covered over with the dry soil, which traps the moisture below where the seeds need it to germinate. This is a far better method than constantly watering overhead with a rose on a can, which will evaporate with the sun or drying winds and put a hard cap over the soil, making it much harder for the seedlings to push through.

# Solution

	S	P	A	C	E			S	E	I	S	M		
G	A	R	B	A	G	E		I	N	D	I	C	I	A
A	L	I	A	S	E	S		R	A	D	I	A	N	T
G	U	M		E	S	T	U	A	R	Y		N	I	L
E	T	A	T		T	O	N	N	E		A	N	O	A
S	E	T		I		C	H	I		C		E	N	S
	D	E	A	N	S		A		C	O	L	D	S	
			B	L	A	S	P	H	E	M	E			
	S	H	O	A	L		P		O	B	I	T	S	
S	K	I		Y		T	I	E		O		R	O	T
H	E	L	D		B	E	L	L	E		P	A	R	R
A	W	L		S	L	A	Y	E	R	S		I	C	E
R	E	T	C	H	E	S		C	R	E	A	T	E	S
P	R	O	P	O	S	E		T	E	R	R	O	R	S
	S	P	I	E	S				D	E	C	R	Y	

## Organic Raspberry Growing Guide: Tips, Varieties, and Health Benefits for Allotment Owners



As an allotment owner, growing raspberries can be a delightful addition to your plot. Not only do they offer a bountiful harvest, but they also provide a range of health benefits and versatile culinary uses. In this guide, we will walk you through the process of growing raspberries, including choosing varieties, cultivation tips, health benefits, and meal ideas.

### **Varieties of Raspberries**

Choosing the right variety of raspberries is crucial to ensure a successful harvest. There are two main types of raspberries: summer-bearing and ever-bearing, each with its own unique growing season and characteristics.

## **Summer-Bearing Raspberries**

Summer-bearing raspberries produce a single, large crop in early to midsummer. These varieties are known for their robust flavor and high yield. Some popular summer-bearing varieties include:

- **‘Autumn Bliss’**: Known for its large, juicy berries and disease resistance, making it a reliable choice for many gardeners.
- **‘Tulameen’**: Renowned for its sweet flavor and firm texture, perfect for fresh eating or making preserves.
- **‘Glen Ample’**: Offers a high yield of large, flavorful berries and is known for its resistance to common raspberry diseases.

## **Ever-Bearing Raspberries**

Ever-bearing raspberries, also known as fall-bearing or primocane raspberries, produce two crops per year. The first crop appears in early summer, and the second, typically larger crop, comes in late summer or early fall. Recommended ever-bearing varieties include:

● **‘Heritage’**: A popular variety known for its excellent flavor, high yield, and hardiness. It produces firm, medium-sized berries.

● **‘Polka’**: Praised for its large, flavorful berries and extended harvest season, making it a favorite among home gardeners.

● **‘Fallgold’**: Unique for its golden-yellow berries, which are sweet and aromatic. It offers a delightful visual and culinary addition to any garden.



## **Cultivation Tips for Growing Raspberries:**

### 1. Location and Soil:

Raspberries thrive in full sun, so select a spot on your allotment that receives at least six hours of direct sunlight daily. They prefer well-drained soil with a **pH range** of 5.5 to 6.5. Before planting, prepare the soil by removing weeds and incorporating **compost** or well-rotted **manure** to improve fertility and drainage.

### 2. Planting:

Raspberries are typically planted as bare-root or container-grown plants. Plant them in early spring or late autumn when the soil is moist and workable. Dig a hole wide and deep enough to accommodate the root ball. Space the plants about 60cm apart in rows that are 1.8 to 2.4 meters apart. Plant them at the same depth as they were previously growing.

### 3. Support:

Raspberries benefit from support to keep their canes upright and prevent them from sprawling on the ground. Choose a

support system that suits your needs, such as a trellis, fence, or wire supports. Install the support system before planting the raspberries. As the canes grow, tie them to the support using garden twine or soft plant ties.

