

Penny Grimley - Editor & Leicester's
Growing Spaces Co-ordinator.

Editor's Column

NOW we have had the first snow of the season and most of the leaves have fallen, there are winter jobs to make a start on.

Rake up those leaves and save them. They will compost down and give structure to your soil, as well as nutrients.

If you put your leaves in plastic bags, put some holes in the bag to allow the leaves to breath as they rot down.

You can add grass clippings or vegetable peelings too. Leave them to mature and spread them on the beds next Autumn.

If you have a greenhouse, it is time to clean the inside, tidy and clean any plant pots and tools ready for next year.

Some of you will have started to dig the ground and cover it ready for the spring crops. Dig or no dig, that is the question of this edition.

What are your views on this debate?

I hope you enjoy this edition of your Gazette.

For support, advice and to send Gazette articles;

Penny.grimley@leicester.gov.uk or call

0116 454 4473 to reach me.

<https://www.facebook.com/LeicesterParks>



Beaumont Lodge Community Centre, Piece of Heaven **Dig or no dig? That is the question!**

Ron Sanderson and Gary Payne

The soil has to be cultivated and fertilised. Digging incorporates manure or compost into the soil and aerates it. It is possible to grow crops of vegetables without digging at all. No-diggers simply sow and plant in compost which has already been spread on the surface of the soil.

Worms are more efficient than gardeners at taking organic matter down into the soil and aerating it. The labour saved by not digging must be set against the labour and time spent on making large quantities of compost. A covering of compost or straw spread over the surface has 2 advantages. It suppresses weeds and conserves moisture. Eventually it is taken down by worms and converted into humus.

At our Peace of Heaven allotment

we are in the second year of experimenting with digging and no-digging.

Last year we used the no-dig method with good results, which were similar to when we dug the previous year. Nevertheless, we noticed that there were more pests than usual in the shape of slugs and blackfly, which decimated the broad beans. However, this may have been due to the weather conditions this year. This was the first time we experienced blackfly on our allotment. On the plus side, whilst digging up a late crop of potatoes, we noticed many more worms than there were previously. This year, we will experiment with both methods. Some beds will be dug in the autumn and some will be no-dig.

Finally, there are pros and cons for both methods. It is a matter of personal inclination and beliefs. Obviously, if you get pain in your back through digging, then the no-dig method is for you!

It would be interesting to hear from others about their own experiences.

Chilli Badgers!

Top tips

Penny Grimley

Scatter crushed scotch bonnet chilli peppers around the growing area, especially near entrances. They irritate badgers noses and turn them away.



Chip, don't burn!

Top tips

Penny Grimley

If you have a lot of brash, don't burn it. Instead chip it down, leave it to compost for 6 - 12 months before mulching your soil. Then let the worms draw the goodness into the soil.

Paul Howgill

To dig or not to dig?

The Leicester Allotment Gardeners Council (LAGC) is a local branch of the National Allotment Society, set up to support the allotment societies in Leicester.

Having had my allotment plots for more than thirty years, I have traditionally dug them in the autumn, limed the ground where needed and double dug areas incorporating in my own made compost.

But I have reassessed my thoughts a few years ago when I had a health problem in the form of a hernia requiring an operation.

Articles about no-dig encouraged me to re-consider my digging regime.

What is meant by no-dig gardening?

Many of you will have heard of no-dig gardening, a method that has gained popularity in recent years and has a lot to offer for soil health. It is a natural way of growing and the principle is simple. It leaves the ground as undisturbed as possible and you could end up with fewer pests, healthier plants and a healthy soil.

Rather than digging the soil to remove weeds the no-dig method promotes adding compost or manure to the surface of the soil. This is a natural process when leaves fall onto the ground, and is broken down into the soil.

By doing this the structure of the soil is maintained and leaves, worms and other-dwelling organisms undisturbed and the ecosystem intact.

This is a good option for gardeners who have limited time to dig over the ground in the traditional manner. The worms are the gardener's friend to do the work for you.

Once you have set up a no-dig system you may find your time efficient as you will spend less time digging. Preventing weed growth and keeping soils healthy.

A negative is that you need access to amounts of compost or mulches to keep weeds covered.

When to start?

Late autumn after crops are cleared is a good time to get started.

Cover the ground with cardboard, clean of plastic tapes and metal staples, also as little amounts of printing on the surface.

By not digging, the good fungi in the soil are not destroyed by digging.

For a new gardener the problem will be what to use as a mulch?

Own made compost is great, bought in soil conditioners again good. Leaf mould is great. Farmyard manure and wood chip again good, can benefit by leaving to break down for six to twelve months.

But how do you get all the mulches you need at the start of your gardening?

Remember, allotment gardening is a marathon not a sprint.

You may have to adopt no-dig gradually as you get hold of more mulches.

