

Winter 2023



NEWSLETTER

THE LATEST NEWS FROM YORK ALLOTMENTS



Date for your diary

The YACIO AGM will be held on 23rd March at Clements Hall, YO23 1BW 9:30am - 12:30pm

SECURING YOUR PLOT OVER WINTER

At this time of year, when nights are long and there are fewer people on their plots, it's important to make sure everything is kept secure. If you have a shed make sure it is well locked or, better still, free of anything that can be easily stolen. Hand tools are the usual target.

Take care not to leave anything flammable near sheds or fences. This includes piles of logs or pruned woody material. Keeping the plot neat also helps. Experience suggests unkempt plots are

more likely to attract anti-social behaviour. If you have fences or hedges trim them. The Tenancy Agreement specifies 1.5 metres as the maximum height. Plots that are enclosed or secluded are also favoured by those up to no good as well as being unsettling for some plotholders who feel insecure when unable to see what's going on around them.

Try not to leave the plot unvisited for very long periods. Failure to notice something is amiss can lead to things escalating. If there's evidence of trespass or damage let your Site Secretary know and report it to YACIO at: contact@yorkallotments.org. Theft and serious vandalism should also be reported to the police by individual plotholders using 101.

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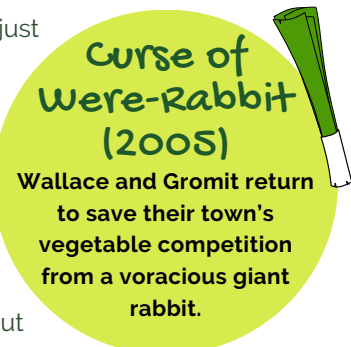
Plus...

Our pick of films with a gardening or allotment theme



INTO THE DARK

We are heading into deep winter now; whatever the weather may be doing, there's no arguing about the long twilight and long nights. A time of minimal earth activity, tipped away from the light and into quiet reflection (if you can avoid the festive craziness that is....). So as there is little growth just now, it's a good time to take stock, make plans, and to get on with jobs that may have been neglected during the growing season.



It's a particularly good time to cut hedges and, once the leaves have fallen, to get on with pruning soft fruit (and later the tree top fruit as well). If you leave hedges till the new year, before you know it birds will begin looking for nesting sites – and it's illegal to disturb nesting birds. You could learn how to lay your hedges: an old craft that cuts half way through stems low to the ground (traditionally using a billhook, but a small pruning saw works too), and bending them horizontal. This makes for a really sturdy and robustly dense hedge that is hugely attractive as shelter for all sorts of wildlife. If you're just trimming the top of your hedge to a more reasonable height, you can still use the cuttings by lying them neatly under the hedge. There's no need to have a polluting carcinogenic bonfire!

Not all soft fruit needs the same treatment by way of pruning so make sure to check you know what you're doing – and that you're not cutting off the branches that will bear fruit next year. Currants and gooseberries have different pruning needs according to their age as well, so look up the processes before you head out with your secateurs. You should already have cut out the summer's fruited canes on summer raspberries, and tied in the fresh new growth; autumn raspberries can all be cut right down to the ground, but you don't need to do that until late January. You can leave blackberry pruning till then too, taking out the old fruited wood and training in the new growth.



How are your winter crops holding up? Have you got enough to see you through to the early purple sprouting broccoli and cauliflowers and wild rocket next year? The root crops should be at their most delicious and of course it's a great season for tasty roasted parsnips, carrots, celeriac, Jerusalem artichokes and stored potatoes, squash, garlic and onions. With good planning you should have plenty of fresh greens too: leeks, kales, salads and herbs. There is strong evidence for the higher nutrient quality of fresh and organically cultivated fruit and vegetables, so make sure you are helping your microbiome and immune system, as well as the soil biota, by growing without chemicals.

Permaculture systems use the idea of zoning for designing and planting, and that may feel very appropriate at this time of year. You might want to pot up a few herbs and salads from your plot and take them home to have handy near the door for days you don't make it up to the allotment before dark, or for when the weather is just too horrible to get up there. Keep cosy, keep gardening!



OH CHRISTMAS TREE!

It can be tempting to replant your Christmas tree on your allotment plot, but these non-native conifers grow incredibly quickly. Without careful management you will find that your plot and that of your neighbours, may soon be overshadowed by a large evergreen tree. The best solution is to take your tree to the waste recycling centre where it can be composted and used to nourish future Christmas trees.