#### 4. Watering and Mulching:

Raspberries require regular watering, especially during dry spells. Apply water at the base of the plants to keep the soil consistently moist, particularly during the flowering and fruiting stages. Avoid overwatering, as it can lead to root rot. Apply a layer of organic mulch, such as straw or wood chips, around the base of the plants to conserve moisture, suppress weeds, and provide nutrients.

#### 5. Fertilising:

Raspberries benefit from regular fertilisation to promote healthy growth and **fruit** production. In early spring, before new growth emerges, apply a balanced fertiliser or well-

rotted **compost** around the base of the plants. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for the appropriate dosage.

#### 1.6. Pruning:

Pruning is essential for raspberry maintenance and optimal **fruit** production. For summer-bearing varieties, prune the canes that have fruited to ground level in late autumn or early spring. These are the canes that have produced berries in the previous season. Leave the new, green canes that will bear **fruit** in the upcoming season. For ever-bearing varieties, cut back the canes that have fruited in autumn, leaving the new canes for the following year's crop. Consult pruning guides specific to your raspberry variety for detailed instructions.

#### 2.7. **Pest** and Disease Management:

Raspberries can be susceptible to various **pests and diseases**, including aphids, raspberry beetles, and fungal infections.

Monitor your plants regularly for signs of infestation or disease.

If necessary, use organic **pest** control methods, such as

insecticidal soap or neem oil, to manage **pests**. Ensure good air circulation around the plants by spacing them adequately and removing any diseased or damaged canes promptly.

#### 8. Harvesting:

Raspberries are ready for harvest when they are fully coloured and easily detach from the plant with a gentle tug. Depending on the variety, harvesting times can vary, but generally, summer-bearing raspberries are ready from mid to late summer, while ever-bearing varieties produce fruit from summer to fall. Harvest the ripe berries regularly to encourage further fruiting.



## **Health Benefits**

Raspberries are not only delicious but also packed with numerous health benefits. They are a rich source of antioxidants, dietary fiber, vitamins C and K, and minerals like manganese. These nutrients contribute to improved immune function, heart health, digestion, and brain function. Let's delve deeper into the specific health benefits of consuming raspberries.

### **Rich in Antioxidants**

Raspberries are loaded with antioxidants, including quercetin and ellagic acid, which help protect the body against oxidative stress and inflammation. These antioxidants neutralise harmful free radicals, reducing the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and neurodegenerative disorders. The high levels of anthocyanins in raspberries, which give them their vibrant red color, are particularly effective in fighting inflammation and protecting cells from damage.

### **High in Dietary Fiber**

Raspberries are an excellent source of dietary fiber, with one cup providing about 8 grams. This high fiber content promotes healthy digestion by adding bulk to the stool and preventing constipation. Additionally, fiber helps regulate blood sugar levels by slowing the absorption of sugars, making raspberries a suitable choice for people with diabetes. Consuming fiber-rich foods like raspberries also supports weight management by promoting a feeling of fullness and reducing overall calorie intake.

### **Boosts Immune Function**

Vitamin C is essential for a robust immune system, and raspberries are an excellent source of this vital nutrient. One cup of raspberries provides over 50% of the recommended daily intake of vitamin C, which aids in the production of white blood cells and enhances the body's ability to fight infections. Vitamin

Vitamin C also acts as an antioxidant, protecting immune cells from damage by free radicals.

### **Supports Heart Health**

Raspberries contribute to heart health in several ways. The antioxidants in raspberries help reduce inflammation and oxidative stress, both of which are linked to cardiovascular disease. The dietary fiber in raspberries can help lower cholesterol levels by binding to cholesterol in the digestive system and preventing its absorption into the bloodstream. Additionally, potassium, a mineral found in raspberries, helps regulate blood pressure by balancing the effects of sodium.

### **Enhances Brain Function**

The antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds in raspberries also benefit brain health. Studies have shown that these compounds can help improve memory and cognitive function by reducing oxidative stress and inflammation in the brain. The anthocyanins in raspberries have been linked to a

lower risk of age-related neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

### **Promotes Healthy Skin**

Raspberries are rich in vitamins C and E, both of which are essential for healthy skin. Vitamin C helps in the production of collagen, a protein that keeps skin firm and youthful. The antioxidants in raspberries protect the skin from damage caused by UV rays and environmental pollutants, reducing the signs of aging such as wrinkles and fine lines. Applying raspberry extract topically can also help soothe inflammation and irritation, making it beneficial for people with sensitive or acne-prone skin.

