

Summer

In this talk, we will be talking about everything for the season on the plot during the summer: weeding, mulches, harvesting and continuation, as well as recipes to use all that lovely produce! We can also troubleshoot any problems you have had so far. These are notes to accompany the talk.

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Mulching

Advantages of Mulching

In nature, there is generally a layer of plants over the soil. When we clear away plants, especially common when we grow annual vegetables, we can leave the soil bare, which is very unnatural. The natural process of the earth is to quickly cover the surface up again, which if you are not careful, will be via annual weeds, the first species of plant to quickly colonise bare ground. In this way nature ensures there is little soil erosion or leaching of nutrients.

So any ground left clear after harvesting a crop should be covered with a mulch or planted with a green manure to prevent soil erosion, leaching of nutrients and excessive weed growth.

Mulches

- Kill weeds by denying them light
- Conserve water by reducing evaporation from the soil
- Protect the soil surface from sun, wind and rain, which can cause soil erosion, capping and leaching of nutrients
- Encourage biological activity
- Add plant nutrients and organic matter to the soil

Clearance Mulch

This occupies the ground before planting and is good at killing weeds. A clearance mulch therefore generally needs to be moved back before sowing seeds

To kill weeds the mulch must completely exclude light. A mulch from autumn to spring will protect the ground over winter from leaching nutrients from the rain, and will kill some plants, but not the strong perennials. To kill these you need to mulch from spring to autumn during their growing season. Bindweed is an exception, as it is very persistent, but it makes it much easier to pick out the pale roots when you remove the cover.

DO USE:

Black plastic sheeting is a really easy solution. It can be available second hand from farmers in the form of broken silage bags or silage clamp covers, or bought cheaply on a roll from Mole Valley Farmers, and can be reused year on year. It can be dug in around the edges or weighed down. Another benefit is, that it is not permeable to water. This helps to trap water in if laid after some substantial rain, helping if you have a dry spring the following year as the water does not evaporate.

A thick layer of cut grass. This is ideal as it not only helps increase soil fertility, but also makes the soil really friable underneath. Long grass cuttings such as after scything a meadow are great, however many people will find it hard to have access

to enough quantity. It does need to be at least 2 ft deep when freshly cut, as it will compress as it rots.

Leaves are also ideal, but the same applies; it can be hard to gather enough.

Cardboard, however this needs weighing down with another mulch, and can rot. If you have cardboard it can be saved to use in a grow through mulch (see later)

You can use black plastic on top of either a thinner layer of grass, leaves, manure, compost or straw, which can be a best-of-both solution if you can't gather quite enough material to block out the light. You will have the advantage of the black plastic stopping weeds from growing, and the advantages of the green material encouraging soil life to thrive.

DO NOT USE:

Old carpet because when it rots it can leave synthetic fibres behind, and chemicals that have been used as a fire retardant. Even natural wool carpets will have been soaked in this.

Thin weed suppressant membrane, as the weeds still grow underneath, plus it degrades. Some is ok, but many do not block enough light on their own.

Pale plastic sheeting as this will not exclude light

Grow through mulch

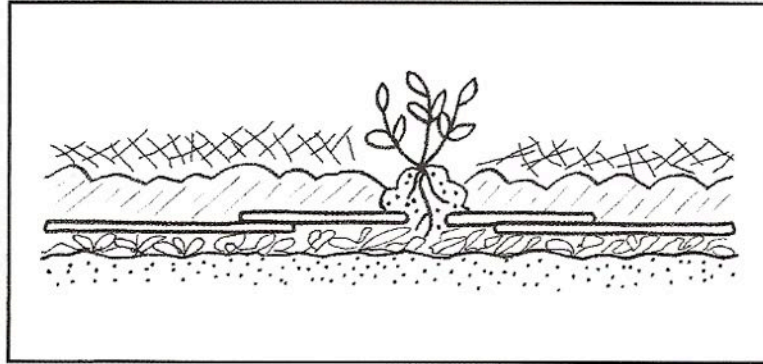
With this type of mulch you get the advantage of suppressing weeds without waiting a whole season for clearance mulch to work. You could use a commercially bought weed suppressant membrane, however, as described above, many are not good enough quality, plus they are plastic, plus they are expensive! Woven ones are better quality, however as they degrade, they can become a hazard for birds trapping their feet, then as they degrade further they can leave fibres in your soil. Cardboard is much better, so I will concentrate on this method.

A grow through mulch is not useful for direct sown seeds, but is useful for plants, for example brassica, bean or herb plants.

If it is your first year on your piece of ground, it is especially helpful, as it means you do not need to remove the turf or even the weeds. I would however remove any weed seed heads (which you can just cut off). If your grass or weeds are especially high, then scythe or cut to make it easier to lay the cardboard. You can use this cut material on the ground below the cardboard, or above if there are definitely no seedheads in it.

1 .Cover the ground in cardboard or 15-20 sheets thick newspaper, overlapping the edges by 20cm.

2. Water the cardboard using a watering can.
3. Add a layer of rotted manure, or compost (we like to use the municipal compost), or well-rotted bark chippings, or washed fresh seaweed, or straw, or bracken, or dry leaves and grass cuttings mixed.
4. Where you want to plant, make a hole in the cardboard, push away the top dressing, replace with some topsoil or compost, and plant into this.
5. Cardboard is completely biodegradable so its' effect will only last one season.



Layers of mulch.

Maintenance Mulch

Advantages

- Controls weeds with less need for digging and hoeing
- Decreases evaporation from the soil, reducing the need for watering
- Protects the soil surface from sun, wind and rain,
Prevents capping on soils that are prone to it
- Keeps soil warm in winter, and encourages early growth of perennial
Vegetables and can enable you to sow seed a bit earlier
- Provides habitat for beneficial creatures such as frogs and beetles
- Supplies the soil with organic matter and plant nutrients
- Reduces the need for making compost – material can simply be laid on the surface

Disadvantages

- Collecting mulch material can be time consuming or expensive
- Prevents light summer rain from penetrating the soil
- Can cause rotting of perennial vegetable crowns over the winter,
and of roses and trees if allowed to touch them.
- Slows the warming up of the soil in spring. Can increase frosts
by preventing radiation of heat from the soil
- Can harbour slugs**, and prevents birds from eating slug eggs
and over wintering pests in the soil

What materials can you use?

Similar to a grow through mulch, you can use rotted manure, compost, well-rotted bark chippings, washed fresh seaweed, hay, straw, bracken, dry leaves or grass cuttings mixed. If slugs are a problem, then using material that is already decomposed such as compost or manure is preferable to fresher materials such as sheepswool or fresh leaves.

Making Compost

This is a repeat of Februarys notes

What sort of compost bin will you use?

This depends on how much space you have and what sort of things you have to put in your compost.

The Black “darlec” compost bins

These are great if you don't have much space and you are likely to add material a little bit at a time, which is what most back gardens will have.

Compost Bays

Made usually with old pallets, these can be large for an allotment, with two or more in a row for turning.

