

What to do now in February.

February is another quiet month, which gives us more time to catch up with those jobs relating to the various structures that we use: for example, repairing old or making new fences, frames, cloches, greenhouses, sheds etc.

Continue to dig, manure and weed the planting areas if the weather allows in preparation for the new season.

Plant bare root fruit trees and bushes if the soil is not frozen.

If you like to make early sowings of hardy vegetables under protection then encourage good germination by warming up the soil in those areas beforehand. You can do this by covering it with black polythene for 3 - 4 weeks and/or by banking up the soil into a gentle south facing slope – even a few degrees will have the effect of moving that area to the south of England! If you have done this then at the end of the month you could sow some early varieties of vegetable, eg, Broad Beans, first early Peas, or cold season varieties of Lettuce. Cover these sowings with cloches or horticultural fleece.

Continue to sow cold season salad leaves under glass.

Chit the earliest seed Potatoes ready for your first planting.

Place the tubers in a frost free spot under cover out of direct sunlight. Place them in a seed tray with the "eyes" or buds uppermost. This is to start them into growth prior to planting.

Sow some first early Potato tubers in pots under cover (eg., in a greenhouse), for extra early potatoes. Two tubers per pot is enough. Pots need to be at least 12 inches wide and ideally at least 18 inches high. Fill the pot with 6 inches of soil/compost, place the tubers on it and cover with a further 4 inches of soil/compost. Later in the season these pots can be moved out of doors: always keep them frost free however. As the foliage grows fill up the pot with more soil around the stems. This is to keep the new potatoes forming from being exposed to light. Potatoes exposed to light turn green and become poisonous(!). You will be able to harvest your new potatoes when the plants have produced flowers.

Sow indoors your summer-heading varieties of Cauliflowers

and Cabbages ready for planting out later in the season.

If you have any old bags of potting compost left over from last season dispose of the contents on your vegetable beds. The John Innes Institute does not recommend storing potting compost long term as the nutrients in them may become unbalanced over time.

At the end of the month top dress any over wintering crops (Spring Cabbage, Autumn sown Onions, Garlic), with a Nitrogen rich fertilizer like Chicken pellets to give them a boost ready for the new season.

If you use organic fertilizers like Blood, Fish and Bone then apply it to your beds now as a general fertilizer. It takes time to be broken down and incorporated into the soil. It will then be available for the plants when the season starts.

Apply a Potash rich fertilizer to your fruit trees and bushes.

Finish any pruning of fruit trees and bushes.

Plant Jerusalem Artichokes at the end of the month. They are grown like Potatoes. They make a tall screen of growth in the season so plant them where they will not subsequently shade out other crops that like a lot of sunshine.