### **Provides Essential Nutrients**

In addition to vitamins C and K, raspberries are a good source of several essential nutrients, including manganese, magnesium, and folate. Manganese is important for bone health and metabolism, while magnesium plays a crucial role in muscle and nerve function, blood sugar control, and blood

1.Fresh Enjoyment: Savor the sweet and tart flavors of freshly picked raspberries on their own as a healthy snack or add them to breakfast cereals, yogurt, or oatmeal.

2.Desserts: Use raspberries to create delectable desserts like raspberry pies, tarts, or crumbles. They also make a delightful addition to cakes, muffins, and pancakes.

3.Jams and Preserves: Preserve the flavors of summer by making raspberry jams, jellies, or preserves. These can be enjoyed on toast, scones, or as a topping for desserts.

4.Smoothies: Blend raspberries with other fruits, yogurt, and a liquid of your choice to create refreshing and nutritious smoothies.

5.Salads: Add a burst of color and flavor to salads by incorporating raspberries into green salads or fruit salads. They pair well with greens, cheese, nuts, and vinaigret.



Growing raspberries on your allotment can be a fulfilling and rewarding experience. By following the cultivation tips provided, you can create an ideal environment for your raspberry plants to flourish and produce an abundant harvest. From selecting the right location and preparing the soil to providing support, proper watering, and regular pruning, each step plays a crucial role in ensuring the success of your raspberry cultivation.

Raspberries not only offer a burst of delicious flavor but also come with numerous health benefits. Packed with antioxidants, dietary fibre, vitamins, and minerals, they contribute to

improved immune function, heart health, digestion, and brain function. Incorporating raspberries into your meals and recipes allows you to savor their delightful taste and reap their nutritional advantages.

From enjoying freshly picked raspberries as a healthy snack to using them in desserts, jams, smoothies, and salads, the culinary possibilities are endless. Whether you choose summer-bearing or ever-bearing varieties, the sweet and tangy flavors of raspberries will enhance your culinary creations and add a touch of freshness to your dishes.

By dedicating time and effort to growing raspberries on your allotment, you not only gain access to an abundant supply of delicious fruits but also connect with nature, experience the joy of gardening, and create a sustainable and rewarding hobby.

So, roll up your sleeves, plant those raspberry canes, and embark on a fruitful journey of growing your own raspberries on your allotment. Enjoy the process and the delightful taste of homegrown raspberries straight from your garden to your table.

## Outreach Project Update

I have been given another task when it comes to Promoting Allotment Life in Yeovil. My idea is to use an old colleague and close friend from my days at the Museum of South Somerset which was down by the Octagon Theatre.

My colleagues name is Toby Stok and he was the Museum Officer in charge of Schools outreach and any adult groups interested in reminiscence and also Museum exhibitions put on at the Museum.

I have asked him to join me on this project. He has all the skills and I have the energy to help co-ordinate and task him with a static display which he will put together with photos and articles etc., and if he can, present a static display for our Show in August.

Then once display is passed as ok, we can hopefully use it as advertising, around Yeovil places of interest and if allowed, visit Schools and clubs and set up the display and give a presentation about allotments in and around Yeovil.

It is only a seed at the moment but from “ little acorns, great oak trees grow. ”

Long term for our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our formation as an Association ( formed 2009), I would like to produce a small publication on our birth to a quarter of a century and hopefully sell it as a piece of local history in the book shop in town.

These sort of ideas have worked out in the past at the museum, so it's something worth pursuing.

## Spotlight on Fruit and Vegetables

On these next few pages I will be spotlighting fruit and vegetables and with this in mind I have chosen a vegetable. For this magazine issue, I have picked the Leek.

Just to re-iterate all my work is taken off gardening websites and allotments magazines. I have only had an allotment for three and a bit years so bringing knowledge to the readers is wholly an exercise in already published work.

I have used a lot of the Gardener's World website and the RHS website and NAS magazines to bring all of their printed wisdom onto these pages.

The more experienced of you will probably already know the words written or will know their meaning in practice.

