

Free Talks on Growing Vegetables,

Fruit, and cut flowers

Autumn

(September Talk)

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Preparing your plot for winter

The winter will herald strong winds, rain, frosts and even snow.

Storing Bamboo Canes

Make sure you take down anything that may blow down, for example bean structures in exposed positions, so they don't break so you can use them again next year.

Make sure you keep canes and wood in the dry so they don't rot over winter, you *should* clean them too, especially if you had blight on your tomatoes.

If you store your canes horizontally you are more likely to get tube nesting bees making homes in the ends than if you store them vertically. (If you would like to encourage this you can create a bee home see the wildlife booklet for instructions <https://ttw.org.uk/wildlife-map-and-booklet-download> - bees in the end of your bean canes makes them unusable that year)

Why Protect the Ground over Winter?

The old method of preparing the ground for winter is to dig over the ground and leave big turned "chods" exposed to break down with the frosts over winter.

The advantage of this is the birds have access to the ground to pick out grubs, slugs and slug eggs, and it can sort out soil that has been walked on and compacted in the summer.

The problem of this is the digging, turning the soil layers upside down, and letting the frost and rain act on the soil, kills microorganisms in the soil, destroys healthy soil structure and natural layering, as well as letting nutrients (which you may have carefully added with compost etc in the spring), leach away. It allows carbon stored in the soil to oxidise, being released as carbon dioxide. In severe rain, you will also cause soil erosion, where the clay or sand base washes away. This leads to increased sediment and nutrients in our rivers, and the soil will take long time, and in repeated cases of soil erosion even centuries to recover. Our soil is precious and we have a responsibility to protect it.

The earth doesn't like to be left bare. Think of how you'd feel if you had no clothes- you want to cover up as soon as possible. This is why annual pioneer 'weeds' are the first plants to cover any soil left bare, so instead, make sure you either sow green manures or cover the soil in mulch, to reduce weeding in the spring.

Protecting the ground with Green Manure

At this time of year, you may already have some areas covered in a living mulch or green manure. This will protect the soil by the roots holding it together and the greenery shielding the soil from rain.

In September, you can still sow field beans, preferably in rotation with legumes (ie other beans and peas). I found sowing as late as October meant they didn't quite get big enough to cover the ground well, so, if sowing this late, I recommend sowing them quite close together, say 5-10cm apart both ways. I also found that birds pecked at the emerging shoots, so covering with fleece would help to stop this, and keep the ground warmer if it became cold.

Phacelia is a great green manure because it doesn't need to follow the rotation of crops like the legume family or brassica family, and it can still be sown in early September. It is not fully frost hardy, so the greenery will gradually disintegrate over winter, leaving stems that can be removed in spring before planting. This means it does not need to be dug in, great if using the no dig method.

Tip: you can mix more than one green manure type together to get a better ground coverage.

Some green manures like rye grass and field beans will be hardy and will either need to be removed and composted before planting in the spring, or "cut and dropped" which means cutting the green material and leaving it as a mulch on the surface. I prefer to remove field beans for compost, in order to keep the ground covered as long as possible, and to even provide early flowers for the bees. Make sure you leave the roots in though, as these will give their stored nitrogen back to the following crop. More information on green manures can be found in the summer notes.

Protecting and Feeding the Ground with Mulches

An alternative to green manure is to mulch with compost or manure. This will prevent some soil erosion from rain, and the nutrients will slowly be washed into the soil from the top. Worms will also make little channels as they go up and down feeding on the compost from the top, helping to aerate the soil, and draw compost or manure into the soil.

First harvest your crop, removing any plant material above ground to prevent pest insects over-wintering and the spread of disease and fungus, then spread compost or manure on the surface. It's up to you if you feel it's possible to do so due to the structure and thickness of the stem, but you can cut plants at ground level and leave the roots to decay in the soil. This has an added benefit of the mycorrhizal fungi that has gathered around the root will stay in place, more carbon is stored in the soil, and the root, once decayed, will leave a more open structure to the soil. You may be lucky that the plant regrows from the root in the spring, giving some unexpected green etc to harvest. Beans are particularly good to do this with as the nitrogen nodules created around the roots will feed the soil for the following crop.

So which mulch to use - compost or manure?

Rotation:

Before potatoes next year (which will be on this year's root bed)– use manure as they like the nitrogen.

Before beans next year (which will be this year's potato bed)- use compost, as the beans may like some lime and manure is slightly acidic.

Before brassicas next year (which will be this year's bean/legume bed)-use compost, as brassicas are more prone to club root if you use manure (it is too acidic).

Before frost tender plants such as tomatoes/ courgettes/ squash (which can be any space from last year really) use manure.

Before roots next year (which will be on this year's brassica or tomato bed) – you don't need to add any nutrient for carrots and parsnips, but compost or manure will be good for onions or leeks.

You can cover your manured or composted soil with black plastic too – this will have a number of benefits:

- No nutrients will be washed away
- The soil won't get waterlogged over winter, so if you want to sow earlier your soil won't be wet and heavy
- The soil will warm up quicker in the spring
- Weeds won't grow so there will be one less job to do in the spring

Black plastic can be bought in garden centres or from mole valley farmers, and will last for many years if stored correctly. You can use compost bags cut down one side and spread out too (they are usually black inside). It needs to be black to cut out the light. Coloured or pale plastic won't work.

Make sure you weigh it down to prevent it blowing away in the strong winter winds. If you don't like the look of it in your garden you can cover the black plastic in bracken or straw, which has the added advantage of protecting the plastic from degrading in the sun, making it last longer.

If you would like to not use plastic, then cover the soil with cardboard, (as with a grow through mulch- see summer notes), then put your manure or compost on top. This will have the benefits of suppressing more weeds than compost or manure alone, and it should have rotted by the time you want to plant in the spring.