Slow Compost

If you have one open compost bay that you don't turn regularly, this can be a habitat for slow worms and grass snakes. You can also place seed heads in the spring for insects to slowly emerge out of hibernation. Do not turn in the summer as you may find grass snake eggs, or in the winter you may find a hedgehog. Slow compost can be investigated in the spring to see if you have compost worth using on the garden at the bottom, but it will be less good quality than if you try to make a good, hot compost.

Fast / Hot Compost

This is what to aim for, for healthy plants and increased nutrient value. It does however take a bit more time and effort.

What to put in your bin:

Greens (50%) to add nitrogen

- **kitchen scraps** – fruit and vegetable waste, (no meat or animal bones as this will attract rats. I also wouldn't add bread for the same reason, best fed to the birds!)
- **grass clippings** – add this in thin layers with browns layered in between so they don't matt into clumps. Grass clippings with clover are even higher in nitrogen. Layering with shredded office paper or biochar works really well.

- **garden plants**, including dead flowers and seeds as most garden flowers won't re-grow from compost. Chop up any woody stems. Do not add diseased material such as blighted tomatoes or white rot onions as this spreads the disease to next years crop.
- **Lawn and garden weeds** – annual weeds only, leaves of perennials, and nothing that has gone to seed – for composting these items see later.
- **Green comfrey leaves** – excellent as a compost activator and also adds potassium.
- **Seaweed and Kelp** – collect from the seaside that which has been washed ashore. Rinse before adding to compost, a great addition to compost as it contains many trace minerals, great for the healthy growth of plants.
- **Chicken Manure** an excellent compost activator
- **Coffee grounds and tea**
- **Hair (human or animal) or sheepswool**

Browns (50%) to add carbon

- **Leaves**- all except walnut tree leaves. Avoid those collected from salted roads in the winter.
- **Pine needles** can be added but in small quantities as they are acidic.
- **Straw** is great, and convenient to have by the bin to add in layers. Hay, which contains seeds, is less ideal.
- **Wood ash** is high in potassium so is great, be aware that it is alkaline, can be used to neutralise pine needles.
- **Shredded office paper** is the easiest thing we have found to use as a source of browns, saved in bags in the shed.
- **Newspaper** is great to have a handy supply near the bin for layering. It is best to scrunch all paper to increase air pockets rather than lying flat, which takes ages to decompose. Avoid using plastic coated, glossy material such as magazine covers, as this takes ages to decompose.
- **Cardboard** – best shredded to help decomposition. Again avoid plastic coated, glossy card such as toothpaste tubes as these don't decompose and you will be picking them out when you use the compost.
- **Drier Lint** only from natural fibres.
- **Biochar** fo a reputable source such as "Oxford Biochar" is a great way of lowering your carbon footprint by carbon sequestering, and also adds great nutrients to your plot. It needs to be activated before adding to the soil, or it can cause nitrogen robbery from the soil, however, you can d this by adding it in layers to your compost, especially with grass clippings

Other

Sawdust is best composted in a separate area with urine to activate. We kept in a separate container and surprisingly it doesn't smell! Small amounts can be added to compost bin, sprinkled in thin layers.

Wood chippings when added to compost or soil cause nitrogen robbery as they decompose, which are why they work so well as a weed suppressing mulch for a path. If you have access to a lot of woodland waste, you could try hugelkultur.

Soot – this can be used but has to be stored somewhere dry for at least 3 months, to rid it of sulphur. It can be used as a top dressing to the soil, it improves the texture of a clay soil, and because of its dark colour, helps the warming of the soil in spring. It is said to deter pests such as pea weevil, celery fly, carrot fly, onion fly and slugs.

Eggshells need to be crushed as they take ages to decompose. They are neutral.

Urine - now don't laugh! It is a sterile and highly valuable resource that we are currently wasting through our sewage systems. It contains nitrogen in a format already broken down ready for plants to use, along with lots of micronutrients. It can be added sparingly to the compost. But better if used to break down sawdust, wood shavings or biochar.

Maintenance for fast compost

Make sure you turn your compost every 6 weeks. This dramatically speeds up compost decomposition, and you could have usable compost in as little as 3 months.

To make faster compost, cut up the ingredients using a lawnmower or shears before adding, and make sure you have a good ratio of browns and greens.

Adding fresh manure, grass clippings and a solution of yeast, sugar and urine can speed up compost, acting as activators.

Keep in a sunny place, the compost will decompose quicker than in the shade.

We have our 4 darker bins in rotation, with one or two we are filling, one which is being turned, perhaps one spare or full of combos ready to use. You could use the same method with compost bays.

Do not keep your compost bin on top of anything impermeable, such as concrete or plastic membrane, the worms need access from underneath to help with the decomposition.

If you find lots of slugs in your compost, it is too wet, so make sure you are keeping the lid on to protect from rain, and try not to add too many wet things to the compost, and maybe add more browns.

If you find lots of ants in your compost, it is too dry. Remedy this by sprinkling in some water, and / or asking the boys to wee into the bins. Urine also acts as a catalyst and makes it decompose quicker!

If it smells, then the air has been compressed out of it by the weight of too much "greens", adding more browns would add more air pockets, turning smelly anaerobic

decomposition to non smelly aerobic decomposition. It can also smell if the compost is too wet – so keep the lid on!

Do not add cooked food, grains or meat. This will attract rats. Putting the bin on a layer of bricks with small gaps in-between is said to deter rats.

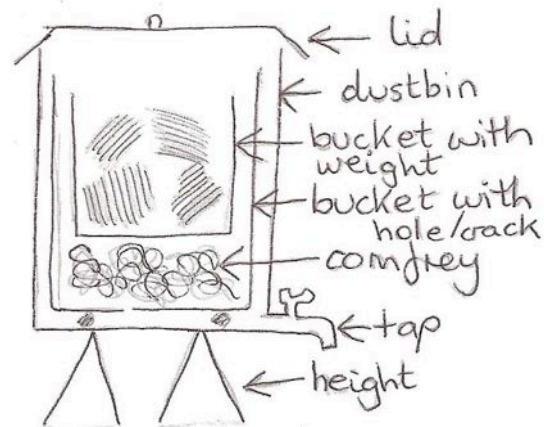
Liquid Fertiliser from Weeds

Weeds that have a strong root, or those that are flowering and so may contain seeds, are best not put on the compost, as this will increase the number of weeds you have in the soil.

To get round the disposal of these weeds without resorting to taking them to the tip, you can make sure they are fully rotted before you add them to the compost. You do this by soaking them in water for 2 weeks. You can use a bucket, or we find a dustbin with a lid better, because as it rots it smells, and the lid traps in that smell! We have 2 dustbins on the go – one for filling and one for rotting for 2 weeks as we have a large area.

You can just empty your bucket of water onto a plant, then scoop up the rotted material and put it in the compost.

We have a bit more to deal with, so we press a colander onto the smelly watery stuff in the bin, scoop out the water, leaving the matted material behind. We use a funnel to transfer the stinky water to containers, then we have a supply of liquid fertiliser to water our plants with. We then tip the dustbins up to empty the excess water onto the rhubarb (it loves it and the one near the bins grows the strongest!), then we add the soggy remains in the compost bin. We find our compost tends to get dry and have ants in so the wetness helps. We also layer crunched up paper below and also above to help airflow. A grim job but our plants and compost definitely benefit.