So let's start the ball rolling with the Leek.

# Leeks

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Sow			S	S								
Plant				P	P	P						
Harvest	H							H	H	H	H	H

Leeks are a delicious [vegetable](#) with a long season and will provide food from August through the winter. The long, blanched stems, also known as shanks, can be eaten young and tender, or allowed to mature. Leeks are great in soups, steamed or stir-fried.

## How to grow leeks

Sow seed in pots or modules of peat-free seed or multi-purpose compost in spring. Keep pots moist and plant out in summer, either individually, using a dibber, or in small clumps. Harvest leeks from autumn. Some varieties are hardy and can be harvested right through to spring.

### Growing leeks from seed

You can sow leek seeds directly into well prepared soil and thin them later. However, the more reliable method is to sow into pots and transplant seedlings when they are about 20cm high. It's also possible to buy seedling leeks from nurseries or by mail order.

## Planting out leeks

Leeks need a sunny, sheltered site with well-drained, well prepared soil with plenty of added manure or fertiliser. To plant the traditional way, make a hole with a dibber, 20cm deep, drop a seedling in and water in. This method, called 'puddling in' will produce large single leeks with well-blanched stems. But you can also plant in small clumps.

## Tending leeks

Keep plants well watered, especially during dry spells and keep weed-free with regular hoeing or with a thick mulch – this will also help retain moisture.

## Harvesting leeks

Depending on which variety you're growing, your leeks will be ready for picking from summer onwards. Use a fork to lift leeks singly or in clumps without disturbing neighbouring plants. Leeks can be left in the ground until you are ready to use them. Once harvested, they will store in the fridge or a cool larder for a couple of weeks.

## Preparation and uses

Leeks are a classic soup ingredient but they are also a delicious accompaniment to winter dishes such as roasts, stews and pies. To prepare leeks, they will need a thorough cleaning to remove the soil, and the outer leaves can be discarded.

Looking for inspiration on how to use your leeks? Our friends at olive have curated a delicious collection of [leek recipes](#), including a comforting chicken and leek pie.

## Growing leeks: problem solving

Leeks are prone to leek rust and to onion family diseases such as allium moth and allium leaf miner. These last two can weaken the plant and allow more damage from fungal and bacterial infections to take hold.

### Leek varieties to try

[Leek 'Musselburgh'](#) – a reliable mid-season leek, with good flavour and texture. A good cropper, it is also very hardy and has good resistance to rust

- Leek 'Pandora' – an early variety, with long regular stems, this can be harvested from September to January.
- Leek 'Lyon prizetaker' – a heritage revival, with large thick stems that will last through the winter.
- Leek 'Toledo' - a reliable leek with long stems and dark leaves, that can be harvested from late November-late February. It has been awarded the prestigious RHS Award of Garden Merit.
- Leek 'Sprintan F1' – a very early cropping leek, ready to harvest from late August through to November, with good resistance to leek rust.

## The Natural Antidepressant In Soil: How Gardening Makes You Happy



People experiencing depression may have a viable option to medication if studies into soil microbes are correct.

Researchers have discovered that a bacterium in the soil called **Mycobacterium Vaccae** activates neurons that stimulate serotonin production.

M. Vaccae works in a similar way to antidepressant medications but anyone can access it for free, it has no side effects and it doesn't create drug dependency.

### Can Soil Really Make a Difference to Mental Health?

Researchers say it can and given recent statistics, the mental health charity MIND say that approximately **1 in 4 people** in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year, it's of paramount importance that people struggling with mental health have options to improve their quality of life.

Mental health affects how people feel, act and think. It's an issue becoming more prominent as mental health awareness campaigns push our perceptions of what mental health is and how it affects millions of us in different ways.

That's why it's so exciting that natural antidepressant microbes have been identified in the soil beneath our feet. A natural antidepressant treatment people can access at any time can only be a good thing.

### **Dirt is Good for You**



Gardeners have known about the healing power of soil for years. There's nothing like fresh air and contact with the garden to boost their spirits.

Soldiers returning shell-shocked from the trenches of WW1 found solace in the hospital gardens, and today gardening still remains “horticultural therapy” for all kinds of mental health issues. **Research suggests** that gardening increases an individual’s life satisfaction, their psychological wellbeing, their sense of community, and increases cognitive function. Could it all be down to a common little bacterium called *Mycobacterium Vaccae*?

