

April's ALLOTMENT INSPIRATION



On the plot news and advice for April



EXPERT PROFILE

Phil Gomersall is the president of the National Allotment Society

The importance of polytunnels

Investing in a polytunnel for your plot will protect crops from the worst of the bad weather and extend the growing season significantly. You will be able to sow spinach in the winter months to harvest young leaves for salads. In June you can sow salad onion 'White Lisbon' and autumn sowings of winter lettuce 'Arctic King' or 'Winter Density'.

Our allotment site in Leeds is quite an exposed site and while many polytunnels have blown away and a number of greenhouse have been flattened, a

wonderful construction that belongs to the oldest plot-holder on our allotment site, and has protected his seedlings and tomatoes over all these years, has remained intact! This particular polytunnel was created many years ago and was originally constructed with old timber. It will not be there much longer, as the plot-holder's family are getting him a brand new polytunnel for his birthday. Hopefully this new polytunnel will serve him as well, nurturing his young plants and giving tender crops much needed heat in Yorkshire summers, and he should save a fortune in screws and nails.

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Northern Polytunnels

Northern Polytunnels has spent almost 50 years designing and manufacturing large-scale polytunnels for commercial plant nurseries. After the success of its hobby polytunnel kit, this company has expanded its range to create a DIY Polytunnel kit.

The DIY Polytunnel kit contains the same heavy-duty steel framework, without the added extras. A minimalist kit means every polytunnel can be bespoke to the grower, so you can source your own doors and door frames from new or reclaimed timber (or anything else that happens to be lying around). This helps keep costs down so you can spend your excess money on seeds, compost and wellies. All steel frameworks come with a lifetime guarantee. Find them at northernpolytunnels.co.uk

FORUM Q&As

We asked our forum...

Q What are your top tips for growing potatoes? Do you grow them in containers or directly in the ground?

"Always containers (usually 30 litre pots) – I find they are much less likely to be attacked by slugs than when grown in the soil. They are also much easier to harvest as you can just turn the whole pot out onto a tarpaulin and pick the potatoes out. They come out cleaner than when grown in soil. When planting I add about 10cm of compost, put in three seed potatoes and fill the pot right to the top with compost. I then don't need to worry about earthing up, although with some maincrop varieties the odd tuber develops near the surface which needs covering later."

Penellype, via the GYO website.

APRIL JOBS

- Plant potatoes on your allotment in April, although be aware timings vary for different types. Put second earlies in the ground from the start to the middle of this month. Maincrops can be planted from the middle to the end.
- Stay organised on the plot during April so you can enjoy the growing season to the full. Remember to label crops and to store any equipment in sheds or take tools home to avoid loss or damage.
- Consider planting an asparagus bed this month, as it is your last opportunity to do so for this year. Crowns can be planted in a sunny area in a 20cm deep and 30cm wide trench. Manure also needs to be incorporated into the bottom of this.
- If you have fruit trees, then you may need to protect the early blossom with fleece to prevent frosts affecting the trees health.



"I plant in the open ground and in containers. I use seaweed, rotted leaves, chicken pellets and anything else available, but always get a better crop from the potatoes planted in the open ground." **bramble, via the GYO website.**

"I grow mine in old recycling boxes using a mix of leaf mould, my own compost and soil. Three potatoes are placed near the bottom of the box, then it is filled to the top using the same mix. I add blood, fish and bone, then after that I feed with comfrey." **Bren In Pots, via the GYO website.**



Did you know?

The tallest verified tomato plant grew to 19.8m and was grown by Nutriculture Ltd in Lancashire



Newquay Community Orchard,
Newquay, Cornwall



PLOT SHOWCASE

Newquay Community Orchard is a re-imagined urban green space and has been in development since January 2015 with a team of passionate volunteers. It will ultimately include a five-acre orchard, forest garden, community growing space, wood workshop, community building and café, amphitheatre and a network of paths.

An Lowarth, the community growing space, sits on a south facing slope. It has a Cornish hedge and hugelkultur hedge providing the beds with shelter from the wind that howls in from the sea. In a variety of raised and lasagna beds, volunteers grow everything from beans to broccoli, salads, root veg and alliums. Flowers and perennial herbs add colour and a fruit cage protects raspberries and other soft fruit. A Victorian style greenhouse is going to be built in 2018, which will offer more space for horticultural workshops and courses. The five-acre apple orchard holds a variety of cooking, eating and cider apples of mainly heritage southwestern varieties. The trees are now four years old and will provide the first harvest this year.

Managing Director Luke Berkeley said: "Everything we do in An Lowarth is based around organic methods and permaculture principles. Volunteers take home what they grow and any left over harvest goes to local projects like Soul Food Kitchen, a community run healthy cooking project that aims to improve social interaction for all."

Newquay Community Orchard runs a variety of programmes providing environmental education, mental health services, community events, employability services and training. The site is a space for all to enjoy, so bring a picnic, walk your dog or get in touch and join one of the programmes. The first ever spring fayre will be held on Sunday April 29, 2018, which will showcase a variety of local goods from farmers and makers throughout Cornwall along with a series of free workshops.

To find out more about what's going on, email info@newquayorchard.co.uk, call 01637 877 325 or visit newquayorchard.co.uk