



# On the plot



## Joy's Tasks for Spring

Now that the bitterly cold spell has past, and the temperatures are a lot more pleasant for venturing outside, here are a few jobs on the plot for the next few weeks: -

**Tidy up** any veg/ leaf debris (they may attract slugs).

**Dig over** (if ground not frozen or sodden)

**Cover** if possible (polythene, ground cover fabric, fleece or cloche)

If using no dig method, then add extra layers of **compost** (composted leaf mould, manure, homemade or council compost)

**Plant** fruit trees, bushes canes etc again if soil OK.

**Sort** through seeds or make a **plan** for coming year, ensuring that no plant group goes in the same space 2 years running, especially 1.brassicas, 2.onion family and 3.tomatoes & potatoes.

Garlic, onion and shallots can be **planted** in sandy light soil.

**Sow** seed outdoors if light soil, eg: broad beans, carrots, parsnips, beetroot, onions, lettuces, radish, peas, spinach, summer cabbage, salad leaves, leeks, Swiss chard, kohlrabi, turnip and summer cauliflower. Be guided by the weather, and sow only if conditions are suitable.

**Sow** seed **indoors** of sweet peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, celery, salads and globe artichokes. Normally this requires a minimum temperature of 15 degrees C (day and night). Better suited for the middle of March.

## Plant sale

The association will be growing plants for our annual plant sale and will send you out a list of plants in the next few weeks that will be available either online (like last year to be collected from the allotment site), or if restrictions lifted, a suitably socially distanced sale on site in second/ third week in **May**.



## New trees planted on the communal plot

A number of years ago, the then committee planted a number of heritage fruit trees on the communal plot to form a mini orchard. Some of these did not thrive and so the committee recently took the decision to remove the poor specimens and replace with three new ones.

The trees chosen were heritage varieties originally bred in

Hertfordshire and obtained from the East of England Apples and Orchard Project who have a very extensive range. <https://www.applesandorchards.org.uk/> These were planted two weeks ago at the communal plot in the rain but just before the recent extremely cold and frosty weather set in.

The trees are:

Apple 'Redcoat Grieve': This was bred in Letchworth in 1916; it is a scarlet sport of 'James Grieve', the fruit having an orange flush and broken red stripes. A dual-purpose apple, it is picked in mid-September and used September to October.



Apple 'Hitchin Pippin': Bred in Hitchin in 1896. The fruit has an orange flush and broken red stripes. Its flavour is like an early ripening 'King of Pippins'. It is a dessert apple ready for picking in early September for use September to October.

Pear 'Fertility': bred in Sawbridgeworth in 1875 by Rivers Nursery. This is a yellow aromatic pear with a flavour like 'Williams Bon Chretien'. This is a dessert pear for picking in mid-September and use in September to October.



The committee is also hoping to plant and sow a wildflower meadow area around the fruit trees this spring and would welcome volunteers, to help. Contact me, Chris, at [christine@peartree-design.com](mailto:christine@peartree-design.com)










### *On the Wild Side with Tricia*

Whilst our plots don't always attract the visitors we want they can be the homes and feeding stations for many beneficial creatures. Even at this time of year there are lots of steps that we can take to increase biodiversity on our plots.

 As you draw up your 2021 plan for your plot why not make room for some more pollinator friendly plants such as Erysimum 'Bowles Mauve', a long flowering wallflower popular with many insects or grow some comfrey, loved by bees and hoverflies and easily turned into an excellent plant food. Be sure to choose the non-spreading Bocking14 cultivar to keep it in check and your neighbours happy!

 If you haven't already cleaned out any nest boxes on your plot this is a good time to do so before this year's birds move in, or maybe put up a new one in a sheltered spot facing north east. Choose a style to attract robins or blue tits for help with reducing caterpillar numbers.

 Bundle together stems and twigs from winter pruning and leave in a sheltered position to provide a home for ladybirds and beetles who will help reduce pest infestations in the coming Spring. Try to avoid turning the compost heap until late March as frogs and beneficial insects may still be hibernating in them.

Until Spring arrives this is a challenging time for wildlife so do gently break the ice on any ponds or water bowls you have on your plot too.



**Bird of the month: The Redwing - a member of the thrush family visiting us from Ieeland or Scandinavia with a distinctive white stripe above the eye and flashes of red under the wing.**



**Last year, Anne MacIntyre's plot was a joy to behold with her bright displays of blooms. Lots of people stopped to say they enjoying seeing her flowers, which she really appreciated. Not only does she grow stunning flowers, she is also a talented photographer and she talks about these interests below.**



I have really enjoyed having my allotment throughout this past year and felt particularly lucky since I only started in 2019. I wanted to have flowers I could cut and photograph so my plot is mostly filled with flowers, along with a few strawberries and new raspberry canes. Last year I completed a free online course called A Year With My Camera (there are books to buy if you want them but the course itself is all free) and took lots of photos of the cosmos flowers I grew at the allotment. I used a Canon 7D camera with a macro lens, but really any camera with manual options will do. I have grown dahlias, roses, peonies, cosmos, carnations, sweet peas (although this year they weren't nearly so good as last year!), tulips, wallflowers, lavender, snapdragons and Thai poppies. I'm hoping lots of these

just come back year after year, so that I don't have so many dandelions to weed out! I haven't lifted my dahlias, just crossing my fingers that it's not too frosty. Anyway, I thought you might be interested to know that along with simply enjoying my hobby I even won a competition, the black and white section of the International Garden Photographer of the Year! There should be an exhibition of all the photos at Kew Gardens next year, assuming things get back to something like normal by then. I



also put my pictures on Instagram @annejmacinty if you want to see more.