### **The Story So Far**

In 2004 an oncologist at London’s Royal Marsden Hospital discovered an unusual side effect from an experiment she was undertaking.

She had been injecting lung cancer patients with *M. Vaccae* to see if it affected their condition. This harmless and very common bacterium was thought to strengthen the immune system, but it didn’t help the cancer.

Instead patients taking *M. Vaccae* reported feeling happier, they could think more clearly and had more vitality. It may not have treated their cancer, but it treated their mental health, an extremely important factor in end of life illness.

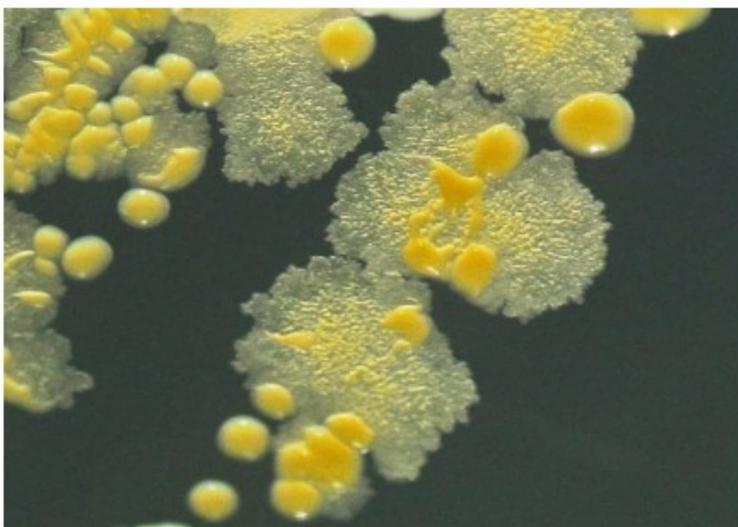
A neuroscientist called Christopher Lowry took up the research at Bristol University **testing *M. Vaccae* on mice behaviour** in stress tests. He found mice inoculated with the bacterium performed better in tests, and they were less anxious. Lowry believes *M. Vaccae* activated the neurons responsible for their

serotonin production. Other neurons affecting the immune system responded too.

**Further research** in the USA also tested *M. Vaccae* on mice, measuring their ability to navigate a maze once fed the live bacterium. This research found mice taking *M. Vaccae* completed a maze twice as quickly as their unvaccinated counterparts, and had less anxiety whilst doing so. The researchers think that *M. Vaccae* activates a group of neurons that produce the brain chemical serotonin. A lack of serotonin has been linked to depression and anxiety plus other mental health diseases including obsessive compulsive disorder, bipolar problems and **Alzheimer's**.

If the serotonin boosting effects in mice are replicated in humans, as suggested by the results from lung cancer patients, then soil is rich source of natural anti-depressants we can benefit from.

### What is *Mycobacterium Vaccae* ?



So what is this antidepressant in the soil exactly – and how can a bacterium be good for you? Aren't bacteria dangerous?

**There are types of bacteria that cause disease and those that don't. M. Vaccae is the latter** – one of the non-pathogenic organisms. It's a species of the Mycobacteriaceae family that's found in plain soil, you don't need to go looking for it, because it's abundant in your own back garden, in parks, and open spaces.

There are a lot of different bacteria in the soil, in fact one teaspoon contains between 100 million and 1 billion bacteria. Bacteria improve the soil, changing it so plants can thrive – in effect it feeds the world.

### **What Else Is In The Soil?**

The soil is a rich environment of life, we've spend millennia living on it, eating the food it grows and interacting with its microbes, so perhaps it's no wonder that the increase in mental health problems runs alongside the increasing urbanisation of our culture.

Researchers are starting to link poor health with a lack of outdoor time. **Studies** show that children in particular are at risk of asthma, allergies, and a weak immune system when they lack interaction with the natural world.

The NHS reports that since 1990 there has been a 700% increase in children hospitalised due to anaphylaxis caused by

food allergies, and it's thought at least 5-8% of children have a food allergy.

