

## Things to do on the plot in December

Contributed by Behemoth

Wet and windy so far. Make sure you stroke your favourite cabbage and coax it along to Christmas day.

### Outside

Protect winter salads and oriental greens. Not strictly necessary but they'll like it all the same.

**Dig for chicory:** Finish digging up any Witloof-type chicory so it can be forced. Cut off the leaves, if any, and pot the roots in a large pot containing some moist compost, not too much. Cover the pot with another the same size, making sure you've taped over any drainage holes to exclude the light. You may need to secure the top pot to stop it being blown off. Or better, put it in a frost-free shed or garage. You'll get your first cheeky 6" chicons in about six to eight weeks.

**Force rhubarb:** Remove dead leaves and debris. Cover crowns with manure. Place a large pot (cover the drainage hole with tape) over a crown. You can use a dustbin or similar but make sure it's weighted down. This will give you pale shoots in March weeks ahead of the main crop.

**Digging:** Do it when it's fine, not when it's wet.

**Mulch:** Spread compost and rotted manure on unused areas. The worms will drag a lot of the stuff down and you can turn the rest in come Spring time.

If it's not too late, stake your tall crops such as Brussels sprouts and PSB.

### Inside

Groundwater levels will be rising so you shouldn't have to water too much. However humidity will rise as well.

Plant out mangetout peas, peas and beans from last month's sowings. Peas and beans like organic matter in their trench and can tolerate partially-rotted manure.

Now's a good time to plant a vine (indoors or out). Prepare the planting area. Not too rich but plenty of water-retaining material such as leaf mould or old grow-bag contents. They're thirsty and stretch their roots wide. In traditional settings the vine roots were planted outside and the stem fed into the greenhouse, though this is harder for polytunnels. Prune it back to one third its length after planting.

If you did as you were told, you should have plenty of salad greens to nibble now. As it's been so mild you may still have fennel, beetroot and pak choi on the go.

Check the structure and ensure that all glass, doors and polythene are firmly attached and not damaged. Make any necessary repairs.

## Fruit

### Planting:

Late November is the start of the fruit planting season, now is a good time to plant fruit and nut trees, soft fruit bushes, and vines. Remember to protect against deer and/or rabbits if they visit your plot, a variety of different shelters are available.

If you can't plant straight away, heel in new plants in a rough trench, they'll be fine as long as the roots are protected from frost and the trench doesn't get waterlogged.

### Pruning:

This is also the time to prune most fruits/nuts, look out for pests and diseases, cut out apple and pear canker during pruning. Don't prune when it's freezing.

Figs have a corrosive sap, care should be taken to avoid skin contact during pruning.

If you're bringing old, overgrown trees back into order aim to do so over 2 or 3 years, too much pruning could well be injurious to the tree and will encourage it to produce lots of new "water shoots", not what you want. Burn or shred cuttings before composting.

Whatever you do DON'T prune stone fruits (plums, peaches, apricots, cherries) you need to wait till a dry spell in summer for that.

Check stakes and ties and loosen as required, even label ties can end up restricting a branch.

### Nutrition:

If you have any mineral deficiencies in the soil then now is the time to apply lime, potash etc around the base of trees, you need to go to at least the drip line (edge of tree canopy) with your feed. Mulching is better done in April/May.

## Stores

Regularly check your stores for rotting specimens and chuck them to prevent it spreading.