The no dig system

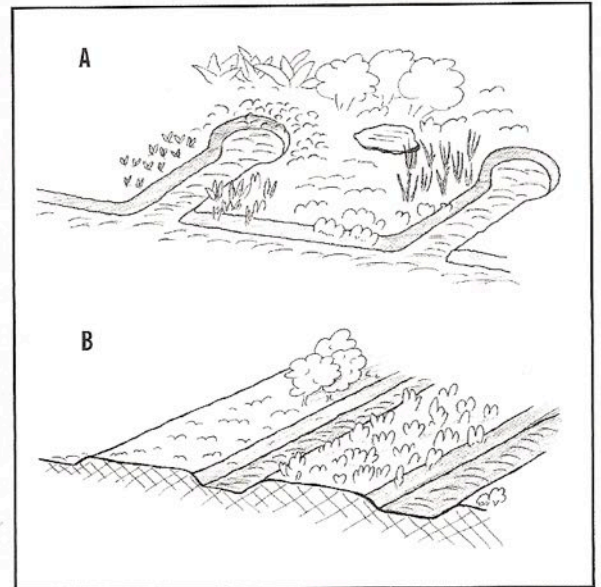
I gave some notes on the no dig or minimal till system earlier in the year, so I won't completely repeat myself. Having tried it myself now for 12 years, we have found it so much easier and I would highly recommend it.

If you have dug or rotavated manure or compost into the soil before, there is no reason you can't start no dig from today! The main thing to plan for next year is not walking on the soil, because this will compact it. So you need to

divide your area into beds around 4-5 foot wide, so you can lean over from the path. Any wider and you will need to stand on them. We like our paths to be 2 to 3-foot wide. If you plant to the edge of the bed the paths will become narrower as the plants grow, and having paths too narrow means you will end up twisting and being uncomfortable as you are gardening, and it makes a wheelbarrow hard to manoeuvre.

Paths

Paths can be made from a variety of materials, with wood chip or grass being the most environmentally friendly, but both requiring different maintenance. Stone or slate chipping and paving slabs have a higher carbon footprint due to their manufacture and transportation, and will still grow weeds which need maintaining too, but provide no nutrient to the soil. As storing carbon in the soil is so beneficial to our climate, I recommend a natural material, but I won't say which I prefer the look of, as that is personal preference.



Keyhole raised beds (A) and straight raised beds (B).

Wood Chip

Advantages

The wood chip slowly degrades and adds nutrients to the soil
You don't need put edges to the beds

Disadvantages

It needs sourcing and topping up regularly every 2-3 years, which can be time consuming and/or expensive
As it degrades it becomes compost, so a growing medium for weeds - the solution for this is to apply cardboard underneath every time you top up the wood chip, and hoe in dry weather as it degrades and weeds start growing.

I would not recommend teram or weed suppressant membrane under the wood chip. Long term it doesn't work at suppressing weeds, and it prevents the wood chip from feeding the soil, plus it's plastic and bits can break off as it degrades.

Grass

Advantages

Grass roots help to hold the soil together and supplies nutrients to the soil. You can even add "dynamic accumulators" such as clover, plantain, salad burnet or dandelions which will pull other nutrients from deeper in the soil.

The grass cuttings make fantastic nutritious compost when mixed with "browns"

You can throw weeds onto the path as you are gardening, then mow them along with the grass, shredding them finely to add to your compost.

Disadvantages

You need to mow regularly, which usually uses fossil fuels.

The grass needs some kind of edging to contain it and stop it spreading into the beds. This can either be an edge maintained by lawn edge shears, or wooden planks that can harbour slugs.

Vegetables to sow or plant now

Carrots

These can be sown up to early September in greenhouse or poly tunnel. If we have a warm autumn, you may even be lucky to harvest for Christmas, however most years the carrots will still be tiny then. Usually you can harvest in March to May. One disadvantage is that winter grown carrots can be less flavoursome than summer grown ones, as the sunshine increases flavour. However as carrot fly is not active in winter, you do avoid this. One pesky problem can be slugs eating the seedlings, which is why they are less successful outside under fleece, however there are winter hardy varieties of seed to try outside with a bit of protection.

Overwintering Broad Beans

These can be planted as late as November. If it gets really cold you can cover in fleece to aid germination, and protect from birds. The seeds can rot if it is very wet, so you can cover in **clear** plastic sheet, clothes or a portable cold frame before they germinate, just make sure the ground is damp before covering and remove once they have grown to 2-3 inches, so they can harden off for the winter. You can also start beans off in pots or root-trainers (trays and modules will be too shallow). Plants need be no more than 1 inch high before the onset of winter. In fact plants that are too leggy or big may get crushed if we have snow.

Broad beans like soil that has preferably been manured during the **previous** season, so they can follow potatoes grown earlier this year. You can add compost and lime if the soil is too acidic (beans like soil slightly alkaline).

Sow 4-5cm deep. Sow extra seeds in case of failures, then thin to 9 inches apart both ways.

Overwintering Peas

These may be worth a try if you have room, although peas can be raised in modules in February and can go out as early as March, so often catch up to winter sown ones once the weather warms. Also hardier peas are more starchy, whereas sweeter peas are less hardy and so are grown in spring and summer. Be aware that both mice and birds like peas, so sow more than you need! Sow 1 inch apart to allow for losses, thinning to up to 9 inches apart in double rows with a support in-between rows. Plant peas 1-2 inches deep. Net protection will deter birds, but if mice eat the peas (they will burrow into the ground), I suggest raising the plants indoors or on a greenhouse shelf, then planting out. A recent tip I was told is to bury holly leaves along with the pea seeds to deter mice with their prickles.

After trying overwintering peas one year, I wouldn't grow them again unless I was worried about food shortages. Mice ate a lot of the seed, and those that lasted through the winter looked pathetic, although you may have more luck! They were no earlier to harvest than sweeter peas sown in the spring in modules, and were very starchy, only good in stews and purees. Something that might be more enjoyable, is sowing peas on a windowsill indoors for fresh pea shoots. You can sow dried peas that you get from food shops for this if you want a lot, cheaply. Grow in succession, sowing a new pot every week or two.