It seems we are just too clean – this behaviour even has a name '**the Hygiene Hypothesis**'. Our use of antibacterial products such as hand gel, kitchen wipes and even toilet paper has left us without adequate defences, not to mention the overuse of antibacterial medications.

Studies have highlighted how early exposure to a variety of microbes leads to a stronger immune system. For example, one such study indicated that Bavarian farm children had significantly lower rates of asthma than their neighbours.

This leads to the fact that some **organisms in the soil may actually be necessary for our health, vaccinating us against diseases and strengthening our immune systems.**

### Nature Deficiency Disorder



Time spent in the soil is time well spent – it vaccinates us from an early age by allowing a wide variety of organisms to affect our immune systems. When this doesn't happen our bodies are inexperienced, unable to identify real threats and they just can't cope.

This overarching lack of contact with our environment now has a name 'nature deficiency disorder' and the only way to beat it is to escape our sterile indoor environments and get back in touch with our rural, crop growing roots.

Of course, the great outdoors will also boost your levels of vitamin D synthesised from sunshine to strengthen bones, and treat Seasonal Affective Disorder, a form of depression caused by a lack of light.

And let's not forget exercise, because moving around outdoors also burns off the calories that contribute to our increasing obesity problems. There are no drawbacks to being outside.

### **How to Increase Your Intake of M. Vaccae**

You can increase your intake of natural M. Vaccae, by gardening. Gardeners breathe in bacteria as they move soil and it gets into cuts on their hands. Outdoor activities such as walking, cycling, and running increase our contact with the outside world and the health boosting bacteria it contains. You can eat M. Vaccae too by growing your own vegetables, fruits, berries and apples which all carry traces of M. Vaccae. If you can't grow your own, buy them at a farmer's market, where

food has been grown locally and not passed through the arduous process of supermarket cleanliness and travel. You might also want to cut out antibacterial product use and let your body use traces of bacteria to build a proper immune system, which is especially important for children.

### **Dirt is not Dirty**

Long-time gardeners always say that spending time among their plants is therapeutic, so finding a natural antidepressant present in the soil will come as no surprise.

Breathing in and touching the soil may be good for health and it goes some way to explain why gardening is so addictive, why the fresh earth smells so good and why many of us feel down in the winter months.

Let's hope further research uncovers how soil bacteria can help us regain some of our natural health, and improve the lives of those with depression, but in the meantime spending time in the garden can only increase your chances of feeling good.

## Milk Shakes



### **Prepare**

less than 30 mins

### **Cook**

less than 10 mins

### **Serve**

Makes 2

A luxurious milkshake makes a super-fun drink or dessert. Choose from rich dark chocolate, strawberry or a simple vanilla.

## **Ingredients**

### **For the chocolate syrup**

- 50g/1¾oz dark chocolate (70% cocoa solids), chopped
- 1 tbsp soft light brown sugar

### **For the strawberry syrup**

- 100g/3½oz hulled strawberries, quartered
- 2 tbsp caster sugar

### **For the milkshake**

- 250ml/9fl oz milk, either full-fat or semi skimmed
- 200g/7oz good quality dark chocolate or vanilla ice cream
- 2 tbsp whipped double cream or canned whipped cream (unsweetened)

## **Method**

1.To make the chocolate syrup, put the chocolate and sugar in a small saucepan with 2 tablespoons water. Place over a low-medium heat and stir to melt the chocolate and dissolve the sugar. Remove from the heat and leave to cool.

2.To make the strawberry syrup, put the strawberries and sugar in a small saucepan with 1 tablespoon water. Place over a low-medium heat and cook, stirring frequently, until the strawberries have completely

1. softened and the sugar has dissolved. Pass through a sieve into a jug, pressing the fruit to extract as much of the strawberry pulp as possible.
2. To make the milkshake, blend the milk and ice cream together until smooth, using either a stick blender in a jug or a blender on high speed.
3. Using a teaspoon drizzle half of the syrup of your choice (if using) down the inside of each glass and divide the milkshake between the glasses. Top with whipped cream and the remaining syrup and serve immediately.

## How to Contact the Editor

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

[gareth.richards@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk](mailto:gareth.richards@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](http://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





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