

Hope allotments blog – February 2021

January was pretty wet and cold with a couple of days of snow (see photo below).



February started off cold and damp and then storm Darcy arrived. After that we got the 'Beast from the east' and Braemar in Scotland recorded its lowest night time temperature since 1995 at -23.

'What's happened to global heating?' I hear you asking yourselves.

Well, the ironic fact is that as rising temperatures disrupt weather patterns one of the consequences is that the UK could get colder- a lot colder! If warmer ocean temperatures disrupt the Gulf Stream, which normally helps keep the UK relatively warm, then we could see much colder winters reminiscent of the last Ice age which in fact which only ended about 10,000 years ago. So there you go.

Saying that, Daffodils are well on their way and we may have an early spring.

On the allotment January/February are the months for maintenance and building rather than growing and we have a number of projects like our new classroom that we have been getting on with during the inclement weather.



Wheelchair access & Archway

We have created a pathway for wheelchair access to the site and the hard landscaping is now done and is waiting for some nicer weather and delivery of the plants to finish off the soft landscaping.

SLUGS

Slugs are a real menace in the garden. They have a habit of eating your tender young seedlings just as you are about to plant them out or just after you have planted them out. All your hard work and tender loving care goes for nothing and you stand there staring at the line of slime that was your lettuces/tomatoes/cabbages etc.

There are various methods that people use to try to combat slugs ranging from copper bands to lines of broken eggshells to slug traps filled with beer.

Some are more effective than others but one of the most effective has been the use of Metaldehyde pellets. These have been probably used for at least 100 years. I have a book by W.E Sherwell-Cooper dating back to 1937 which recommends the use of powdered meta fuel, which was basically Metaldehyde, mixed with bran as the best control of slugs.

However the use of Metaldehyde has been linked to the demise of birds like Thrushes and animals which eat slugs like Hedgehogs and is now being phased out.

Below are the guidelines set out by DEFRA to come into force next year.

Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs - Metaldehyde for use against slugs

Metaldehyde will be phased out by 31 March 2022 to give growers and gardeners appropriate time to switch to alternative slug control measures. Small quantities of product for gardens should not be disposed of at home and can be disposed of through local authority waste facilities.

This decision takes into account advice from the UK Expert Committee on Pesticides (ECP) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) about the risks that Metaldehyde poses to birds and mammals

While slugs can cause significant damage to farmers' crops and gardeners' plants, pesticides containing ferric phosphate can provide effective control without carrying the same risks to wildlife as metaldehyde slug pellets.

Alternative methods of pest control also include cultural techniques like planting slug resistant crop varieties, selectively timing irrigation and harvest and sowing seeds more deeply into the soil.

Looking forward to March.

There is an old saying 'In like a lion, out like a lamb' which suggests that if March starts off cold and stormy it will get milder towards the end – we shall have to see.

March is the month when planting gets underway in earnest with a mad rush to get everything in and growing.

First early potatoes – we are using 'Sharpe's express' this year – are planted at the end of March and a lot of the root crop vegetables like turnips, beetroot and carrots can be sown as well although the latter two should be given the protection of cloches or fleece to protect them against frost.

If you have access to a glasshouse/poly tunnel you can start tender crops like tomatoes, chillies and peppers if you haven't already in a heated glasshouse, conservatory or window ledge.

Finally,

Question: What do you call a man without a spade on his head?

Answer: Douglas

Have a happy gardening month and see you in March.

Joe - the Hope gardener