Overwintering Onions - Japanese type

These can be bought as "sets", which are simply small onions. You can raise onions from seed, which enables you a wider choice of varieties, but they are fiddly to weed, and the losses are quite high, so it is easier to plant sets, however growing from seed can prevent importing white rot. Red onions are more prone to diseases such as white rot than white onions. They also don't store quite as well, but if you eat a lot of red onions then they are well worth growing.

Onions like a fertile soil, so apply manure or compost before planting. Bonemeal may also be beneficial. Either plant 3-4" apart in rows 1 foot apart. Make sure the set is planted root down, and plant them half in half out of the soil.

Unfortunately birds often pull them out thinking they are worms, which is really annoying, as you have to check almost daily and replant them, being careful not to damage the emerging shoots. You can plant amongst flowers in a flower bed and the birds may not spot them! I have found covering in fleece worked well as a bird deterrent, but the sets pushed themselves out of the soil as their roots grew, so I even had to replant them under the fleece! I really enjoyed the success of planting the sets in modules first. You can use any normal compost, made yourself or shop bought, in small 40 per tray module trays (or anything else you may have). Just pop the set in, half in half out like

you would in the soil, and keep covered, either indoors, in a greenhouse, polytunnel or cold frame. Water so they don't become too dry, and about 3 weeks later, the sets have established roots and grown a green shoot. Then you can plant them out. If you want to have big onions, plant 6" apart in rows 2' apart, and only use the bigger sets out of the bag you buy, discarding the small sets.

Keep weed free as they grow, an onion hoe is useful. Apply fertiliser in the early spring, either bonemeal as a top dressing, organic fertiliser (comes in a packet from Willowbrook), chicken manure pellets as a top dressing, or liquid fertiliser. Also water in dry weather to prevent bolting (going to seed).

Garlic

Officially, garlic doesn't need as fertile soil as onions, it also likes soil slightly limey, so you can put it in your brassica or bean bed, or you can keep it with the onions as it is allium family and suffers from similar pests and diseases. One year I put some manure in the row I planted the garlic, therefore ignoring the above advice, I also put them near roses as this is supposed to deter aphids from the roses, and I got the best garlic I have ever grown! Garlic needs the frosts of winter to divide the bulb, so the best time to plant is now.

Divide the bulb into cloves, leaving the papery skin on, and plant deeper in the soil than onions, covering with soil. Make a hole with a trowel, plant root down, and plant up to 10cm deep on a light soil, but shallower on clay, covering in about an inch of soil. Positioning as with onions, 7.5-10 cm/3-4 inches apart, in rows 1 foot apart. I did notice you get bigger bulbs from the bigger cloves, just like with the onions.

This is a really easy crop, just weed and/or mulch, harvest around June the following year. Looks good planted in flower beds, as long as you are able to get access to dig out the root.

Brassicas?

It may be too late now to sow British Brassicas, but if you can find bigger plants in Willowbrook, they may be worth a go. Varieties such as January King, Curly Kale and Purple sprouting and cauliflower are all fairly easy to grow. You can find more notes on British brassicas in the spring and summer handouts.

Although British brassicas may be a little late to sow, you can still sow **Chinese cabbage such as Pak Choi**. These bolt in hot weather and so are better over winter. Sow in seed trays or direct, and plant out with spacings shown on the seed packet as these vary depending on the size of the plant. If you have a greenhouse or polytunnel, plant in there, or protect with fleece from frosts. The most successful I have been with them is sowing in January and planting in February, harvesting in March/ April all in our ploy tunnel. Germination will be slow if it's very cold, so you could germinate them indoors.

Slugs, pigeons and caterpillars love these, so keeping them under a cover such as fleece helps avoid these problems. Pak Choi are lovely in stir fries, but make sure you make a succession of sowings, or you will have them all at once!

Lettuce and leaves

Some types of lettuce are particularly hardy, my particular favourite is Winter Density, a large cos type and nice and crunchy. There are so many types of lettuce, from crisp-headed types and butter-head and non-heading loose-leaf types. Claytonia/miners lettuce is very tasty and grows, although slowly over winter.

I usually have some in the poly tunnel using successive sowings. Very cold weather has sometimes damaged lettuces, but they have sometimes re-grown, and mostly they are fine. If doubtful, sow late January, early feb, and harvest before tomatoes etc need planting.

Pea shoots make a lovely late salad, and are a use for any over-wintering pea seeds, in preference for the peas themselves. As they are hardy they should germinate in colder weather.

Chard is another leaf that can over winter, you can use both the leaves like spinach, or the stems in a stir fry.

Fruit to plant in Winter – All!

Fruit trees and bushes are dormant at this time of year, so it is an ideal time to transplant nursery grown plants.

Soil:

For soft fruits, you can top dress or dig in generous amounts of well rotted manure or garden compost and fertiliser to improve water retention and fertility to the soil before planting. In preparation for planting tree fruits, fertilisers should not be used unless the soil is very poor and infertile, since it may produce excessive, soft growth rather than fruiting wood.

Poor drainage is more likely on heavy clay (although any soil can have poor structure) and a lot of Wellington is over clay. Severely waterlogged soils are best to avoid for most fruit, because this will need to have a suitable drainage system in place. Enormous amounts of grit would be needed to lighten a very heavy clay, fine sand should not be used as it makes the problem worse by blocking the soil pores. Grit or gravel should be used in channels in the soil,

keeping a path open for water, rather than being worked in. If you have a heavy waterlogged soil, then you are better growing plants that like these conditions. Aronia (used for its highly nutritious berries cooked or juiced) more water tolerant than any other fruit. Rhubarb is not a fruit and works well in a damp area. Blueberries also prefer a damp soil, but you need to dig a big hole and fill this with ericaceous compost.

A Ph of 6-6.5 is ideal for all fruits except blueberries and cranberries. Soils below 5.8 will need liming, and those over 7 need top dressing regularly with sulphate of ammonia. With blueberries and cranberries, plant into ericaceous compost. We added 3 large bags to each planting hole for our blueberries, in an area of our allotment that is sometimes level with the water table in the winter, and they are very healthy 15 year old plants now. You can get a pear free ericaceous compost from Dalefoot Composts. We have found watering with a few teaspoons of cider vinegar raises the acidity of the soil and gives healthy plants, without needing to use sulphate of ammonia.