Making High Potash Liquid Fertiliser from Comfrey

A patch of comfrey can be useful on a boundary hedge or fence to help suppress weeds from coming in from a neighbour, or can utilise a shady spot. I'd recommend "Bocking 14" comfrey, as it has a sterile seed, or this can become a weed. A root from a neighbour is good to propagate from.

Create a container, as shown in the diagram. Put the leaves in and preferably site it in the sun for faster decomposition.

Once made, put the black liquid in a bottle and add to a watering can at a concentration of 20:1, one part comfrey and 20 parts water. Use on anything particularly containers and tomatoes. It can also be bought from garden centres.

A Fertility Patch

Growing some perennial plants known as dynamic accumulators can add important nutrients to your garden or allotment. These perennial plants have a long tap root and can bring up nutrients from the subsoil.

Comfrey accumulates potassium in large quantities, and has a very high nitrogen content (and also therefore a high nitrogen need). Using the variety Bocking 14 means the seeds are infertile, so it won't spread all over your garden.

Legumes such as lucerne are best at accumulating phosphorous. Lucerne also accumulates calcium, and fixes nitrogen in the roots, making the comfrey grow better. If you have a spare patch it is worth growing comfrey and lucerne, although the lucerne will die out after about 4-5 years, by which time you can replace it with chicory or cocksfoot grass for a couple of years before replanting that with lucerne. Either add the leaves to your compost, use as a mulch material or make a liquid manure.

Green Manures

A green manure crop is grown mainly to protect the soil, to hold plant nutrients that would otherwise be leached away by the rain, and to add organic matter and plant nutrients to the soil.

If you have a patch of ground during the growing season that is not in use, you can grow a green manure. This may be an area you want to save ready to plant over wintering onions, garlic or broad beans in October. Or it may be a space left bare once a crop has been harvested.

You can use green manures much more effectively if you use a no-dig method. When green, unrotted plants are incorporated into the soil by digging, the soil will need to draw on its own resources of nitrogen to decompose the plants. Therefore the traditional regime of digging in a green manure can actually cause a temporary deficiency in nutrients until the soil rebalances. It also exposes the soil and leads to leaching out of nutrients from bare soil.

The way you use a green manure without digging, is by cutting the plant at soil level using a strimmer, brush cutter, scythe or shears, and leaving the cut material on the

surface as a mulch. You can then also cover in either cardboard and more mulch, or black plastic sheet, however the green mulch layer may be thick enough to suppress weeds on its own.

You can try interplanting taller crops such as sweetcorn, with lower growing green manures such as trefoil.

A good mix of 3 different green manures is phacelia, crimson clover and annual rye, as their roots occupy different parts of the soil. Leaving them to flower has the added advantage of providing food for bees and for a cation exchange to happen in the soil, to release more nutrients.

Leaving the roots to decompose will allow air channels to form in the soil as well as all the beneficial mycorrhizal fungi and soil microorganisms.

Types of Green Manure

Choose annuals if your green manure is for the short term, great for allotments.

Choose perennials if your green manure is for long term.

Legume Family – nitrogen fixers

Alfalfa / Lucerne – sow April long tap root– July, perennial

Agricultural Lupin – Sow March – June, deep roots help aerate soil

Field Beans – sow September – November, over winters

Fenugreek – sow March – August – can be eaten, doesn't fix nitrogen

Winter Tares - sow March – September, over winters

Yellow Trefoil – sow March – August – annual low growing can under sow, over winters

Crimson Clover – sow April – September - annual

Persian cover - annual

Vetch - annual

Sweet clover - long roots - biennial

Sanfoin - perennial

Red clover - perennial

White clover - perennial

Brassica Family

Fodder Radish – sow August – September. Annual

Mustard – sow March – September, Annual

Others

Hungarian Grazing Rye – Nitrogen catcher and carbon fixer – stores nutrients - perennial

Cocksfoot - perennial nitrogen catcher

Buckwheat – Sow April – August nitrogen and Phosphate lifter - annual

Annual (Westerolds) Ryegrass – sow March – April or August – September

Chicory - perennial, very long root, very good for breaking up a clay plan and compacted soil.

Phacelia – Sow March – September, almost over winters

This is the only one I regularly use, however I am going to use a mix of 3 this year. Highly recommended, as the frost starts to rot it down, I cover in black plastic clearance mulch because it isn't protecting the soil as much. In the spring, I simply remove anything off the surface that hasn't rotted and add to my compost bin, and sow seeds! No need to dig over.

Pruning Fruit

Trees of stone fruit should be pruned in summer to prevent diseases such as canker. Trim any broken branches, choose one branch to remove if they are crossing, and if you want to reduce the size, trim to a bud pointing up and out. Always prune as close to a node or growing point as possible, to reduce the risk of disease. Take your time and try to be minimal- its easy to get carried away. Good sharp tools also help. Choose tools the right size for your strength, and oil and wipe the blades after every use.

Fruit bushes generally need a prune after they fruit, with many types fruiting on the second year wood, so leave this years for next years crop. The exception to this is autumn raspberries, which you cut down to the ground in autumn.

Continuation

To continue your harvest past the summer and autumn harvest time, you may want to think about what you can plant next.

Firstly, where is the available space?

You will probably find early potatoes, over wintering / early onions, peas, lettuce, garlic, early sown carrots, will come out first, also there may be space where you didn't have time to cultivate or a crop failed, it's not too late to sow more carrots, beetroot, french and runner beans, gherkins, lettuce, radish or turnip if you do it soon! Even a successive sowing of Sweetcorn or broad beans can work well!

So what else should you plant now?

Swede

Position Swede is a member of the brassica family and so needs to be in the bed with other brassicas.

Soil preparation add compost and lime if needed

Sow Swede is best sown in May to prevent mildew, but can be sown very early June. Sow *in situ* (straight into the soil) in rows 45cm apart, 1 ft between plants. They need lots of room or they don't grow very big. If you have a small space, they can be planted closer if you only have one row.

Protection They are part of the brassica family so caterpillars love them! I recommend covering with fleece stretched over hoops in a tunnel. You must put this over them when you sow them, as any whitefly on the leaves when it's put on later will have a field day under the fleece as their predators won't be able to get in either.

Harvest when they are big enough.

Oriental Greens

These are better suited to a colder climate than our summers, so plant in the autumn to prevent them going to seed.

Chinese celery

Chinese celery is one of the most commonly grown vegetables in China. The entire plant is used, either fresh or dried. Chinese celery is a smaller version of the celery in Western markets, but its flavour is quite a bit stronger. Chinese celery has long green stems with green shiny leaves with jagged margin. It prefers cool temperatures. Use the pencil-thin stalks and leaves in stews, stir-fry or salad. Considered indispensable for Chinese cooking, this celery has a stronger flavour than Western celery, so less is needed. It stays flavourful when dried.

Planting season: Spring or late summer

Position Anywhere they will squeeze in!

