

# Winter is almost over .....

These tips provide guidance on times for planting, sowing, harvesting and other tasks. Each month highlights a different pest/disease, non-chemical methods of control, and relevant news and information.

## VEGETABLES

These are sowing/planting times for the South of England. Growers in Scotland should delay for 2-4 weeks. If a hard frost is forecast soil can be covered with horticultural fleece to protect germinating seeds.

### SOW OUTDOORS

- \* Broad beans (Broad beans are particularly susceptible to blackfly. Many organic gardeners avoid growing them.)
- \* Parsnip
- \* Onions (from seed)
- \* Peas (for May/June crop) suitable varieties: Feltham First; Meteor

### SOW UNDER COVER

- \* Summer cabbage, e.g. varieties Greyhound, Hispi, Primo, Derby Day, Stonehead, Minicole, Winnigstadt
- \* Radish (summer varieties)
- \* Lettuce
- \* Rocket
- \* Spinach
- \* Early turnip e.g. purple top milan

### SOW UNDER HEATED COVER

- \* Aubergine (for a greenhouse crop)
- \* Pepper (for a greenhouse crop)

### PLANT OUTDOORS

- \* Jerusalem artichoke tubers
- \* Shallots

### PREPARATION

Start chitting early potato varieties in preparation for planting in late March/early April. Individual tubers can be placed in egg cartons (or similar) in a cool place under indirect light.

### HARVEST

Jerusalem artichoke, perpetual spinach (leaf beet), early purple sprouting broccoli, brussels sprouts, celeriac, celery, chicory, endive, kale, leeks, parsnip, radish, salsify, scorzonera, spinach, swede, turnip.

## FRUIT

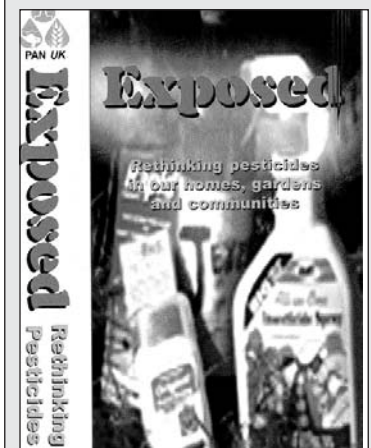
- \* Finish planting fruit trees and bushes (raspberries and other cane fruits).
- \* Finish pruning apple and pear trees.
- \* Protect blooms on early flowering fruit trees - peaches, nectarines, apricots - with horticultural fleece or similar.
- \* Shorten sideshoots on red and white currants to just one bud and remove old stems crowding the centre of the bush.



To receive Gardening Tips send your email address to [roslynmckendry@pan-uk.org](mailto:roslynmckendry@pan-uk.org). Tips can also be downloaded from our website at [www.pan-uk.org/gardening.htm](http://www.pan-uk.org/gardening.htm)

### 'Exposed' - a new video from PAN UK

Exposed describes the impacts of pesticides on health and environment with additional sections on the toxic origin of pesticides and how to phase them out. Accompanying information provides helpful suggestions for finding safer alternatives.



This video, the first of its kind, is available on FREE LOAN from PAN UK. Interested community groups or gardening groups should contact Roslyn McKendry <[roslynmckendry@pan-uk.org](mailto:roslynmckendry@pan-uk.org)> (020 7065 0912) for more information. The video can also be bought for £10.



- \* Prune gooseberries.
- \* For an early rhubarb crop force a few crowns by covering with buckets. Place straw/compost over the buckets for added heat.

## GENERAL TASKS

- \* Remove any volunteer potato to keep plot free from blight.
- \* Start harvesting green manure crops when the soil is ready to dig. Young lush growth can be chopped up and incorporated into the soil to break down for a few weeks before planting. More mature crops should be composted first.
- \* Warm up soil by covering with plastic sheeting or with cloches a couple of weeks before sowing.
- \* Wash down the greenhouse roof and sides to remove grime.
- \* Clean out gutters.
- \* Clean and sterilise pots and trays.
- \* Collect plastic water bottles for use as make-shift cloches.
- \* Order seeds and other supplies.
- \* Make 5in square mats to place around cabbage shoots to protect from cabbage root fly - cardboard, carpet or similar works well.
- \* Help birds through the winter by providing some extra food.
- \* Plan your planting scheme for the year ideally organised around a 4-year rotation.
- \* Prepare potato bed by forking in compost or rotted manure. If soil is too wet cover with plastic for a few days to keep rain off.
- \* Make leaf mold from any fallen leaves.
- \* Top-dress perennial or over-wintering crops with compost.

## ONION WHITE ROT

This is one of the most serious diseases affecting onions and other allium family members and is caused by the fungus *Sclerotium cepivorum*.

The first signs are yellowing and wilting of older leaves. A white fluffy mycelium and black specks then develop around the base of the leaves and the bulb. During a high infestation the onion may wilt and die. The black specks are sclerotia and these survive in the soil or on diseased plant material over winter. They will germinate in the spring if onions or their relatives are planted and will invade onion roots.

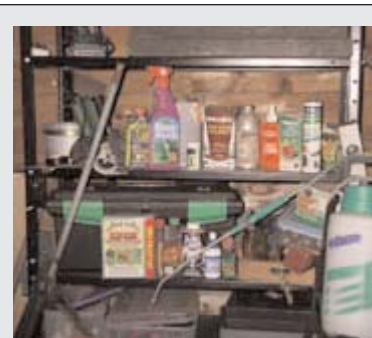
The fungus usually affects a few plants in a row and then spreads through contact between roots. Long distance transport is generally via movement of infested soil on boots, tools, or onion sets. The sclerotia are extremely hardy and can survive for at least 15 years in the soil even without any onions being planted. Infestations are most severe in cool moist soils (10°C to 20°C) and are less of a problem in warmer soils. White rot begins in the field but carries over into storage. If stored onions sprout this is a sign they may be affected.

White rot is almost impossible to eradicate but the likelihood of infestation can be reduced or its severity minimised.

- ◆ Minimise movement of soil between plots on boots, tools, or on onion sets
- ◆ Diseased onions and surrounding soil should be dug up and either burnt, buried deeply or landfilled. Diseased onions should not be composted (unless you are absolutely certain your heap will reach and stay at 50°C to 60°C for several days).
- ◆ Increase spacing between onions to prevent white rot spreading between roots
- ◆ Buy your garlic/onion sets from a reputable supplier or grow onions from seed instead
- ◆ Kitchen Garden magazine (Nov '04) suggested a method for helping reduce sclerotia in infested soils. This was to partially compost healthy onion debris and spread on the soil in spring. Sclerotia should then be fooled into thinking onions have been planted and germinate. They will then die as no suitable live host is available.

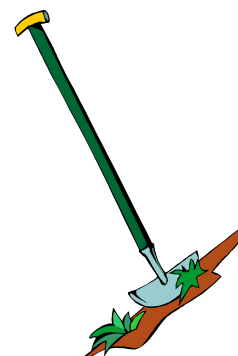


credit: Walt Stevenson



## Do you have any stored pesticides?

Did you know that disposing of old pesticides in bins or down drains can pollute land and water. Most local councils offer a service for safe disposal of old pesticides and other chemicals. Find out what facilities are available near you at: [www.pesticidedisposal.org](http://www.pesticidedisposal.org) or call your council.



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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