TO DIG OR NOT TO DIG THAT IS THE QUESTION



In recent years whether digging is beneficial or harmful has become a hot topic in the gardening and allotment world. On the one hand we have traditionalists who like to wield the spade or power up the rotovator and believe that turning and churning the soil is a hallmark of good allotment practice. On the other we have those, often disciples of no-dig guru Charles Dowding, who see digging as both harmful and little better than a pointless ritual.

Those favouring no dig often do so for environmental reasons. Arguments for discarding the spade include minimising disturbance to soil life, avoiding bare ground that can be battered and compacted by winter weather, inhibiting germination of weed seeds brought to the surface by tilling, reducing moisture loss and lessening carbon escape into the atmosphere. Other no dig advocates are a touch less ideological, simply seeing spade work as a laborious task that delivers no gain.

Most traditional diggers would dispute that digging is unbeneficial. Digging, it is claimed, breaks up and loosens soil, especially when it is compacted, so that roots can run deeply. Heavier soils are seen as those most likely to benefit being left rough dug for winter frost to break clods into a fine tilth for spring. Rather than encouraging weeds, digging is regarded as a means of keeping them in check, particularly where perennials such as couch grass tend to invade. Other advantages claimed are being able to dig in bulky manures, clearing crop debris and exposing pests to predation by birds.

Another Year (2010)

A lovingly tended
allotment plot provides
the backdrop for Mike
Leigh's moving film
about friendship, love
and loss.



At the end of the day, whether or not to dig comes down to individual preference and practice. Perhaps there's merit in both approaches.

Repeated soil disturbance does seem an inherently disruptive action that should only be done when needed. But there are times, especially when a plot is getting overrun with perennial weeds, soil has become trodden and compacted or there's manure and compost to incorporate, when the benefits of digging are likely to outweigh the disadvantages.

SPOTLIGHT ON GLEN ALLOTMENTS



Dead hedge under construction

After having a couple of trees pruned, Colin suggested we make a dead hedge to deal with the green waste and to give wildlife some cover and a home over winter. It was really great fun to make and it only took about 2-3 hours from start to finish.

We also held a plot sign competition with prizes going to the tenant who made the most creative plot number. Weronika, Tosia and Witek won the children's competition while the best adult sign was created by Emilene Coventry.



The winning children's sign

STAYING SAFE ON YOUR ALLOTMENT

For many going to the allotment is peaceful and fulfilling, but occasionally accidents happen. One such incident happened recently on one of our sites. It was getting dark and cold and luckily another tenant found the injured tenant and got help. But it could have ended very differently. Whilst YACIO looks after your safety on the site, with 6 monthly risk assessments, it is up to each tenant to ensure their plot is safe and here are some things you can do to help.

Greenfingers (2001)

Based on a true story, prison inmates beat the odds to create a show garden for Hampton Court Flower Show.



Ensure all pathways are free from trip hazards and you have not left a rake lying about. Wear gloves, this protects you from disease from manure and other substances, as well as reducing the risk of thorns sticking in your fingers or hand. Remove any barbed wire on your plot, this should already have been done, but please remove if you find any. Do not leave glass bottles lying about and ensure your tetanus vaccination is up to date.

Have a small first aid kit in your shed. This can include wet wipes, plasters, tweezers as we have all had that little splinter or thorn in our finger, a small bandage and a small pair of scissors.

I keep mine in a small Tupperware box. Also think about having a bottle of sanitising gel on the shelf for when you stop for a break, a drink and something to eat.



Take your mobile phone with you and make sure you have let someone know where you have gone and when you expect to be back, especially if you

live alone. Ask a neighbouring tenant if you could have their mobile number in case of emergencies, or ask your site secretary for their number.

If your site is gated and locked, please ensure you lock the gates behind you. These are there to keep you safe and the site safe from thieves and damage.

If you keep poultry or pigeons, please wear gloves when cleaning them out, if you suffer from any chest conditions, also think about wearing a mask as tiny spores could irritate your condition.

Having an allotment is one of the best things, fresh air, exercise, a sense of self worth when you harvest, pleasure when you see your flowers grow and bloom. Enjoy your allotment and stay safe.

Heather Whittaker

Health, Safety and Animal Welfare Trustee



Don't miss out on hearing from us

Have you moved house, changed your email or phone number? Please let us know.



CONTACTING US

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