Correct growing habit / training fruit for the space

Thinking of this now will make it easier to harvest, save you wanting to move plants later, and can enable you to grow a lot of fruit in a small area.

Fruit trees, such as apricots, cherries, figs, apples and pears, can be pruned to grow against a fence or wall, these are called fans, espaliers and cordons. Climbers such as grapes and kiwi, can be grown over most structures, even pergolas and up semi mature trees. Blueberries and cranberries can work well in pots, due to their soil requirements, and traditional favourites strawberries can be grown in any container, hanging basket, or even in containers up a fence or wall. Just make sure you water pots well.

The above is rather a brief summary of growing fruit, which is rather a large subject. Hopefully this is enough to keep you going this winter, maybe have a look through catalogues for different types of fruit to grow, and I would recommend www.rhs.org.uk or www.allotment-garden.org as really helpful websites. I always refer to the RHS encyclopedia of gardening for fruit pruning tips, and "Creating a Forest Garden" by Martin Crawford is a fantastic way to approach your fruit production, very sustainable and beautiful, and for both large and small scales.

Flowers to sow now

Autumn Planted Bulbs:

Daffodils/ Narcissus

Iris xiphium and their hybrids x hollandica or Iris Latifolia

Lilium

Allium

Camassia Electra – great if your soil is too heavy for tulips, very hardy, (Avon Bulbs supply this 01460 242 177 or www.avonbulbs.co.uk)

Camassia Leichtlinii (Caerulea is a deep blue, Alba is ivory or stellar hybrids which are cheaper and varying shades)

Eremurus Stelford Hybrids – would make a statuesque cut flower!

Ornithogalum (magnum and pyrenacum)

Tulips - not many are perennial, and if you want them for cutting, look for types over 30cm tall. Parkers wholesale has the largest and cheapest range I have found.

Seeds:

Astrantia (although this smells horrid!) is a gorgeous and long lasting cut flower and perennial.

Alstromeria seeds need a period of cold to germinate, so you may want to try to germinate some, although they are notoriously hard to germinate. Just make sure if you want them for cutting you get the tall type and not the dwarf ones. Perennial and possibly my favourite cut flower.

Bishops Flower – annual to biannual, easy to germinate and seed sown now survives over winter, like a more refined cow parsley, is gorgeous in the garden, and makes a good addition for beautiful bouquets.

Euphorbia Oblongata – short lived perennial and makes nice greenery for flower arranging, seeds sown survive well over winter and germinates well.

Storing Autumn Crops

A really good online guide to storing your crops can be found here

https://lovefoodhatewaste.com/article/food-storage-a-z?_ga=2.142920573.970112909.1630133610-1955098724.1630133610

It contains an easy to use reference guide for most of the fruit and vegetables you might grow or buy in the shops.

Storing Potatoes and Root Vegetables

Although a freezer is great for keeping many vegetables in good condition from harvest to when they are needed, they are not really suitable for crops such as potatoes, onions etc.

Parsnips and carrots and celeriac can be left in the soil over winter if your soil is well drained but you may find increased insect damage and problems digging them up when the ground is frozen. A covering of straw and/or horticultural fleece is essential if keeping celeriac in the ground as it will be damaged by frost and snow if not properly protected.

Those parsnips left in the ground should be dug up and used or stored in March, or they will go to seed, which makes the core very hard and the parsnip bitter.

When storing vegetables you need to sort out the damaged or any showing signs of rot and use these first, because if they rot, the rot will spread and ruin your whole crop. We suffer quite a lot of slug damage on our potatoes and the 'slugged' are always in our 'use first' bag, slug intrusion is indicated by little holes in the potatoes.

Prepare carrots by removing any thick soil and cutting off the foliage about an inch from the top of the root. With beetroot you should twist off the foliage rather than cut it. You do not need to wash crops before storing, leaving the soil on helps prevent them from getting soft. If you harvest in wet weather, having a polytunnel or greenhouse is very useful to dry them off before storing in bags. If you don't have this facility, choose a dry, sunny day to harvest.

Storing Root Vegetable Crops in a Clamp

In the days when people had large families and often survived by what they grew it was common to store root crops such as potatoes, carrots, Swedes, beetroot and celeriac in clamps. Clamps are probably not the best method for storing the smaller amounts required by a small family or couple. I have no personal experience of using clamps, but here is the theory:

The first thing to ensure is that the crop will be kept out of standing water. Choose a dry spot in the plot and then dig a trench around the storage area. This will help drain any water and provides soil you will need later. Next place a layer of straw, bracken or even shredded paper on the ground and then place a layer of your crop down. With carrots, you could try a circular pattern, thick end to the outside, then place another layer of your packing material or sand to level up. Carry on adding layers to form a cone shape. On the outside of the clamp, place six to eight inches of straw and make a little straw spike at the top. This will allow excess moisture to escape, The soil you removed from your drainage trench can then be used to cover the clamp.

Storing Potatoes

When you first harvest your potatoes, you should leave them out in the sun for a few hours to dry off and allow the skin to harden a little. I found they dry really quickly in the poly tunnel, so made the whole harvesting process much quicker and less weather dependant. After they have dried off, brush off any excess soil and check for damage. Sometimes it is hard to tell as a little hole on the surface can indicate a network of tunnels and even a live slug hiding in the potato so check as carefully as you can.

Any forked, slugged or suspect potatoes should be put to one side and used as quickly as possible.

Unlike other root crops, potatoes should preferably be stored above 5 ° C as below that the starch turns into sugars, which can give them a sweet taste. The optimum temperature range is between 5 and 10° C. If storing in a shed, make sure they are properly protected from frost. This means insulating them

from below (eg putting a blanket or even waste buildings insulation under them) and all around the bag and on top (eg wrapping them in a blanket).

You can store potatoes in paper but leave the neck slightly open to allow excess moisture to escape, (although this is really only possible if stored in a cupboard inside in order to properly exclude light). Hessian sacks help more air to flow while closed but do leak mud if inside! Do not use plastic bags under any circumstances as this makes them sweat and rot.