Soil Preparation compost or manure

Sow in pots to transfer to a seedbed, planting around 15-20cm apart. Chinese celery grows best in a cold climate, 60-75 F. Plants may need shading if grown in warm summer season. Seeds are very small and seed germination can be erratic. Several unique characteristics are observed for the seed germination - germinating best in cold condition (50-60 F) but poorly in higher temperature; germinating best with seeds uncovered and in the light. Soil should be kept moist during the seed germination and seedling growth stage.

Maturity: Approx. 50 days

Protect These don't tend to have many problems apart from slugs. Celery root fly exists, but I've never had a problem

Harvest as soon as the leaves or stems are big enough to use

Pak choi (and other Chinese cabbage)

These are suited to a colder climate, so grow these fast maturing crops either early in the year, or after the summer solstice, otherwise they will go to seed very quickly

Position Pak Choi and Chinese cabbage are members of the brassica family and so need to be in the bed with other brassicas.

Soil preparation add compost (and lime if needed)

Sow In seed trays or modules then transplant when 2-3 true leaves are showing, or sow in situ under fleece; they grow really fast so I find a seed bed is not needed. Plant them, or thin out seedlings to 15cm apart for small varieties of pak choi and 20cm apart for medium size plants, and 35cm apart for very large plants. Pak choi has very shallow roots so needs watering only a little and often rather than drowning in water. Weed regularly and water if its dry, to prevent them bolting. harvest when they are big enough.

Protect They are part of the brassica family so caterpillars love them! I recommend covering with fleece stretched over hoops and weighed down at the edges. You must put this over them as soon as you sow or transplant them, as any whitefly on the leaves when it's put on later will have a field day under the fleece as their predators won't be able to get in either. Leave the fleece on the whole time they are growing. Pak choi is sadly susceptible to the entire barrage of brassica ailments including flea beetles, cabbage whitefly, caterpillars, slugs, snails and birds to name just a few predators, however the fleece will protect from all except slugs.

Harvest at any stage from 4 to 13cm in height, and depending on growing conditions, this can be as within just three weeks of sowing. Two or three further cuts may also be possible. A headed crop of pak choi, which should be ready in around after six weeks, can be lifted entirely or cut around 3cm above ground level and then left to resprout.

Pak choi is best kept in the fridge and eaten within a week, so sow in succession or they will all come at once and you will find it hard to eat it all before it goes to seed.



Winter Brassicas

Sow savoy cabbage and purple sprouting before July to get decent sized plants next year.

Position These belong in the brassica bed, in rotation after the beans

Soil Preparation compost (and lime if needed to prevent club root)

Sow either in pots to transfer to a seedbed after about 3-4 weeks, or straight into a seedbed if you can protect the young seedlings from slugs and flea beetle, as one slug can destroy your entire row in 1 night. If slugs are a problem sow in modules and transplant once slightly bigger. Transplant to their final space once about 15-20cm tall They need lots of room 2ft by 45cm -although refer to the packet.

Protect Caterpillars love them, so grow under fine netting or fleece.

Harvest as soon as the heads are big enough

Plants are available as small plants from willowbrook, often bare rooted, wrapped in newspaper and in groups of 10 or 20 for little over £1-2. I would ask behind the counter in willowbrook as they are not always on display, and I would preorder so they can save particular varieties for you, as they sell out very quickly, sometimes in a couple of days!

You can also sow them although some varieties sowing times are a bit earlier in the year. I recommend creating a seedbed and covering this in fleece, to prevent early attacks from flea beetle, then later attacks from pigeons and butterflies. This year I have had success from starting the seedlings in modules inside, then planting out seedlings in the seedbed 10cm apart. Brassica seeds last ages – up to 6 years – so only sow what you need Thin seedlings to 10cm apart.

The plants need to be planted out shortly after you get bare rooted plants, so have your patch ready, by clearing the weeds, forking in some compost and if needed a little lime, and firming the soil a little. If growing your own, transplant once they are 15-20cm high

Plant cabbages 45cms apart and brussel sprouts 60cms apart, always checking advice on the label. Closer plantings will cause smaller heads on your cabbage and cauliflowers.

I would advise covering in environmesh or fleece to prevent butterfly attack. You can uncover them once it's cold enough that they are hibernating, however they will need cover all winter to protect from hungry pigeons.

Winter Carrots

Position in the roots rotation, in a container or in the greenhouse or poly tunnel if you have removed an earlier crop. Once your tomatoes have finished or even got blight, you can sow carrots for the winter. If sowing later (October, early November), cover the ground with fleece to help them germinate. If they are very small by Christmas don't worry, and they won't grow much in Jan or Feb, but you should be able to harvest them before planting tomatoes or other greenhouse crops again in spring.

Soil preparation compost

Sow in rows a foot apart, thin to 1' apart, or scatter sow in a block and harvest by pulling out the biggest and leaving in the smaller ones to continue growing.

Protection One advantage of sowing carrots late and in a polytunnel to overwinter is they won't suffer from carrot fly, as this is active in the summer. Otherwise protection needed includes horticultural fleece, a 2ft fence made from environmesh, or growing at a height, for example on a waterbutt or table.

Harvest run your finger around the top of the carrot to assess if its big enough to pull. If growing rows in the soil, its likely you will need a fork. If growing in a pot of compost you may be able to pull them out gently with fingertips.

Florence Fennel

For years, I didn't grow fennel because I heard it cross pollinates with dill, and I like growing dill. However, the aim with bulb fennel is to eat it before it flowers, so as long as you do this, you can grow both.

In order to prevent it going to seed quickly, you should sow it after the summer solstice, but do sow soon after this, and give it a sunny spot.

Position in the roots rotation,

Soil preparation compost

Sow in rows a foot apart, thin to 9" apart.

Protection none needed

Harvest If given enough sun, nutritious soil and water, they grow surprisingly quickly. Harvest when big enough, and before you start to see a flower head grow.

Over wintering onions, broad beans and Garlic can be planted in October, so I will cover this topic in the September talk.

Summer Harvest and Recipes

Potatoes.

By now your potatoes should be in full leaf. If it is dry before you want to harvest, watering can swell the tubers, giving a higher yield. Mulches are particularly helpful at trapping the moisture in. If you have plenty of mulch material, then you can use this instead of earthing up, however if you only have a little, you can earth up using a draw hoe, then cover the damp exposed soil between the rows.

Early potatoes don't store very well so it is best to eat these before your main crop if possible, left in the ground until needed. Main crop potatoes store well and can be lifted and stored in a paper potato sack in the shed or cupboard. Make sure that if

you leave your potatoes in the shed over winter they are well insulated, wrapping blankets both around and beneath them. We found “swift” first earlies to be dotted with small slug holes, where the slugs left “charlotte”, right next to them, alone. We also prefer the taste and texture of “charlottes”. We also like Maris Peer, who hold their skins better and can be less flowery as they age, than Charlottes.

Recipe ideas for new potatoes

1: My favourite chippy potatoes.

