

short cold days and long dark nights.....

The winter months provide a good time to catch up with unfinished tasks and to prepare for next spring. Think about ordering seeds and seed potatoes, tidying out the shed, cleaning the greenhouse, collecting plastic water bottles to make mini-cloches, cleaning plant pots, repairing frames, and planning your crop rotation for next year.

VEGETABLES

Sow indoors

Sow lettuce, radishes, round varieties of carrots, spinach, salad onions and turnips. Place on a windowsill or in a propagator.

Plant outside

Garlic cloves can be planted, e.g. Thermidrome and Printantor.

Harvest

Jerusalem artichokes, perpetual spinach, brussels sprouts, winter cabbage, savoy cabbage, carrots, celeriac, celery, chicory (non-forcing and forcing varieties), endive, spinach, kohlrabi, lettuce, kale, leeks, parsnip, radish, salsify, scorzonera, swede, turnips.

FRUIT

- * Plant rhubarb crowns
- * Cover established rhubarb to force early shoots
- * Cut down canes of autumn-fruiting raspberries which have finished fruiting and burn to prevent fungal diseases spreading.
- * Plant bare-rooted fruit trees and bushes this month.
- * Support young trees with stakes and ties.
- * Winter prune young apple and pear trees.
- * Place grease bands around tree trunks to prevent winter moths from climbing trees and laying eggs (see over).



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UK High Court rules to protect rural residents

On 14 November, the UK High Court made a historic decision ruling that the UK government has acted unlawfully in its pesticides policy failing to protect the health of rural residents and communities who are exposed to pesticides as a result of living near regularly sprayed fields.

Georgina Downs v Secretary of State for Defra is the first known legal case of its kind to reach the High Court. The judgement highlights several ways in which current pesticide policy fails to adequately protect residents. It acknowledges what Ms Downs has always argued: that the "bystander risk assessment" relied on by the UK government is inadequate. It does not account for the repeated exposure to mixtures of pesticides, through a variety of exposure factors and routes, that affects those living near sprayed areas. The judgement further notes that "Some individuals may be particularly vulnerable (for example, the asthmatic, the elderly, children, pregnant women), but they must be protected too."

This case focuses on rural residents, but has implications for all those affected by pesticide exposure. The judgement concluded that Ms Downs had produced "solid evidence that residents have suffered harm to their health". The UK government will now have to review its policy on pesticides. It will be very interesting to follow developments following this unprecedented case.

More details available on *Georgina Downs'* website at <http://www.pesticidescampaign.co.uk/>

GENERAL TASKS

- * Cover bare ground with leaves, weed cloth, straw (or similar) to prevent soil erosion. Beds to be dug first in spring can be covered with polythene so prevent them from becoming waterlogged and so allowing you to dig them earlier. Don't dig if the soil sticks to boots/tools as it will destroy the soil structure.
- * Collect fallen leaves and store allowing them to break down to form leaf mould, an excellent soil supplement.
- * Collect remaining crop residues or other organic matter and add to the compost heap.
- * Put out bird seed and fat balls for the birds.
- * Cover compost bins to keep the rain out and heat in.
- * Set up water butts to collect rain water from roofs.
- * Remove yellowing leaves from winter brassicas.
- * Check stored crops removing any showing signs of rot.
- * If your pond freezes frogs can be deprived of oxygen. Floating a small ball in it will keep a small area clear.
- * Protect cauliflowers curds by bending their inner leaves over them. This keeps them white and delays their opening.
- * Net winter brassicas to protect them from pigeons.
- * Earth up spring cabbages to protect from high winds.



SLUGS

Digging over the soil in wintertime brings slug eggs to the surface where they are more likely to be killed by frosts or eaten by birds. The pearly white eggs are about 3mm in diameter and found in clusters.



In April increasing temperatures and wet weather provide good conditions for slugs to grow and multiply. No single method of control will be completely effective so you should try several strategies. Here are a few ideas

- * Hunt for slugs at dusk or dawn with a flashlight.
- * Encourage slug-eating animals such as frogs by building a pond
- * During the day slugs congregate in moist dark places. Create suitable hiding spots and then gather slugs from them. Many people find overturned grapefruit halves work well.
- * The parasitic nematode *Phasmarhabditis hermaphrodita* specifically attacks slugs. These are bought as a powder, mixed with water and applied with a watering can. They infect slugs and kill them in about a week leaving your plot slug-free for about 6 weeks. But they are relatively expensive to buy.
- * Remove debris from your plot to remove slug hiding places.
- * Place beer traps around the edges of beds. These can be made out of yoghurt cartons by cutting 'windows' near the top of cartons for slugs to enter. Place sugary beer or milk in the pot, replace the lid and sink into the ground with the 'window' just above ground level.
- * Slugs do not like crawling over copper so pot plants can be protected by placing copper tape around the pots. Make sure the slugs cannot reach your plants by crawling up drooping stems or leaves.
- * Raise seedlings indoors and plant out when they are more able to sustain attack.
- * Slug killing products containing aluminium sulphate and ferrous phosphate have minimal impact on wildlife.

Avoid Metaldehyde

The UK government runs a Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme to identify when pets and wildlife have been poisoned by pesticides. Metaldehyde is always one of the most frequent causes of pet deaths. Avoid products containing metaldehyde.



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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