**February**

**Overview**

We get a glimpse of the early signs of the arrival of Spring this month. The soil begins to warm up around the middle of February and we can see for the first time this year the buds beginning to swell on fruit trees and bushes. Overwintering vegetables begin to look less sorry for themselves and they start to produce new growth. These are the signals that it is now safe to think about sowing a row of early, peas and broad beans using a hardy cultivar. It is too late to sow the broad bean ‘Aquadulce’ it is only really suitable for growing overwinter.

**Sowing and Planting**

After the middle of the month it is safe to think about sowing the seeds of early vegetables. Prepare a seed bed and sow ‘White Lisbon’ Spring onion, early short horn carrots, early types of lettuce, try a cut and come again it saves on time waiting for a heart to form. It may be too early to make a start in the colder areas of the country but try sowing of parsnip seed if you really want large roots but use a canker resistant cultivar.

February is the best month to plant out garlic and shallots. Prepare the ground as you would a seed bed and plant using a trowel don’t push the bulbs into the soil. Plant the garlic cloves about 2ins/5cms deep and leave the tips of the shallot bulbs just at the soil surface. The birds will pull one or two out leaving them lying on the ground. Replant them as soon as possible the birds will quickly lose interest.

**General**

Top dress all of the fruit trees and soft fruit bushes with a general fertiliser at the recommended application rate. At the same time top dress the rest of the plot with a general fertiliser as land becomes available.

Check over any fruit trees and bushes for damage and disease problems and take appropriate action.

Prune late/autumn fruiting raspberries down as low as possible and mulch around them. Tip back summer fruiting back to around 6ft/1.9mts to encourage the development of fruiting side growths

Complete any outstanding winter pruning of soft fruit bushes cutting out down to soil level the older dark stemmed shoots of blackcurrants.

Cover the soil with cloches or sheets of plastic to warm it up in readiness for the next batch of sowing and planting. Don’t overdo it little and often is the plan over the coming weeks.

Check over the chitting potatoes and begin to rub off any eyes that are unwanted leaving three or four well-spaced shoots. Keep some fleece or newspapers nearby to cover them up on starry, frosty nights you don’t want to run the risk of losing them at this late date.

Keep checking frequently on the condition of any produce in store it will begin to wake up after its winter dormancy and start to regrow.