After you have had the potatoes in store for a month or so, wait for a fine day and empty the bags out. Re-check for developing rots and don't be surprised if you find the odd slug or two you missed first time. I have heard of people popping a few slug pellets in the sack as well.

Storing other root crops

You can store other root crops including:

- Carrots
- Parsnips
- Celeriac
- Beetroot
- Turnip
- Swede
- Kholrabi

in the following way:

Remove foliage close to the crown. Place in layers in boxes, crates etc separated with a damp, but not wet, packing material. You can use sand, coir or even leafmould.

You can use a banana box for storing in (or any second hand box). Most supermarkets throw them away and will give you some if you ask. The ideal temperature for your root crops is between 0 and 4° C , lower than potatoes. Since you probably don't have a refrigerated storage facility, like me you will just have to settle for the coolest place you have. If you have a cellar, this is ideal. With some care, you can enjoy your own produce year round using no technology or electricity at all.

Freezing Crops

Some crops freeze better than others.

Sweetcorn (removed from the cobs), shelled peas, prepared runner and French beans, can be blanched and frozen in meal sized bags.

The inner beans of french beans ie Haricot beans, and borlotti beans, will change flavour if frozen. I could only eat them if disguised with lots of spices when cooking! These are better dried.

Chopped, skinned tomatoes freeze really well, especially in “poly-lina” pour and store bags (reusable a many times if carefully washed)

Squash and pumpkin store really well just left in a cool but not frosty place, but if some are damaged (one year we kept them in the shed and they were nibbled by mice), you can prepare, roast and puree them and they freeze well.

Chilles freeze really well, just washed and left whole (note: peeled, cubed shop-bought ginger also freezes really well), but do not put garlic in the freezer as it will taste mouldy. This also applies for any dish with garlic in eg pesto.

Raspberries, blueberries, blackcurrants, blackberries, gooseberries, cranberries, and aronia berries all freeze well. Simply wash and remove any bits you don't want to eat, as it will be really difficult to do so after! If you cover a baking tray with baking parchment paper, then put a single layer of fruit on this, they freeze separately. Then if put in a bag once frozen they are more easily decanted.

Strawberries don't freeze as well, but if you have an excess and don't have time to make jam then they can be stored in the freezer ready for cooking later.

Apples do not freeze well whole, but can be juiced or frozen once pureed

Prepared onions freeze well, but I find taints my freezer with the smell and taste of onion. Onion flavoured ice cream is not pleasant! Double bagging with quality freezer bags may prevent this, but I haven't tried this. The best way to store onions is to dry them and hang them in strings.

Bottling

This is either something you have time and interest in, or not, as many of the crops you can bottle, also freeze well. I have lots of detailed information on a separate handout if you are interested. I would love to have time to try bottling haricot beans, but have not as yet had any experience.

Dehydrating

You can dry fruit and vegetables without a dehydrator if you live in a hot country or are lucky enough to have an aga. You can dry some things on the lowest setting on the oven. However if you want to do this more often, it can be lower in energy use and more reliable to use a dehydrator.

We are new to dehydrating, but have found it great for tomatoes (and making banana chips!). It is a massive subject we are just beginners with, so I cant really offer any advice, other than after a lot of research, we got an excalibur dehydrator. These are top of the range, as a fan at the back of the unit is better than one underneath, as you don't have to keep swapping the trays

around for an even dry. Also the quality of the trays are more durable than some other makes. You can dry an awful lot of veg or fruit in a 4 tray one, so that will be fine for most people. We have proved bread in our 9 tray model, and it is great for that as it is taller, it is however massive to store – the size of a large microwave.

Making Leafmulch

Leafmulch makes a really good potting compost, an great addative to multipurpose compost to make it go further, and a great mulch for the soil. There are a few different ways of making it - I have tried putting it in plastic bags or in their own separate compost bin - but the best and quickest method is to make a ring fence from chicken wire and upright posts, on a small plot of earth, and simply fill with autumn leaves (from deciduous trees, although not walnut) It rots down in one or two years, with the help of some air and rain,. If not completely rotted, it can be used as a weed supressing mulch. When it is ready for use with seeds it will look like a fine potting compost.

Recipes For Late Summer and Winter Vegetables

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.

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.

Parsnips

Roast Parsnips rolled in Parmesan

These are lovely, sweet and crispy and good served with any meal as a side dish, or as a starter with a dip such as crème fresh flavoured with dill or sweet chilli dipping sauce. You can also make a large batch as they are great to freeze, just defrost and reheat in the oven.

Ingredients:

Olive oil for the tin

600g parsnips

100g Parmesan cheese grated

100g fresh brown or white breadcrumbs

seasoned flour

2 eggs, beaten

- Preheat the oven to 190c, put in an oiled baking tin to get it really hot
- Peel parsnips and cut them into wedges, then steam them for 10 minutes
- Mix breadcrumbs with the parmesan
- Dip the hot parsnips in the seasoned flour, then into the beaten egg, and lastly roll in the breadcrumb mixture
- Roast the parsnips on the oiled baking tray for 35 minutes, until golden brown

Spiced Parsnip Soup

Surprisingly filling, this also freezes well in the pour and store bags.

