

Things to do on the plot in March

Contributed by Judith and Downsizers

Meteorologically speaking, March has the greatest variation from one day to the next, and the widest variations from year to year. It is also the month with the biggest contrast between north and south. So if a sunny, frost-free day presents itself, you need to get out on the plot ASAP, because there might not be another for a while!

General Tasks

There is still time to dig over your plot and incorporate 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 still have overwintering carrots and parsnips in the ground, it is time to start using them up as the warmer days will be encouraging them to sprout and turn woody. Also Spring clean the plot and any beds of over wintering vegetables.

Feed spring cabbage, late sprouting broccoli and cauliflowers. As soon as the danger of frost has passed feed overwintered onions with high nitrogen feed to kickstart leaf growth again.

Weed around garlic, broad beans, peas, etc.

Watch for the first slugs when the weather warms up, hunt out overwintering snails and squash (or eat) them before they can do any damage. If you are considering using biological controls during the growing season, do your research and place your order now for delivery closer to the date.

Wash out pots and check propagators so that when April comes and you want to get going on the sowing you're all ready.

Look out for last minute missing seeds etc. They will soon stop stocking them in many shops, so you'll be relying on leftover stock in seed catalogues or a trip to the nursery/garden centre and possibly a more restricted/expensive choice.

Outdoor Sowings

Frost and snow are still a very real risk in March, so it may still be worth holding back to avoid wasting precious seed. Farmers' lore says that the best way to test if the ground is ready for sowing is to sit on the soil with a bare bottom. Whatever method you choose, always go by the weather conditions and forecast when sowing and planting – not the date.

Broad Beans and Peas

Continue sowing 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. If the ground is warm enough, you could also try a first outdoor sowing too, perhaps using cloches to get the seedlings off to a good start.

Parsnips

Towards the end of March, start thinking about sowing parsnips. But don't be too hasty. They take a long time to germinate, so wait until the ground has warmed up to ensure that they don't rot. If the conditions are too cold you can easily lose the entire sowing.

Other Early Sowings

If conditions allow, make your first sowings of Brussels sprouts, kohlrabi, turnips and beetroot.

Planting

Asparagus

Unless the ground is soaking wet, plant out new asparagus crowns in a well manured and weeded permanent bed. (If conditions or time do not allow you to plant them in their final position, make a shallow trench and bury the roots

temporarily).

Jerusalem Artichokes

Start planting out artichoke tubers from the end of the month. See detailed instructions here.

Potatoes

Continue chitting your seed potatoes (first and second earlies) in a cool, light, frost-free place. Don't let the shoots become too long as they will snap. People in the South can start planting out from the middle of the month onwards, as long as the ground is not too wet.

Onions and Shallots

Starting planting out onion sets and shallots this month if conditions allow. Lots of information on growing onions can be found here.

Plant out early sowings of winter lettuces such as Arctic King and Marvel of Four Seasons under cloches in mid to late March.

Under Cover

If you have a heated greenhouse or propagator, continue sowing cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers and aubergines for growing on under glass (See February for details).

Celery

Now is a good time to sow celery, on a warm windowsill or a heated propagator. Sow thinly, and expect germination to be slow. Prepare a trench for trench varieties or well manured patch of ground for self blanching types. Wild celery and Chinese celery (kintsai) make good alternatives for small gardens.

Beetroot and Celeriac

These can be sown under cover without additional heat. They are destined for outdoors and will transplant with a little care. 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 and spring onions. Mizuna, komatzuna and various other oriental greens can be sown indoors or under cover for an early crop, or outdoors as the weather starts to improve.

Salad Beet, Swiss Chard and Perpetual Spinach

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

Herbs

This is a good time to sow perennial herbs so that they're tough enough to face the winter.

It is still not too late to divide perennial herbs such as chives.

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.

You may still have time to prune apples, pears and bush fruits if the buds haven't started to break.

Cut out cankers while pruning and treat properly.

Forum

This is by no means a definitive list of what you can do on the plot and under cover 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