



April in the allotment

VEGETABLES

SOW OUTDOORS

- * Beetroot and turnip
- * Peas and broad beans
- * Broccoli
- * Brussels sprouts
- * Cabbage
- * Carrots
- * Chard
- * Endive
- * Kale
- * Kohl rabi
- * Leeks
- * Lettuce
- * Spinach and perpetual spinach
- * Radish

SOW OUTDOORS UNDER COVER

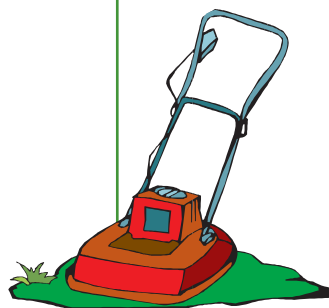
- * French beans
- * Squash (e.g. courgettes, marrows, pumpkins)
- * Greenhouse cucumbers (e.g. Conqueror, Telegraph)
- * Lettuce
- * Sweet Corn

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)



Illegal pesticide hospitalises two allotment gardeners

This January two allotment gardeners arriving at their site early one morning received a shock. A fellow plot holder lay unconscious on the ground adjacent to the trading hut. An ambulance was called to take the man to hospital. Later in the day a second man started to feel unwell. His condition deteriorated and again an ambulance was called.

Hospital staff identified that both men had been poisoned and informed the emergency services. Both the fire brigade and police were despatched to the site. A tea hut, open to all plot holders, is available on site. Both the poisoned men took sugar in their tea and forensic examination revealed the sugar was 7% methomyl.

Methomyl is a carbamate insecticide and is one of the most poisonous pesticides in the world. The World Health Organisation classifies pesticides according to their acute toxicity and they place methomyl in Class 1b (class 1 is the most toxic class), describing it as 'highly hazardous'. It comes as white granules indistinguishable from sugar.

Methomyl is not licensed for use by amateur gardeners in the UK and was last licensed for agricultural use in 2001. The source of the pesticide may have been an old agricultural product, or it may have been brought in illegally from abroad.

The first man admitted to hospital was in a serious condition for several hours only responding slowly to treatment. By good fortune the medication administered to speed up his slowing heart rate was coincidentally an antidote to the pesticide. Expert opinion suggested he might have died if he had not received prompt treatment.

The police were unable to identify whether the sugar had been contaminated maliciously or accidentally and have dropped the case.

In a 2004 incident on an allotment site methomyl was used to bait biscuits to control rats and killed a police dog on a missing persons hunt (see September 2004 tips). Two plot holders were taken to court.

Plot holders should be aware

- * it is only legal to use pesticides licensed for amateurs in the UK
- * it is illegal to use agricultural pesticides
- * it is illegal to bring pesticides into the UK from abroad
- * it is illegal to lay poisoned bait in the open where children or wildlife could have access to it

Unwanted or illegal pesticides should be disposed of in local authority safe disposal sites. Check www.pesticidedisposal.org for locations.

PLANT IN GREENHOUSE

Aubergine, peppers and tomatoes should be planted in the greenhouse.

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.

Carrot Root Fly

When planting carrots it is worth taking steps to protect them from their main pest, the carrot root fly (*Psila rosae*). These small black flies (8mm in length) lay eggs in the soil near carrots. About a week later larvae emerge and begin feeding. First symptoms are a reddening of the carrot leaves which begin to wilt. If you lift the root you will see tunnels eaten by the larvae and may see the creamy coloured larvae which are about 1cm in length.

There are usually two generations of flies with eggs first laid by over-wintering adults in April/May and a second generation laid in July/August. Carrots growing in the ground at these times are vulnerable to attack and more damage is caused by the second generation.

Preventing damage from carrot root fly

- * Cover the crop with a barrier to prevent the flies from laying eggs near carrots. Fleece works well but remember to bury the edges of the fleece to prevent the flies from getting in. Mulching the ground with a layer of grass clippings will also make it more difficult for the flies to lay eggs.
- * When in flight the carrot root fly stays low so surrounding the carrot bed with a barrier of polythene extending at least 60cm high can deter them.
- * It is thought that carrot root flies detect carrots by their smell which is particularly strong during thinning. Various strategies may minimise this smell
 - ◆ Planting several rows of onions or garlic between each row of carrots. Rosemary, sage or wormwood plantings may also work.
 - ◆ Sow sparsely to avoid having to thin seedlings.
 - ◆ Dust with calcified seaweed to disguise the smell.
 - ◆ Remove thinnings and other waste from the area.
- * Time plantings so roots are not in the ground during egg laying periods.
- * Sow a resistant variety. 'Carrot F1 Fly Away' and 'T&M Fly Away' have resistance to larval attack. 'Sytan' is also less susceptible to larval attack.
- * Avoid particularly susceptible varieties such as 'Autumn King'.
- * Carrot root flies are not strong fliers so planting in an exposed, windy site can prevent their attack.

This troublesome pest can affect related crops (in the apiaceae family) such as parsnips, celery, celeriac, parsley, coriander.

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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