**January**

**Overview**

January is probably the coldest period of the winter and coming on top of the floods and heavy rains of just before Christmas it is well worth taking the time to look over the allotment and prioritise the jobs for the month. Top of the list has to be clean up the plot and dispose of all of the damaged and rotten crops. Don’t worry too much about soil preparations for now just concentrate on clearing the way for a February blitz; weather permitting of course. Most of the overwintering vegetables will have suffered under the wet conditions make a list, visit the site shed or garden centres and get in what replacement seeds or bulbs you will need for your immediate needs.

**Harvesting**

Brussels sprouts, cabbages, leeks and parsnips, if they haven't been damaged by flood water. Check on any vegetables in store and discard any that have gone mouldy or rotten.

**Sowing and planting**

Patience is the watchword. The days are still too short and cold even think of sowing seeds either outdoors or in the open. A few sowings of onions, lettuce, peas, broad beans, radish and early carrots can be made under protection towards the end of the month. The January sun can push temperatures quite high so give a little air to the transplanted lettuce plants on warm days closing down early in the afternoon.

**General**

Protect overwintering vegetables under cloches or fleece. don’t forget to ventilate and allow plenty of fresh air to get in on sunny days. Under the protection winter sunshine temperatures can get as high as on a hot summer’s day.

Pack some straw or fleece around celery to protect it from any damaging frosts but remove it on sunny days to let the plants breathe.

Draw the soil up around the stalks of cabbages and winter cauliflowers to just under the first set of leaves. Check over Brussels sprouts and sprouting broccoli and support them with a strong stake to prevent them from being blown over in high winds.

Take advantage of days when the soil is frozen hard to barrow and stack manure and compost close to where it will be dug in later on. Don’t walk on the soil as it begins to thaw it will be wet and sticky.

If you have any plants or seedlings ticking over in a cold greenhouse cover them with several layers of newspaper on frosty nights but remove it on warm days.

Dig up rhubarb roots and divide them leaving the sections on the surface of the soil for a few days to let them be frosted prior to forcing. Cover any crowns in the soil that have been set aside for forcing with an upturned bucket or flower pot and cover the drainage holes to shut out the light. With luck you will be harvesting pale pink sticks by late February.

Check on any fruit and vegetables in store and remove any that are diseased or soft.

Towards the end of the month when the weather and soil conditions allow plant out soft fruit bushes. Spray all fruit trees and bushes with a garlic winter wash on a fine day; do not spray in frosty conditions. It won’t hurt to hold the job over to next month.

Seed potatoes will available from the end of the month. Order your seed potatoes and collect seed trays or wooden tomato trays ready to chit them in. On days when you can’t work on the plot clean the shed, greenhouse, tools and linseed oil any wooden handles. Check that the watering can and buckets don’t leak and that the wheelbarrow doesn’t have a flat wheel.