

## What to do this month at your plot – February

*February, being the last of the winter months, often has a sting and ends up being the coldest month. So, more than any other month, this one you need to play according to local conditions. It's best to hold off than try to sow in waterlogged, near frozen ground that will most likely rot any seeds.*

### Sowing & Planting in February on the Vegetable Plot

The **seed potatoes** should be with you by now but it's too early to plant outside so chit them. Chitting is the process of pre-sprouting before planting. When you get your seed potatoes you put them in a cool but frost free place where they get some light but not direct sunlight. The potatoes will then grow short stubby shoots to get them off to a fast start when planted out.

If the weather allows, you can direct sow your **broad beans** in February along with early **peas** such as for a May / June harvest. This early in the year your best chance would be to start your peas in the greenhouse or a coldframe and plant later.

Conventional advice is often to sow **parsnips** now but it might be better to leave to March or even April if the ground is wet.

**Jerusalem artichokes** and **shallots** can be planted now, although shallots will benefit from covering with a cloche.

### Under Cover in Greenhouse, Coldframe and Polytunnel

If you have a greenhouse, you can get an early crop of **lettuce**, **rocket** and **radish** away in there. You can utilise cloches outdoors but success will be more dependent on the weather.

Time to sow your **summer cabbages**, **turnips** and **spinach**.

**Onions from seed** should be started now. They need about 15 degrees C to get them going so you may be best using the windowsill in a cool room to start them off.

With a heated propagator or using windowsills you can start off **aubergine** and **peppers, chillies** and **tomatoes**.

### Fruit - Planting & Pruning

There is still time to finish **planting fruit** trees and bushes, especially **raspberries** and other **cane fruits**.

Early this month you can prune **apple** and **pear trees** while they are still dormant. It's also time to prune **gooseberries** and **currants**. With currants shorten the sideshoots to just one bud and remove old stems from the centre of the bushes.

### Forcing Rhubarb

**Rhubarb** can be forced for an early crop of the sweetest stalks. Just cover a crown or two with large buckets or even an upturned black bin and insulate the outside with straw or manure for added heat. The

stalks will grow in the dark. The drawback is that this takes a lot out of the crown and it won't recover for a couple of years.

### **General Jobs on the Plot**

If you have finished all the major tasks, such as digging over, creating leafmould heaps etc you will not have a lot to do in February but this is your last chance before spring.

You're going to be using your pots and seed trays next, so this is a good opportunity to wash out and sterilise them so your seedlings will get off to the best possible start.

This year's potato bed will benefit from a good application of compost or rotted manure that can be forked in or rotavated in to get them away.

You can cover soil with dark plastic sheeting, fleece or cloches to warm it up for a couple of weeks before you start to sow and plant.

### **Harvest**

**Leeks** may well be standing ready but if a long freeze seems likely you can dig some up and heel them in to dug ground for easy access – unless we have deep snow!

**Parsnips** and **swedes** in the ground can come up when you are ready, cover with fleece or straw to stop them freezing solid into the ground.

The cabbage family should be providing some sustenance with early **purple sprouting broccoli**, **kale** and **Brussels sprouts** still being available. **Beet leaves (perpetual spinach)** and **chards** may be available.

Other crops you may have: **scorzonera**, **chicory**, **endive**, **celeriac**, **celery** and **Jerusalem artichokes**.

**Don't forget the AGM on 10<sup>th</sup> March and start thinking, planning and sowing crops for the Summer Show in August.**