Keeping the skin on, wash, then quarter the potatoes, creating a cube or triangle about 1-1.5”, cutting bigger potatoes into 6. Boil for 7 minutes while preheating the oven to 220c. Drain off the water, put the potatoes, some olive oil and lots of salt, pepper and/ or herbs (dried) in the dry pan, shake to cover and spread on a baking tray. Cook for about 20-25 minutes in the oven until crisp. Lovely with mayo.

Discussed at previous talks were:

Irish Champ- mash potato and raw spring onions and butter, works best with main crop potatoes.

Potato salad – idea to put the mayonnaise on when hot as this draws in the flavour.

Mange touts and peas

Mange touts may need the string removing, especially if it has been dry or if they have grown into sugarsnap peas.

Keep picking peas and mange touts, the more you pick, the longer they will be productive for. Once seeds start to mature, the annual plant starts dying.

Onions

If your some of your onions start to go to seed I would eat these ones first, as if they are left in the ground too long, the cores are too hard to eat. The cores can be chopped in when young, but later have a hard texture even when cooked, although you can still eat the rest of the onion.

To dry onions for storage, keep out of the rain on racks, and some goodness from the leaves is drawn back into the root. Store in a cool, dark place.

They can be strung; chop off half the leaves once dried fully. Start by tying a length of string at the base of one onion leaf. Keep adding onions and twisting the string round the dried leaves. Don't put too many on, as it gets too heavy. Finish by tying off and making a loop in the string to hang it by. Pull out the onions as you use them, starting from the top.

Shallots in Balsamic Vinegar

500g shallots

2tbsp muscavado sugar

Bay leaves or thyme sprigs, or rosemary, oregano or marjoram (optional)

300ml balsamic vinegar

1. stand unpeeled shallots in a bowl of boiling water for 2 minutes to help loosen skins, then peel.

2. bring vinegar, sugar and herb of choice to the boil, then add shallots and simmer for 40 minutes

3. transfer to a warmed jar and store for 1 month before eating

Clove and Onion Pasta

700g white onions (or more!)

2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

10 cloves

3 tbsp olive oil (I found less is fine if you are on a diet!)

200ml red wine

600g spaghetti

Salt and pepper (I liked lots)

Bunch of flat leaf parsley, chopped

50g unsalted butter (less is fine if you are on a diet!)

150g Parmesan cheese, grated (do not skimp on this!)

1. Thinly slice the onions
2. Cook onions, garlic and cloves in the oil over a low heat to prevent browning, keeping a lid on to maintain the water (I don't have a lid and added a little water while cooking and this was fine and meant I needed less fat to cook it in) This takes about 20 minutes
3. Once the onions are cooked and translucent, add the red wine bit by bit and increase the heat to cook off the alcohol. Once excess liquid has evaporated, remove the cloves.
4. Meanwhile cook the spaghetti with a little salt in the water (other types of pasta are fine too)
5. Add the butter and parsley to the sauce.
6. Serve with plenty of grated parmesan and black pepper

Tomatoes

I like to store chopped tomatoes by skinning them; chopping and putting in pour and store bags in the freezer (these are not cheap but re-usable and bendy for getting out frozen sauces). Ferline F1 are particularly good for this as they have a thin skin, lots of flesh and few seeds. You can then use just as you would tinned but with much more flavour and vitamins.

Really rich tomato sauce

Makes 4 x 500ml

1kg tomatoes

1 large onion

2 garlic cloves (leave out if freezing or it will taste mouldy! Add once thawed.)

2 tbsp olive oil

1 tbsp tomato puree
1 heaped tbsp chopped oregano
1 large tsp sugar
200ml red wine
Salt and pepper
1. Skin and chop tomatoes
2. Chop onion and cook at low heat so it doesn't brown
3. Add chopped tomato, tomato puree, garlic, oregano, sugar and wine and simmer gently over a low heat for about 40 minutes until it has reduced and thickened.
This makes enough for 4 x 500ml in the pour and store bags for the freezer.
Great in Moussaka, bolognese and chillies.

Tomato and Marrow Chutney

1.4kg marrow, peel, remove seeds and chop to 1 cm chunks
450g ripe tomatoes, skinned and roughly chopped
2 onions chopped
2 garlic cloves chopped
10ml black peppercorns ground to your desired coarseness
10ml allspice berries ground
30ml salt
10ml ground ginger
700g sugar
750ml cider vinegar
Put all ingredients in a pan, heat gently until sugar is dissolved,
Then bring to the boil and boil steadily, stirring to prevent sticking.
Reduce by about half, put in clean jars and seal while hot.

Spinach

Leaves generally don't last too long once picked, although sealing in a plastic bag or Tupperware with a little dampness and stored in the fridge elongates their life.

They store very well in the freezer for cooking with. Prepare by removing the mid rib of larger leaves and roughly chopping if desired. Steam in a pan with a little water and the lid on. Once wilted, squeeze out the water, and you can even use a clean tea towel to wring out more water. Open freeze in balls then put in a bag once frozen, these can be defrosted for spinach and ricotta cannelloni etc.

Green sauce

Lots of spinach steamed then put in a bowl
Add a couple of tablespoons of yoghurt
4oz cheese grated, some cream cheese if you want it
Black pepper and a bit of salt
Then whiz up with a food mixer until smooth, you can then add more yoghurt and cheese to taste.
Great with pasta and it freezes

Spinach and Ricotta Canniloni

Combine cooked spinach that has had the water squeezed out, with a tub of ricotta in a bowl, with some grated nutmeg to taste.

Push this mixture into dried shop bought pasta tubes, Asda in Taunton sell the best ones by Napolina.

Place in an oven dish and cover in really rich tomato sauce (see above). You can add finely chopped courgette or sweet peppers to the sauce as you are cooking, if you want it to stretch further.

Cover in a thick layer of grated cheese, decorated with cherry tomatoes, and bake in the oven around 180* for 45 minutes.

You can also make this dish as a vegetarian lasagne.

Sweet corn

is quite hard to tell when ripe. The fluffy bit on the end of the cob should be black; you can peel back some leaves to have a peek while it is still growing. The corns should be plump and yellow. Another way of gauging is by their weight.

Sweet corn doesn't store well on the cob as the sugars turn to starch quickly, so eat as soon as possible after picking, and it also doesn't last for long on the plant once ripe (they turn floury). If you have too much at once, then remove from the cob using a sharp knife run down the length of the cob, blanch and freeze.

Beans

If growing borlotto beans, wait until the pod is red and the beans are showing, or the beans are very small. We ate the big beans in forgotten French and runner beans last year and they are fine to eat. All take nearly an hour to cook though! They do not freeze well, so it's best to dry them.

I recommend a bean shred and stringer from Perrys is fantastic for runner beans, if you think you don't like them then try this!

Another thing I found is broad beans are much nicer double skinned, then they can also be eaten cold in salads or pureed for a dip with garlic and cumin.