Some areas of the plot may have difficult, tough perennial weeds which may warrant more special action to control.

But traditional autumn digging on my plots is a thing of the past. It is done on fewer areas and the hoe used far more.

More details from no-dig guru such as Charles Dowding, RHS, and Garden Organic are all well worth reading.

Paul Howgill, Secretary,

Leicester Allotment Garden Council



Christine Bradley

A story of two halves.

Groby Road Allotments

During the Groby Road Allotment open day, two site newcomers were presented with awards. Zoe, winner of our Best Newcomer Award and Johnny, winner of the Green Leaf Award (water innovation).

Here's Zoe's story...

I got into gardening in my 30's when I fell in love with lillies. Since then I have gone from strength to strength with growing flowers at home.

I wanted to try and grow my own food as I believe that it tastes better and is better for you.

I got my allotment in January this year and have grown strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries, rhubarb, apples, potatoes, onions, cauliflowers, red cabbage, brussels sprouts, sweetcorn, runner beans, French beans, fennel and courgettes.

I am looking forward to next year and adding to my knowledge.

Zoe Robinson.

Here's Johnny's story...

I first became interested in the hobby when I would help my father at his allotment as a young boy in the 1950s.

I started gardening when I bought my first family home with a garden in the 1980s.

I had my first allotment at Rowley Fields around 15 years ago, my next allotment was at Glenfield Village Allotments and now I currently have a plot at Groby Road Allotments.

The things I like about having an allotment are being able to grow fresh fruit, vegetables and flowers, the health benefits of being outdoors in the fresh air and exercising.

Making new friends with my fellow members and being able to share knowledge. I personally have learnt how to grow dahlias and chrysanthemums, showing that you're never too old to expand your knowledge.

Johnny Graham

Huge congratulations on your awards and for making such an amazing impact on your plots during your first year on site.



Zoe (top left) and her allotment (top right) Johnny (bottom left) and his plot (bottom right) being presented with their awards.

Penny Grimley

Funding opportunities & up for grabs.

Community Ward funding.

I mentioned this stream of funding in my first edition and now that the end of the financial year (end of March 2025) is approaching, it is a good time to submit your bids for future projects.

The community ward funding money given to the councillors must be spent within the current financial year and it cannot be carried over.

The last opportunity to submit bids over £500 is now. The evaluation panel occurs at the end of January 2025.

If the amount you are requesting is under £500, the application can

be fast tracked.

Before submitting your application, always read the guidelines in full. Take a look at the funding criteria, check that your project is suitably matched and that you can meet more than one criteria point.

Also check what they do not fund.

To apply, please follow this link <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council/decisions-meetings-and-minutes/community-meetings/>

Up for grabs

We have two compost bins and a gazebo frame (without the canvas top and sides) going free to a good home.

Please contact the editor for more details.



Daxa Ralhan (LCC Public Health) & Kay Thompson, Gurpreet Kaur (TCV)

Get Growing

Supporting Growing Spaces across the City

Do you enjoy gardening and making new friends?

Why not join Gurpreet **Tuesdays** at **Team Hub, New Parks** from 10-12 and **Wednesdays** at **Abbey Pumping Station** from 10.30 - 12.30 for a relaxed morning of gardening and chat!

Contact: gurpreet.kaur@tcv.org.uk



Lucy Michaels

Ecological belongings, soils of Leicester.

Voices of urban growers.

From interviews with Leicester gardeners and growers (2021-2022) for the Warwick University project, [Ecological Belongings](#). Look out for the forthcoming publication!

“The soils of Leicester are rich, but it is what they give, not just the vegetables.”

“It's only really when I put my hands in the soil and I'm growing things that I feel at home.”

“Look at those bugs. They show it is going really well. It's so rich and warm. We actually grew courgettes on top of the compost last year.”

“I love my community and feel part of that, but the soil is the same. Once we are in a place long enough and making the soil, we do become part of the soil and we do belong.”

“The soil critters, bacteria and fungi, whose names we don't even know. We all have our place in the cycle of things.”

Reflect on your own experiences of your connection with the soil.



Leicester's Growing Spaces 2024

Penny Grimley

Let's celebrate the end of the growing year with a few images from my visits this year. It has been a fabulous growing year despite the weather, with many challenges but let's also focus on the achievements.

The theme for our next edition in February will be how to sow seeds, when to plant and what to plant. We'll also look at recognising different types of weeds and how to manage them. If you have some useful tips to share, please do get in touch.

Please do send in your stories, celebrate your successes, and mark those milestones within the Gazette. Thank you to everyone who has contributed with articles and photos this year.

There are members growing food on allotments, reclaimed land, at community centres, libraries, on parks, within school premises and we also have the community orchards across the city too. You are all amazing. Let's make 2025 another year to remember!

Take care everyone and see you in the New Year.