*Do you have a particular interest related to your plot that you'd like to share? Tell us about it by emailing [communications@sraa.org.uk](mailto:communications@sraa.org.uk).*







SRAA Special Edition

# Introduction to No - Dig



## No Dig First Principles

There's no apology for the opening photo being Charles Dowding's amazing Somerset market garden Homeacres. An abundant plot from the leading light in no dig gardening. And much of this article naturally flows from his work, writings and indeed his 2019 talk to 130 guests at our SRAA special event.

**Starting Out** for the first time with going No Dig should not be daunting, even if it's your very first allotment. No dig is far more natural and less labour intensive than more traditional methods of double digging land.

So you have to be brave and go with the **theory**, even if you are tempted to start turning over that weedy soil, and digging in manure.

Principle #1 Not digging means you leave the precious soil undisturbed, allowing mycorrhizal fungi to develop and beneficial creatures to thrive.

Principle #2 Instead of digging in manure or compost just add 5-10cm of compost on top of a double layer of thick cardboard (kills weeds) in early Winter and the worms will incorporate it.



## A simple approach For healthy soil



Clear weeds as much as you can at start: dig out bindweed, couch grass & brambles. Light hand weeding later.



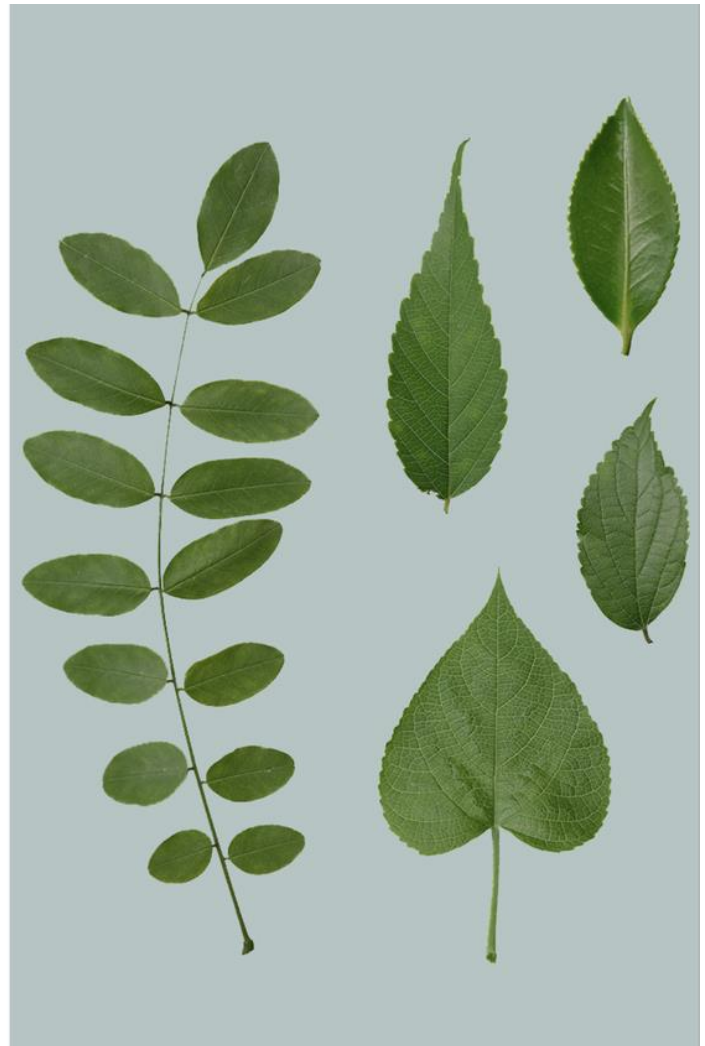
Lay a thick cardboard mulch on beds. Apply a good annual layer of compost. Keep grass path edges well trimmed.



Plant a bit deeper than usual directly into this compost. It is suggested to use a dibber with small veg plugs.



No Dig suits a second crop later in the season. No need for re-composting. Just lightly rake. Very productive.



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Productivity is a great benefit of No Dig. Charles Dowding has documented trials proving bigger yields of crops. Part of his methodology is to grow plants a bit closer together because the nutrient availability is enhanced. In this image he is using a long dibber to make holes for dropping in pre-grown salad plugs - 8 plugs per 1.4m width of bed.

These plugs are started off indoors for germination then brought on in a greenhouse or cold frame. Because they are dropped into holes of friable dibbed compost, the planting process is then neat & quick.

Salad crops especially are fast to develop and crop, with the outer leaves being snapped off for eating, then picked again a few days later after more new growth. The plants are sustained to re-grow, which makes it v productive.

If you have new plugs on the go & ready then it is easy to twist out used plants, lightly rake the row, then dib holes to plant a second crop. Obviously you must be mindful of crop rotation when doing this. But the main point is - have replacement plugs ready to go right in.



*No Dig beds can be very productive. More crops closer together, optimising time and materials eg compost*

Compost is a critical component of No Dig gardening. This is especially true at the start when a thicker 'initial' layer is applied, eg 10-15cm. After that a 5cm application in Autumn or early Winter will suffice.

Using bagged compost is too expensive so plan ahead and create your own. A half size plot needs 2-3m<sup>3</sup> minimum.

Composting and how to generate good quality and quantity is another topic we will cover. SRAA obtains free municipal compost in quantity for all tenants but this needs supplementing with nutrients eg from manure or your made compost.

More info on No Dig is on Charles Dowding's website, plus his excellent videos, or contact the SRAA committee.

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