Ingredients:

30g butter

1tbsp sunflower oil

1 onion, chopped

675g parsnips, chopped

1 tsp ground coriander seeds

1 tsp ground cumin seeds

½ tsp ground tumeric

¼ tsp hot chilli powder

1.2l vegetable stock

salt and pepper

a little milk (optional)

150ml single cream

Yoghurt to serve

Chopped coriander to serve

- Fry the onion and parsnips in the oil and butter in a large saucepan, for 5 minutes
- Stir in the spices and cook gently for 2 minutes
- Add the stock and simmer for 30 minutes or until the parsnips are quite tender
- Season and puree in a food processor
- Add milk to the desired consistency
- Add cream and warm through gently without allowing to boil
- Serve with a dollop of yoghurt and chopped coriander

Celeriac and Parsnip Bake

Ingredients

600g parsnips, peeled and cubed
 1kg celeriac, peeled and cubed
 25g butter
 4 tbsp double cream
 freshly grated nutmeg
 1 tbsp chopped sage leaves

For the topping:

50g fresh coarse breadcrumbs
 5 tbsp parmesan coarsely grated
 handful of flaked almonds
 1 tbsp olive oil

1. Cook parsnips in a pan of boiling salted water for 2 mins, then tip in the celeriac and boil together for 8 mins. Drain well, then mash with butter and cream. Season, then add a grating of nutmeg, stir in the sage and spoon into a buttered ovenproof dish. Make up to this stage 1 day ahead or freeze for one month. Defrost in fridge overnight.
2. Heat oven to 190C/fan 170C/gas 5. Mix breadcrumbs, Parmesan, almonds and oil together. Season, scatter over the mash, then bake for 35-40 mins from cold, 25-30 mins if not, until topping is crisp and golden.

Moroccan spice blend: Ras-el-hanout (this blend can also be bought prepared from supermarkets, although all differ slightly).

1 tsp black peppercorns
 1 tsp cloves
 1 tsp aniseeds
 1 tsp nigella seeds
 1 tsp allspice berries
 1 tsp cardamon seeds
 2 tsp ground ginger
 2 tsp ground turmeric

2 tsp coriander seeds
2 pieces mace
2 pieces cinnamon bark
2 tsp dried mint
1 dried red chilli
1 tsp dried lavender
6 dried rosebuds broken up

Just blend all the ingredients together using a coffee grinder or using a pestle and mortar. All the ingredients can be found in sunseed in Wellington.

Moroccan Tomato and Vegetable Soup

3 tbsp olive oil and a small knob of butter or ghee
2 onions chopped
1 butternut squash, peeled, deseeded and cut into small chunks
4 celery stalks chopped
2 carrots, peeled and chopped
1-2 tsp ground turmeric
2-3 tsp ras-el-hanout
1 tbsp sugar
800g chopped skinned tomatoes
1 tbsp tomato puree (I use a whole tin as it is good for you)
1.5 litres stock (vegetable or chicken)
4-5 tbsp natural yoghurt (optional)
a bunch of coriander leaves roughly chopped
salt and pepper
bread to serve
(serves 6)

Heat oil and butter in a large saucepan (I had to use a preserving pan to be big enough), stir in the onion, squash, celery and carrots, and cook for 4-5 minutes or until they begin to soften and get a little colour.

Stir in the spices, sugar, tomatoes, tomato puree, and stock and simmer for 30-40 minutes.

Season and serve with yoghurt and coriander on top.

Quick Moroccan Couscous

Cook any veg you have, usually with some sort of onion (I usually stir fry most things in a wok and steam those too hard to stir fry)

While cooking, add 125ml of hot water to 175 ml couscous, leave for 5 minutes and fork through to separate

Once the veg is cooked put everything in the large frying pan or wok, add a tin of tinned tomatoes (or fresh skinned and chopped of your own) and a couple of teaspoons of ras-el-hanout, and heat through.

Serve with the couscous

This takes about 10-15 minutes after the veg is prepared

Tomatoes

Casablancon Stuffed Tomatoes

150g couscous
½ tsp salt
150ml warm water
3-4 tbsp olive oil
4 large tomatoes (I find the amount of filling fills 12 medium sized tomatoes, or just have some left over to eat separately)
1 onion, finely chopped
1 carrot peeled and diced
a sprinkling of sugar
1-2 tsp ras el hanout
a bunch each of fresh flat leaf parsley and coriander
½ preserved lemon finely chopped
salt and pepper

preheat the oven to 180c. combine couscous, salt and warm water, stir and leave to stand for 10 minutes before rubbing in 1 tbsp oil with fingers.

Slice off the top of the tomatoes and set side. Using a spoon, scoop out the pulp and seeds and reserve in a bowl. Fry the onions and carrot in the remaining oil until cooked, then stir in the tomato pulp, sugar, ras el hanout and cook until it forms a thick sauce, then season.

Mix the tomato mixture with the couscous and preserved lemon. Spoon into the tomato cavity and place the top on each one like a lid. Bake in the oven for 25 minutes. Eat either hot or cold

Tomatoes and Aubergine

Moroccan Ratatouille with Dates

4-5 tbsp olive oil
1 onion sliced
2 garlic cloves chopped
1 red pepper sliced (pith and stalk removed)
1 medium aubergine halved lengthways then sliced crossways
2 courgettes sliced
225g stoned dates
2 tins (800g total) chopped tomatoes
1-2 tsp sugar
2 tsp ras el hanout
small bunch flat leaf parsley chopped
salt and pepper

Heat the oil in a casserole. Cook the onion and garlic for 2-3 minutes. Add the pepper, aubergine and courgettes and cook for 3-4 minutes. Add dates,

tomatoes, sugar, and ras el hanout and mix. Cover with lid and cook for about 40 minutes until vegetables are tender. Season with salt and pepper and sprinkle with parsley. Serve hot.

Carrots

Bejuja Carrots

This is good as either a vegetarian lunch served with yoghurt and rice, or as a side dish.

Ingredients:

4 tbsp vegetable oil
675g carrots, sliced
4 garlic cloves
5cm piece root ginger
1 tsp poppy seeds
1 tsp ground tumeric
2 tsp ground cumin seeds
2 tsp ground coriander seeds
1 chilli, deseeded and chopped
1 tsp salt
lg handful chopped coriander
Natural Yoghurt to serve

- Fry the carrots for 10 minutes. Stir in the garlic, ginger and poppy seeds and fry for a further 2 minutes
- Stir in the spices and salt and cook until the carrots are tender, careful not to let it catch
- Finally stir in the chopped coriander and serve with yoghurt.