Borlotto Bean and squash soup

1 Butternut (or other type about 1 kg) squash, skinned, deseeded and chopped

1 potato (optional) peeled and chopped

Vegetable oil 2 tbsp

Fresh thyme 1 tbsp

Dried chilli flakes ½ tsp

Ground coriander 2 tsp

1 red onion peeled and chopped

1 packet thick sliced smoked back bacon (optional) fat removed and chopped into pieces

Dark muskavado sugar 2 tsp
Vegetable stock 750ml
400g borlotto beans (podded weight)
1 red pepper chopped (optional)
Coriander, fresh, chopped
Salt and pepper
Greek style natural yoghurt (optional)

1. If the beans are fresh, first boil for 40 minutes, meanwhile prepare the other veg
2. Fry the onion, squash, thyme, spices, potato and bacon for about 5 minutes in a separate pan
3. Drain the pre boiled beans, or if using pre cooked from the freezer, add now
4. Add the sugar and stock and beans, bring to the boil, cover simmering for 10-15 minutes, until beans and squash are fully cooked.
5. Add the pepper and cook for a further 3 minutes
6. Using a hand held wand or potato masher, pulp the soup leaving it chunky
7. Serve with coriander salt and pepper and yoghurt

Squashes and pumpkin

These store really well. We ate our last baby bear pumpkin in May one year. After ripening in sunlight (this can be done off the plant in a conservatory or near a window), store in a cool dark place, and check every now and then that no mould or rot is showing on the skin or underneath. An attic is perfect but not if you have mice!

Pumpkin cream

2lbs pumpkin peeled and chopped
4ozs of butter (optional)
juice of two oranges
The grated peel of the two oranges
2lbs of sugar
2 teaspoons of either cinnamon or ginger depending on preferences (you can add more afterwards if its not spicy enough)

Steam the pumpkin in a steamer until tender then add butter sugar spices peel and juice and cook on a very low heat for 30 mins or so, stirring often to stop burning. Then pot up in sterilised jars, as you would jam. It keeps in the fridge for months. Its great with apple pie, or ice cream, or on cake etc.

Courgettes

Keep picking or they will turn into marrows!

Cheesy Leeky stuffed courgettes

4-6 small courgettes 1.5-2 inches wide (serves 2)
1-2 leeks, finely chopped

Oil to fry with
1-2 garlic cloves
Cheddar Cheese
1 tbsp flour
Milk (about ¼ pint)

We like to serve these with jacket potatoes seeing as the oven is on, so start these first for about an hour.

1. Cut the courgettes in half lengthways. First score in a ring around the seeds with a knife 5mm deep, leaving an edge, then scoop out the seeds (saving them) with a sharp teaspoon. Place the “boats” in an ovenproof dish, packing them in to help keep their shape while they cook. Place in a medium oven and cook while preparing the filling. Keep an eye on them so they don't burn.
2. Fry the leeks in the oil while chopping up the insides of the courgettes. Add courgette inners when the leeks are partly cooked, with the garlic. Once the insides are mush and the leeks are cooked, add some flour, then milk. Keep stirring so it doesn't stick. When it's all hot, add cold milk and stir until hot again. Add grated cheese and remove from the heat when it's melted.
3. Remove the courgettes from the oven, check they are cooked with a knife and place the sauce in the boats. Grate some more cheese on top and place back in the oven until it's melted, and serve with the jacket potatoes.

Courgette Pie

450g/1 lb. Courgettes (sliced)
3 tablespoons of olive oil
375g Short crust or Puff Pastry (225g of Plain Flour recipe for short crust pastry is equal to 368g of ready made pastry) so would probably be enough.
2 medium eggs
2 tablespoons of crème fraiche
75g (3oz) grated gruyere cheese
2 crushed garlic cloves
4 tablespoons of chopped parsley
50g/2oz breadcrumbs (white or wholemeal whichever is preferred)

Preheat the oven to 200oC/180oC fan oven/Gas Mark 6. Put the courgettes on a large baking sheet and drizzle with the oil. Put in the oven and roast for 8 minutes.

Transfer the courgettes to a sheet of greaseproof paper and put the unwashed baking sheet to one side.

Roll out the pastry on a floured board until it measures 30cm. or 12 inches square. Lift the pastry carefully onto the baking sheet.

Crack one egg into a bowl and spoon in the crème fraiche, whisk lightly, and then add 50g (2oz) of the cheese, along with the garlic and parsley. Season with salt and black pepper and mix together until well combined.

Arrange the courgettes down the middle of the pastry and pour the egg and crème fraiche mixture over the. Scatter the breadcrumbs and remaining cheese on top. Gather the pastry sides up and over the filling to create a thick pastry rim, (not completely covering the courgettes). Chill for 10 minutes.

Beat the remaining egg and brush over the pastry. Bake for 30 minutes or until the pastry is crisp and golden brown.

Preparation time 25 minutes plus 10 mins chilling

Cooking time 40 minutes (depending on oven)

Serves 4

Cabbage

Simple Coleslaw

Using a food processor as it's so much easier, grate peeled carrot, and slice onion and white or red cabbage. Add shop bought mayonnaise and salad cream and stir!

Fried Cabbage

Fry together sliced cabbage and onion. When nearly cooked add some seeds (mixed, any type) and some partially hydrated raisins (just soaked in hot water for a couple of minutes), then when fully cooked add some balsamic vinegar and serve.

Broccoli

Keep an eye on your plants as its easy to miss when they are perfect!

Jamie Oliver's Asian veg

Ingredients:

1 fresh red chilli

1 clove of garlic

Soy sauce

1 lime

Sesame oil

250g (9oz) asparagus

1 head of broccoli

(I have used this recipe with all different veg; french or runner beans, purple sprouting, cauliflower, peas, cabbage. Broccoli, purple sprouting and cauli are particularly good as they soak up the sauce!)

Method:

De-seed and finely chop the chilli, adding half to a large serving bowl and setting the rest aside. Crush the clove of garlic into the bowl and add 2tbsp of soy sauce.

Squeeze in the juice of 1 lime and add a glug of sesame oil. Mix, taste and tweak with the soy sauce if needed.

Trim the asparagus stalks. Quarter the head of the broccoli lengthways from the head to the base of the stalk.

Steam the greens to preserve more of the vitamins

Drain the broccoli and asparagus of any water, then tip into the serving bowl with the dressing, quickly toss and take to the table.

Lettuce

Lettuce Soup

Serves 4 - 6

Preparation 10 minutes

Cooking 30 minutes

225g/8oz lettuce leaves

1 small onion

1 large potato

40g/1½ oz butter

450ml/¾ pint chicken stock

salt and black pepper

grated nutmeg

450ml/¾ pint of milk

Thoroughly wash the lettuce leaves and shred them. Peel and finely chop the onion and peel and dice the potato. Melt the butter in a saucepan add the onion and fry for 5 minutes, until soft. Add the potato, lettuce and stock. Bring to the boil. Reduce the heat, cover the pan and simmer the soup for 30 minutes. Allow the lettuce soup to cool slightly before liquidising it or rubbing it through a sieve into a clean pan. Add the milk. Season to taste with salt, freshly ground pepper and nutmeg. Reheat gently and serve. This soup freezes well. Freeze the pureed soup before adding the milk. Thaw the soup, add the milk and reheat.

