

April in the allotment

VEGETABLES

SOW OUTDOORS

- * Beetroot
- * Broad beans
- * Broccoli (white/purple sprouting varieties to harvest next Feb-Apr; calabrese varieties to harvest in late summer)
- * Brussels Sprouts (April plantings of later varieties will yield a crop ready for christmas e.g. Citadel, Trafalgar, Revenge)
- * Cabbage (summer varieties sown now to harvest in Aug/Sept; winter varieties later in April to harvest Nov-Feb; savoy varieties to harvest Oct-Feb; red varieties to harvest Sept/Oct)
- * Carrots (sow intermediate or long-rooted varieties - try varieties resistant to carrot root fly e.g. Fly Away)
- * Chard
- * Endive
- * Kale
- * Kohl rabi
- * Leeks
- * Lettuce
- * Peas
- * Perpetual spinach
- * Radish (summer varieties e.g. French Breakfast, Sparkler)
- * Salsify and scorzonera
- * Spinach (summer varieties e.g. King of Denmark, Sigmaleaf)
- * Turnip (sow early varieties e.g. Purple top milan)



SOW OUTDOORS UNDER COVER

- * French beans
- * Squash (e.g. courgettes, marrows, pumpkins)
- * Greenhouse cucumbers (e.g. Conqueror, Telegraph)
- * Lettuce
- * Sweet Corn

SOW UNDER HEATED COVER

- * Aubergine
- * Celery
- * Outdoor cucumbers (e.g. Burpless Tasty Green)

PLANT OUTDOORS

- * Globe artichoke
- * Jerusalem artichoke tubers
- * Chitted potatoes (second earlies and maincrops)
- * Onion and shallot sets
- * Asparagus (remove perennial weeds before planting crowns)

PLANT IN GREENHOUSE

- * Aubergine
- * Peppers
- * Tomatoes



Prostate cancer risk from weedkillers

The UK government's advisers have warned for the first time that pesticides, particularly weedkillers, might cause prostate cancer and want better monitoring of this link. These are the conclusions of the Department of Health's Committee on Carcinogenicity which were asked to review epidemiological and other research to identify chemical exposures possibly related to prostate cancer.

In the UK prostate cancer is now the most common cancer diagnosed in men and is the second biggest cancer killer. There have been dramatic increases in the numbers of cases diagnosed over the past 20 years with 26,000 new cases every year. One in 13 men in the UK will contract prostate cancer during his life and, although survival rates have improved, there are 9,900 deaths every year. Although improvements in detection can account for a part of this increase the advisory body were also able to identify risk factors linked to the disease. In particular the review found that farmers were more likely to develop prostate cancer particularly if their work involved spraying weedkillers.

www.advisorybodies.doh.gov.uk/coc/prostate.htm

FRUIT

PLANTING

- * Fruit trees are coming out of dormancy so all bare-rooted fruit trees should already have been planted.
- * Strawberry can be planted in March/April, but it is best to remove flowers in the first year.

OTHER FRUIT TASKS

- * Compost around the base of fruit trees, particularly young trees
- * Weed around the base of young fruit trees. Weeds compete for nutrients and affect how well young trees get established.
- * Sow melon seeds under cover to plant in the greenhouse in May. Cantaloupe varieties do best in unheated greenhouses.
- * Hand-pollinate peaches and nectarines (using a soft paint brush) as they flower early when there are not many pollinating insects.
- * Strawberries can be forced to flower by covering them with cloches. You may need to hand-pollinate the forced plants.

SCALE

Scale insects are a large group of unusual insects which appear like small shells attached to the stems or undersides of leaves. There are over 100 different species worldwide, and at least 25 different pest species in the UK. They are usually divided into soft scale (which secrete a waxy film) and armoured scale (which secrete a separate covering). All feed on plant sap and those found in the UK are typically between 1 and 5 mm long. In the UK they are most frequently found on houseplants or in heated greenhouses, but can also be found on some outdoor plants.

The wingless legless adults spend their lives pressed against their host plant. Mature females lay eggs underneath the protective scale 'shells'. When eggs hatch the young leave the shell and crawl about but soon settle down to suck sap from the host plant. Those affecting outdoor plants usually have only one generation per year while those living in heated greenhouses may have overlapping generations with all stages visible at the one time.



Those potentially relevant for UK allotment gardeners are

- * brown scale, *Parthenolecanium corni*, affect bush and cane fruit, and roses
- * soft scale, *Coccus hesperidum*, affect citrus, bay, and many indoor plants
- * hemispherical scale, *Saissetia coffeae*, affect a wide range of indoor or greenhouse ornamental plants

Many scale insects do not cause a serious problem for their hosts but a large infestation can weaken a plant. They also excrete honeydew making foliage sticky and encouraging the growth of moulds. To reduce populations

- * Inspect plants regularly, particularly along the stem and main veins. Squash any scale you find with your nail.
- * Soft scale and hemispherical scale are both controlled by a parasitic wasp, *Metaphycus helvolus*, available from Defenders (www.defenders.co.uk; tel - 01233 813121). These are released in greenhouses but are only effective when the temperature reaches 22°C for a few hours each day.
- * Eradicoat is made from plant extracts and works by blocking insects breathing holes. This can be sprayed over scale insects suffocating them. It is also available from Defenders
- * Organic sprays made from fatty acids or plant oils can be used. They are not persistent so often require repeat treatments to be effective.

OTHER TASKS

- * Place growbags in the greenhouse to warm up
- * Harvest the remainder of the winter-harvest crop and compost any debris
- * Propagate perennial herbs such as rosemary and lavender. Cut a few inches below a shoot tip, remove the lower leaves from the cutting and place the cut end in perlite in a humid, shaded environment. The relative success rate of rooting and the time required depends on which species is being propagated.
- * Grass will grow rapidly in April/May so it is time to get the lawnmower out of the shed and into action



Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) is an independent non-profit organisation working nationally and globally with individuals and organisations who share our concerns. PAN UK projects enable us to work effectively towards specific targets to enable us to:

- ❖ Eliminate the hazards of pesticides
- ❖ Reduce dependence on pesticides
- ❖ Promote alternatives to pesticides

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