MOIST CARROT CAKE

Ingredients

3 large eggs
175ml (6 fl. oz) sunflower oil
2 tsp pure vanilla essence
55ml (2 fl. oz) soured cream
175g (6 oz) raw muscovado sugar
175g (6 oz) soft brown sugar
250g (9 oz) wholewheat flour
1 tsp freshly grated nutmeg
2 level tsp ground cinnamon
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
Small tsp salt
300g (11 oz) grated, peeled carrots
75g (3 oz) desiccated coconut
Icing (simply mix together)

125g (4 oz) full fat soft cream cheese
50g (2 oz) unsalted butter
50g (2 oz) sifted icing sugar
Juice of a lemon

Method

Preheat the oven to 150C (300F) / Gas Mark 2. Grease and line an 8 inch / 20cm round cake tin, or 2 x 1lb loaf tins. Combine the eggs, oil, vanilla, soured cream and sugars. Fold the flour, nutmeg, cinnamon, bicarbonate and salt into the wet ingredients, followed by the carrots and the coconut. Mix well, then spoon into the cake tin(s). Bake on a central shelf for 1 1/2- 2 hours until the cake feels firm to the touch. It freezes well.

Carribbean Veggie Stew

Ingredients:

6 New Potatoes chopped fairly small
2-3 Carrots (or other veg eg French beans that you can steam over the potatoes)
1 Onion
1 Courgette
6-8 medium tomatoes, skinned and chopped
Celery (any type, I used about 10 leaves and stem of Chinese celery, or you could use 2 large sticks of blanched celery)
2 garlic cloves, chopped
1"cube of Ginger, grated
1 tbsp brown sugar (I left it out and it was fine)
1/2 tsp English mustard powder
1-2 chillies (or more depending on taste and strength of chillis)
Juice of half a lime
Tin of beans, drained of juice, or your own pre cooked haricot/borlotti beans

- Put the potatoes on to boil
- Steam carrots over the potatoes while the other veg are cooking.
- Fry the onions and courgette and celery until soft.
- Add the flavourings, cook for 1-2 minutes, then add the chopped tomatoes and beans and cook
- Stir in the potatoes and carrots and serve

Chicory

Chicory tagliatelle

This dish is nice hot or cold, so put the remainder in the fridge to nibble on the next day!

Ingredients:

1 packet of smoked back bacon, chopped
Extra Virgin olive oil to fry
1 onion

1 garlic clove
500g fresh tagliatelle
100g fresh chicory leaves, chopped, preferably into strips
6 tbsp white wine
knob of butter
grated zest of 1 lemon
170ml double cream
handful of chopped flat leaf parsley
Grated parmesan cheese
Salt and pepper

- Fry the onion until starting to soften
- Add the bacon and garlic and cook for 3-4 minutes
- Add the wine and chicory to the onion mix, and start to cook the pasta in water (the pasta only takes a couple of minutes)
- Once the chicory has wilted, add the butter, lemon zest, cream and season well
- Mix the sauce with the drained pasta and add the chopped parsley
- Serve with parmesan to taste

Moroccan Pear and Chicory Salad

Ingredients:

2-3b ripe but firm pears, cut into 8 segments and cored
Chicory (2 hearts from the shops or equivalent leaves if homegrown)
2-3 tbsp olive or argan oil
juice of ½ lemon
2 tsp honey
salt and pepper
hand full of fresh rose petals if authentic, (or if it's the wrong time of year for roses, I used some dried from sunseed and these were fine)

Arrange the pear and chicory in a serving dish
Mix the oil, lemon juice and seasoning together to create a dressing and pour over the salad
Scatter the rose petals over the top before serving

Asparagus, Chicory, Smoked Salmon with Crème Fraîche salad

Ingredients

30 spears medium or fine asparagus
6 Belgian endives (chicory), trimmed
200ml crème fraîche
1 Tablespoons lemon juice
2 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

400g (12 slices) finely sliced smoked salmon
1 small bunch of chives, roughly snipped

Method

1. Wash and trim the asparagus.
2. Drop into a pan of boiling, salted water and cook for 3-5 minutes until the stems are tender but retain a little bite.
3. Drain and spread out to cool on plates lined with kitchen paper.
4. Separate the endive leaves.
5. Put in a large bowl with the cool asparagus spears.
6. Whisk the crème fraîche in a small bowl with 2 Tablespoons of cold water.
7. When you are ready to serve, drizzle the endive and asparagus with the lemon juice and olive oil.
8. Toss well, lightly season, then mix again.
9. Divide between six plates.
10. Weave in the smoked salmon slices, drizzle over the crème fraîche and scatter with chives.

Serves 6

Cauliflower

Aloo Gobi

Ingredients

2 large potatoes
1 medium cauliflower
1 large onion
1 Tablespoon Garam Masala
Bay leaf
4 cardamom pods
3 inches cinnamon stick
1 teaspoon haldi
Flour
Salt

Method

1. First make the roux for the sauce
2. Peel, chop & fry the onion until it is transparent.
3. Add a Tablespoonful of garam masala and fry gently for a while.
4. Add some flour to make a roux and cook it out.
5. This can be made earlier in the day, kept in the fridge and warmed at eating time.
6. Peel & cut potatoes into 1 inch chunks
7. Put water to cook potatoes into a pan
8. Add Haldi; Cardamom; Bay leaf; Cinnamon; Salt and potato
9. Cover & bring to boil & boil for about 8 minutes until potatoes are starting to cook.

10. Meantime dismember cauliflower into florets.
11. Add cauliflower florets to potatoes in boiling pan and boil for a further 5 minutes at which time both potatoes & cauliflower should be nicely al dente.
12. When vegetables are cooked strain off & reserve liquid. Fish out the spices and discard them.
13. Add sufficient reserved liquid to the warmed roux until you get a nice thick sauce.
14. Pour over the vegetables and gobble it up quick.
15. Use any remaining liquid as a vegetable stock for something else.