Turnips

Dauphinoise Turnips

1 kg/2lb 4oz turnips peeled and placed in a bowl of cold water to prevent them from browning

3-4 cloves garlic

500ml/17½fl oz double cream (you may need a bit extra)

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 160C/320F/Gas 2.
2. Slice the turnips into thin slices, about 2mm-3mm/0.13in thick. Place the slices into a bowl as you cut them.
3. Crush the garlic. Scrape the grated garlic flesh into the bowl with the turnips.

4. Season the turnips, to taste, with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
5. Pour the cream over the turnips and mix well again.
6. Place the turnip slices into the gratin dish. They should come to just below the top of the dish. Press the turnip down with the back of a spoon or your hands so it forms a solid layer. The cream should come to just below the top layer of turnip (top up with more double cream if necessary).
7. Place the turnips in the oven and bake for 45-60 minutes, and then check it. If the cream looks like it's splitting, your oven is too hot, so turn it down a bit. When cooked, the gratin should be golden on top and the turnips tender. If necessary, give it another 15-20 minutes.
8. Serve the dauphinoise as a side dish to roasted meat or poultry

Beetroot

Shown on the website www.lovebeetroot.co.uk, there are so many reasons to grow and eat beetroot! This is also an amazing site for recipes.

Reduces blood pressure and the risk of heart attacks and strokes

Powerful antioxidant properties to help reduce the oxidation of LDL cholesterol.

Contains folic acid

Reduces risk of osteoporosis as it contains the mineral silica. This helps the body to utilise calcium.

Stabilises blood sugar

Treats anaemia and fatigue because of iron content

Helps slow progression of dementia

Beetroot Soup!

2 beetroots (wash and leave skin on for maximum nutrition)

1 potato

1 onion

2 cloves of garlic

salt and pepper

one stock cube

fresh ginger

Cook beetroots until soft (a little bit longer than potatoes), cook potato. (Keep stock from beetroot)

Fry onion and garlic until soft.

Add beetroot, potato, onion and garlic together. Add Stock. Season with salt and pepper.

Stock is made from the beetroot juice and I roughly add one stock cube per pint.

Increase to 2 stock cubes if you wish depending on your taste.

Whiz it all up. Re-heat and add grated fresh ginger just before you serve.

I freeze this after I have whizzed it all up, (although if freezing leave out the garlic and add when reheating)

the fresh ginger really gives it a kick!

(Horseradish works well in beetroot soup)

Beetroot Relish

3 medium sized beetroot, skinned but uncooked

2 red onions

3 heaped tbsp muscavado sugar

3 level tbsp wholegrain mustard

Cider Vinegar

Chop the beetroot and onion. You can have this either chunky (by hand) or small chunks (in food processor) depending on preference. Place in a pan. Cover with cider vinegar (you can top up with water but I prefer not too). Bring to the boil. Add the sugar and mustard and stir until the sugar has dissolved. Boil until the beetroot is your preferred consistency and it is as dry as you prefer. I prefer it drier so I can add it to sandwiches, so I don't add water then it takes less boiling to reduce. Place in warmed jars, it will store for about 1 year.

Kohl Rabi

Kohl Rabi Remoulade

(I made this recipe with horseradish instead of mustard and added sunflower seeds. Delicious!)

Young kohlrabi is a good alternative to celeriac for a summer version of this classic dish. If you like, add some bacon, cooked until crisp, then chopped and sprinkled over the top. Serves four as a starter, six as a side dish.

2 tsp hot English mustard

2 tsp cider vinegar

1 scant tsp sugar

1 pinch salt

75ml olive oil

75ml groundnut or sunflower oil

2-3 kohlrabi, weighing about 750g

Freshly ground black pepper

2-3 tbsp finely chopped

parsley (optional)

In a bowl, whisk together the mustard, vinegar, sugar and salt. Pour the oils into a jug, then very slowly trickle them into the mustard mixture, whisking all the time, until you have a creamy, emulsified dressing. Taste and adjust the seasoning as necessary. Peel the kohlrabi, cut it into matchsticks and toss into the dressing along with a few grinds of black pepper and the parsley (if using). Leave for about 30 minutes to allow the flavours to blend.

Kohlrabi and Spinach Gratin

(We had courgettes from our allotment so used these instead of spinach and our freshly dug baby new potatoes)

If your kohlrabi still has its green leaves attached, combine them with the spinach in this tasty gratin. Serves six as a side dish.

1 tbsp sunflower oil
1 knob butter, plus a little more for greasing the dish
2 medium onions (about 600g), halved and finely sliced
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
500g kohlrabi, peeled and cut into 3mm thick rounds
250g potatoes, peeled and cut into 3mm rounds
2 tsp thyme leaves, chopped
200ml double cream
200ml water (or chicken or vegetable stock)
1 big handful baby spinach, or spinach mixed with kohlrabi leaves
1 tbsp parsley, chopped

For the topping

60g fresh breadcrumbs
25g butter, melted
45g cheddar or hard goat's cheese, grated

Preheat the oven to 190C/375F/gas mark 5. Place a medium-sized frying pan over a medium heat. Add the oil and butter, wait until it foams, then add the sliced onion and a pinch of salt, and sauté for 12 minutes, until soft and starting to take on a little colour.

Throw in the kohlrabi, potatoes and thyme, and season generously with salt and pepper. Cook, tossing the mixture occasionally, for another five minutes.

Pour over the cream and stock, simmer gently until the liquid is reduced by half, stir in the spinach and parsley, then place in a lightly buttered gratin dish, about 30cm x 20cm x 7cm in size, levelling it out with a spatula as you go. Place the gratin dish on a baking tray.

Blitz together the breadcrumbs, butter and cheese in a blender, and sprinkle over the top of the filling. Bake the gratin in a hot oven for about 35-40 minutes, until all golden and bubbling.

Garlic

Garlic, planted in October, is ready to harvest in June. It stores well, but if you think you have too much, you can pickle it. I like simply pickled plain unflavoured garlic myself. It's fine to eat like pickled onions, not as strong if you do not dry it and pickle it when fresh. You can however add spices and flavourings such as chilli, mustard, celery seed or peppercorns. Boil for 10 minutes in vinegar, then jar, seal and store in the fridge, for at least 3 weeks before eating

Fruit

Rhubarb

Stop harvesting your rhubarb in August because the plant needs some time to grow and store energy in the roots to survive the winter.

Rhubarb Chutney Recipe

This is an altered recipe from a mango chutney recipe, so the quantities are a little subjective; just alter to your taste.

1.1kg Rhubarb chopped into inch pieces
25g fresh root ginger finely chopped
2-6 chillies depending on taste
1 large onion chopped
1 garlic clove chopped
450g apples cored and chopped
Raisins or sultanas
15ml salt
600ml white wine vinegar
½ tsp ground cinnamon
225g Demerara sugar
225g granulated sugar

Put all ingredients in a pan and heat and stir until desired thickness, this can take over an hour, put in clean jars

Strawberries

I love them on porridge in the morning! If you are using them like this they are ok to freeze, but generally freezing does change the texture a lot, so many people make jam. You do need to add pectin to strawberry jam for it to set.

