

Things to do on the Plot in February

Contributed by Behemoth

February 2nd is one of the great 'cross-quarter' days, which make up the wheel of the year. It falls midway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox and in many traditions is considered the beginning of spring.

Outside

General Tasks

Late February is a good time to start digging over your plot and incorporating any organic mulch that was spread on it over the winter. Don't do this if it's too wet. As a rule of thumb, wait until the soil doesn't stick to your boots.

Repair raised beds, compost bins, sheds, paths, posts etc. now while you've got time and they're not covered with new growth.

Warm up the soil by covering prepared areas with polythene, plastic cloches or fleece. Make sure you do this on a sunny day and don't trap a frost under the covering.

If you've still got root crops like parsnips or carrots in the soil they may start to regrow. To keep them in good condition, work your way along the row loosening the roots with a fork. The idea is to break the tap root but not to actually dig them up. This should give them another month or so.

Force Rhubarb: Cover the crown with straw or shredded paper and cover with a bucket. Weigh the bucket down with a brick.

Spring clean the plot and any beds of over wintering vegetables.

Feed Spring Cabbage.

Weed around garlic, runner beans late leeks etc

Sowings

Not strictly the best time for outdoor sowings yet.

Potatoes

Chit your seed potatoes in a cool, light, frost-free place.

Broad Beans

Sow broad beans and hardy peas (such as Feltham First and Meteor) in root trainers or individual pots. For the peas you could use the 'guttering' method if you've got the space.

Parsnips

Dont! Hold back until March, unless you live in the South of England where you may be able to risk it ... or in France.

Under Cover

As usual, things are more exciting at this time of year under the covers but it depends if you are hot or not. If you have a heated greenhouse or propagator that can accommodate large plants then early sowings should not cause you problems.

If you don't, then you might have to be ingenious, organised and patient. You can germinate seeds in the house in a warm place but you need to maintain optimum temperatures while the young plants grow. You can use a sunny window ledge but the temperature variations and limited light can lead to leggy seedlings. To get round this put them in an unheated cold frame or greenhouse on sunny days and bring them in before the temperature drops. Do this and you can grow good plants from early sowings without any special equipment. If this is too much hassle or you forget to bring them in, wait a few weeks or even buy plants from the garden centre.

Cucumbers

For fruits that are not bitter choose all female varieties (Flamingo and Cumlaude) or try Burpless Tasty Green. Sow one seed per pot, placing the seed on its side covered with about half an inch of compost. Keep at 20C (68F) to ensure rapid germination. Two or three plants should provide plenty for the average household.

Tomatoes

Sow seeds in trays, just covered with compost. Keep at 20C (68F). They should germinate in a few days. Cherry varieties produce the earliest crops. Medium to large tomatoes take a bit longer and may be susceptible to blight. Large or beefsteak tomatoes need a long growing season and plenty of sunshine, making them better suited to Southern England, though you never know.

Peppers

Sow by the end of the month and keep the temperature between 20C-24C (68F-75F). They can be slow to germinate, up to three weeks. They also need a long growing season.

Aubergines

Choose an early variety, germination as peppers.

Beetroot and Celeriac Can be sown under cover without additional heat. These are destined for outdoors and will transplant with a little care. or if you don't want to risk it wait until you can sow direct outside.

Salad Crops

Spring and Summer lettuces do well if sown undercover now, as will radishes. Sow winter lettuces such as Arctic King and Marvel of Four Seasons thinly in trays or modules, for planting out under cloches in mid to late March.

Salad beet

A row or two sown now will grow rapidly and provide tender young leaves as the tatty winter ones finish.

Herbs

Divide Chives, Sage, and Thyme and cut back excess growth.

Fruit

Lift some mature rhubarb crowns, split and replant; mulch of compost over rhubarb crowns.

Last chance to plant new trees, bushes and raspberry canes.

Apply a high potash fertiliser and perhaps a mulch (especially if trained as cordons, fans etc) under medium sized fruit trees.

Check stored fruit for damage/rotting.

Protect any blossoms from frost if you can.

Untie and retrain any fruit canes that were bundled up in the autumn.

Mulch.

Prune apples, pears and bush fruits.

Cut out cankers while pruning and treat properly.

Forum

I'm sure that this isn't a definitive list of what you can do on the plot and undercover at this time of year. If you have any hints, tips, suggestions or comments please click here to go to the "Grow your Own" section. Why not have a look at the other topics while you're there?