Cauliflower Spinach and Chickpea Balti

Ingredients

Sauce

- 3 Tablespoons vegetable oil
- $\frac{3}{4}$ inch cube of ginger, grated
- 1 large garlic clove, crushed
- 5 onions, chopped
- 4 tomatoes, chopped
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro)
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon turmeric powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon chilli powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon paprika
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon garam masala
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 brown cardamoms, broken slightly open
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon dried methi (fenugreek leaves)
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

Stir Fry

- 12 oz cauliflower florets
- 14 oz frozen spinach, thawed and drained
(or use 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ lb fresh, cooked and drained)
- 15 oz cooked chickpeas
- 5 Tablespoon vegetable oil
- 4 onions, chopped
- 1 inch cube fresh ginger, grated
- 6 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 4 tomatoes, chopped
- 2-3 fresh green chillies, finely chopped
- 1 Tablespoon chopped fresh coriander (cilantro)

Method

Part 1- Sauce

1. Heat the oil over a moderate heat.

2. Add the ginger and garlic and stir.
3. Add the onions and stir-fry until they are translucent.
4. Add 9 fl oz water and bring to the boil.
5. Add everything else, cover and simmer on a low heat for 30 minutes.
6. Remove the bay leaves and cardamom pods, and liquidize the rest in a blender.
7. This will make about 2 pints of sauce some of which can be frozen and used another day

Part 2 – Stir Fry

8. Heat the oil in a large wok (or a frying pan) over a medium high heat.
9. Fry the onions gently until they begin to turn brown.
10. Add the ginger and garlic and chillies, stir well, and cook for one minute.
11. Add the spinach, tomatoes, cauliflower, chickpeas, salt and enough balti sauce to coat all the vegetables (4-6 ladles of sauce).
12. Turn the heat to low, cover and simmer until the cauliflower is just tender.
13. Stir in the coriander.

Serve with naan bread or chapattis.

Roast Leeks with mint and feta

Serves 3

Total cooking time 40 minutes

Oven Temperature 220°C (425°F, Gas 7) – adjust for fan assisted ovens

Ingredients:

1 kg Leeks (weight before preparation, trimmed, washed and cut in half lengthways)

1 – 2 tablespoons olive oil

1 teaspoon of rock salt

200ml dry white wine or a good quality vegetable stock, if you do not want to use alcohol

200g Greek feta cheese, cut into 1cm dice

15g finely chopped mint

30g freshly grated Parmesan cheese

- Lay the leeks in an ovenproof dish and brush with the olive oil. Sprinkle on the rock salt and pour the wine or stock into the bottom of the dish. Cover the dish with foil or a lid and cook for 20 minutes.
- Remove the lid or foil, dot with the cubed feta that has been tossed with the chopped mint and Parmesan cheese. Cook uncovered for another 20 minutes.

Marrow and Ginger Jam (pulped)

A smooth preserve resembling a fruit butter in texture but not as thick as butter.

2.75 kg (6 lb) peeled and seeded marrow (prepared weight)
Grated zest and juice of 4 lemons
225g (8 oz.) crystallized ginger chopped
2.75 kg (6 lb.) White Sugar

- Cut the marrow into chunks and cook it in boiling water until tender. Drain the marrow thoroughly, then mash it and return it to the pan.
- Add the lemon zest, lemon juice and crystallized ginger. Bring the marrow to the boil, then add the sugar and stir until it has dissolved.
- Continue to boil the jam for 20 minutes or until it is thickened. Stir occasionally to prevent it burning on the bottom of the pan.
- Pour into warmed jars, cover and label.

Yield 4.75 kg (10½ lb)

Blackcurrant Cordial

I cook as many blackcurrants as I have simply by covering with water. Then put the blackcurrants through a jelly bag. I leave the blackcurrants overnight if possible. Do not force through the bag otherwise the juice will be cloudy.

I freeze the juice in 500ml (18 fl oz) quantities. The cordial takes very little time to make and I prefer to make it fresh as it is needed.

As well as drinking the cordial it can be used to make Ice Cream or Sorbets.

Making the cordial:-

- Defrost the juice if frozen.
- Put 500ml (18 fl oz) of Blackcurrant juice in a pan add 300g (10½ oz) of sugar. Heat the juice gently stirring until the sugar melts, pour into warm bottles put the lid on. Allow to cool and keep in the fridge for up to three months.
- I do not know how long it keeps once opened, it has never lasted long enough to find out.

Mustard Pickle with Green Beans

1 kg (2lb) Green Beans
750g (1½ lb.) Onions
1 litre (1½ pints) Malt Vinegar

Pinch of salt
25ml (1½ tsp) Turmeric
5 ml (1 tsp) Dry Mustard
750 g (1½ lb) Demerara Sugar
45 g (1½ oz) Cornflour

- Cook the beans in salted water. Strain and mince. (I put mine in the food processor).
- Mince the onions. (or chop in the food processor) to desired size. Cook until tender in 300ml (½ pint) of the vinegar.
- Add the beans and the remaining vinegar. Boil for 15 minutes.
- Blend the cornflour, turmeric and dry mustard with a little of the vinegar to form thick paste. Add to the bean and onion mixture, with sugar. Boil for another 10 minutes. (maybe a little longer, depending on the consistency you prefer).
- Cool, pot into sterilized jars, seal and label.

NO COOK LASTS-FOR-AGES **APPLE CHUTNEY**

This is a derivation of an Indian recipe from the days of the Raj.

Makes 10 x 1 pound jars

900g Cooking apples, peeled and cored

900g Stoned dates

900g Sultanans

900g Soft brown sugar

900 ml Malt vinegar

30g Curry powder

Mince or blitz together the apples, dates and sultanans.

Thoroughly mix with all the other ingredients and season with salt and pepper.

Leave to stand in a cool place, not in the fridge, for 24 hours.

Either seal in sterilized jars, or keep in a lidded plastic container and use as required.

This chutney is excellent with any cold meat or pie.

National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners **- Join our group for cheaper seeds**

Wellington Transition Town has a group membership for the NSALG, which along with other benefits, see the NSALG website, also allows us access to Kings members catalogue. This gives a massive discount on seeds, in comparison to other catalogues, eg fothergills etc, often over 50% off, and the seeds are a fab quality. To have an individual membership costs £20, but if you join with us, **you only pay £3.**

If you would like to join, please email Kate on kateholloway@live.com