Raspberries

Raspberry coulis – from my frozen fruit store – cook some raspberries in a small saucepan, sweeten if you like with a pinch of sugar, push through a sieve to remove seeds and serve with pavlovas or ice cream – so easy and simple but impresses at dinner parties!

Gooseberries

Gooseberry and Elderflower jam

These flavours work so well together, and their seasons almost coincide. One year I had to use the previous years frozen gooseberries to be in time with the elderflower. If we have a late spring it can made the elder flower a little later for when gooseberries are ready.

Under ripe gooseberries will make a green jam. Ripe gooseberries will turn the jam pinkish.

450g / 1lb Gooseberries
3tbsp - 300ml water
450-550 / 1-1.25 lb sugar
1 head of elderflower (I used 2 as I like a stronger flavour)

Top and tail the gooseberries. Remove the flowers from the stalks, wash in cold water.

Put the gooseberries, elderflowers and gooseberries in the water - use the smaller amount of water if the fruit is really ripe, but up to the maximum if the fruit is very hard. Simmer gently until the skins are soft - these will not soften after adding the sugar.

Now add the sugar. Use the larger amount of sugar with under-ripe fruit. Stir over a low heat until the sugar has dissolved. Boil rapidly until setting point is reached. You can use a jam thermometer to measure this, or, once the jam has been boiling ferociously for a couple of minutes, remove some with a spoon and place on a plate and put in the fridge for a minute. If it sets, the jam is done. Spoon into hot, sterile jars and seal down.

Blueberries

So lovely fresh, I wouldn't bother cooking them. However if you have excess they freeze really well. Open freeze on a baking tray with parchment paper on, then pour into a bag once frozen, so they don't stick together. This works also for most fruit.

Cherries

Duck with Morello cherry and port sauce

1. Put about 150g fresh or frozen morello cherries in a pan, with 200-300ml port, 2 tbsp red wine vinegar and 50g sugar. Simmer gently for 40-45 minutes until the sauce reduces.

2. Pan fry the duck quickly on each side to seal in the flavours, then bake at 220, skin side up, in the oven on a grill pan for 10-15 minutes, depending how rare you like it. Rest for 10 minutes.

3. Serve with the sauce, with potatoes and seasonal greens

Blackcurrants

Crème de Cassis

Ingredients for approximately 2 liters:

- Approximately 2 kg Black Currant berries

- Approximately 1.5 litre of fruit alcohol 45% (or vodka or other clear spirit with low taste)
- 1 kg of sugar
- 1 glass jar 4 litre or two 2-liter jars. Jar should be sterile (clean)

This recipe is in two stages. The first stage consists of preparation:

- Strip berries from stems (do not wash the berries!)
- Put the berries into the jar
- Add alcohol until the berries are covered and close jar (the top should be air-tight)
- Leave the jar in the sun for 6 weeks

The second stage consists of filtering and bottling:

- For approx. 1.4 l of syrup mix 1 kg of sugar into 400 ml of water and bring to a boil
- Leave it to boil until the syrup water has become completely clear and little bubbles are rising to the top
- Let the syrup cool down completely
- Use a sieve to remove the juice from the berries and then filter the juice through some cotton.
- Mix the two: 400 ml of syrup to 1 l of cassis juice
- Fill the Crème de Cassis into small bottles and close with a cork
- The Crème de Cassis is ready to be mixed with wine or champagne after another 2 months

Simple Country Wine Recipes for Autumn

These recipes all come from “Home Made Country Wines” first published by the *The Farmers Weekly* in 1955 as a collection submitted by readers. They are simple and well tested. Experience suggests that precise measurement of quantities of ingredients is unnecessary. It is possible to make fruit wines without adding yeast, but you never know quite what you’ll get. An important factor is not being in a hurry to sample the finished product!

There are plenty of books around that give full details of the practical aspects of winemaking, and grape juice is now widely available, which it wasn’t in the 1950s. Grape juice (red or white as appropriate) always helps to add “vinosity” to a country wine; i.e. it makes it more like wine.

Apple Wine

Ingredients: A mixture of apple types, washed and chopped. (Bruised windfalls are fine.)

White sugar and lemons. Dried baker’s yeast, or wine yeast if you want to use it.

Method: Fill a clean, plastic 2 gallon (9 litre) bucket with the chopped apples. Pour in as much boiling water as possible; cover with a lid and leave in a warm place for 3 – 4 days, stirring daily, until it starts to smell a bit cidery. Strain the liquid into a large preserving pan; for each gallon (4.5 litres) of liquid, add the thinly peeled rind and juice of 1 lemon, and 3lb sugar. Place on stove and heat enough to dissolve the sugar completely, stirring as necessary. Turn off heat. When lukewarm, decant the liquid (now known as “must”) into fermentation jar. If using baker’s yeast, mix a couple of teaspoons-full with half a cup of must, cover and leave in a warm place until it’s starting to froth – shouldn’t take very long. Add this to the fermentation jar when it feels just warm to the touch; if you have a thermometer, a temperature of 21C is ideal. Insert an airlock, and leave in a warm place (eg. airing cupboard) until fermentation ceases. This may take several months. In general, the longer the fermentation, the better the wine will become.

The precise character of this wine will depend partly on the sort of apples used. Sometimes it will have a second fermentation a long time after bottling, usually when the weather starts to warm up. This is called the malo-lactic effect, and can give a slightly sparkling wine – which is nice!

Carrot Wine & Parsnip Wine

Ingredients: (Quantities the same for both types of veg.) To each gallon of water, add: 4lbs roots, 3lb sugar (brown or white), 2 lemons, 2 oranges and 1oz. root ginger (if liked). Yeast.

Method: Scrub and roughly chop the roots. Place in large saucepan with water, thinly peeled rind of the oranges and lemons, and the well-bruised ginger. Bring to the boil and then simmer for about 20 minutes, until the vegetable content is just soft. Strain on to the sugar in the preserving pan, place over low heat, and stir until sugar is completely dissolved. Turn off the heat, and follow the same procedure as for apple wine.

Both of these wines must be given at least a couple of years in the bottle, and have the reputation of being pretty potent, as suggested by another recipe in the book for “Carrot Whisky”. (Never yet tried by myself.)

Sloe Wine

This is perhaps the easiest of all. I first made it in 1962, and it has never disappointed.

Ingredients: To every gallon of sloes add a gallon of water and 4lb of white sugar. (Reduce quantities *pro rata* if you cannot get enough sloes.) Yeast.

Method: Put the sloes in your wine-making bucket; add the required amount of boiling water; cover and leave in a warm place for 3 – 4 days, stirring daily. Strain into preserving pan or large saucepan. Add the sugar and heat just enough to dissolve it completely, stirring at intervals. Allow to cool, decant into fermentation jar, and add yeast “starter” as described above. Has been known to ferment for a year.

Compiled for Transition Town Wellington.
(Simon Ratsey, October 2010)

Things covered in the next talk

Vegetable harvesting – those not covered in this talk eg celeriac, parsnips, carrots, chicory

Sharing more recipes

What to plant now – overwintering broad beans, brassicas , garlic and onions

Storing veg

Putting the garden to bed for winter