

Jobs to start now on your allotment

The recent spell of rain has been an excellent time to work on water harvesting because no doubt we will have a drought later in the year and sites will be forced to introduce restrictions on access to running water if they are to stay within budget.

Looking forward to the sunny weather we might have in March ...

March is the month when your allotment truly comes back to life. With longer days and warming soil, there's plenty to be getting on with. Whether you're a seasoned grower or a first-year plot holder, here are some suggestions of what you can be doing.

Getting Your Soil Ready

If your soil is no longer waterlogged you can:

Fork over compacted beds and work in well-rotted manure or garden compost to improve structure and fertility

Rake to a fine tilth where you plan to direct sow — the finer the surface, the better the germination

Remove weeds while they're small and manageable; hoe on a dry day so they shrivel on the surface

Spread a general fertiliser like Growmore or blood, fish and bone across beds a week or two before sowing

Sowing Outdoors

Hardy crops can go directly into the soil from mid-March. Cover with cloches or fleece if cold snaps are forecast.

- **Broad beans** — if not already sown in autumn, now is the time
 - **Peas** — choose an early variety like *Kelvedon Wonder* and support with sticks or netting
 - **Parsnips** — sow as early as you can; they take weeks to germinate, so be patient
 - **Carrots** — sow thinly in rows and cover with fleece to keep carrot fly at bay
 - **Beetroot** — soak seeds overnight before sowing to encourage faster germination
 - **Radishes** — fast-growing and perfect for filling gaps between slower crops
 - **Lettuce, spinach, and rocket** — sow little and often every two to three weeks for a continuous harvest
 - **Spring onions** — quick and easy; ready in about eight weeks
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Sowing Under Cover

A greenhouse, cold frame, or even a bright windowsill gives tender crops the warmth they need to get started.

Crop	Temperature Needed	Notes
Tomatoes	18–21°C	Sow into small pots; don't rush these
Peppers & chillies	18–25°C	Slow growers — sow early in the month
Aubergines	20–25°C	Treat like peppers
Leeks	12–15°C	Sow in trays; transplant in early summer
Celery	15–18°C	Surface sow — needs light to germinate
Courgettes	18–21°C	Late March at the earliest
Sweet peas	10–15°C	Beautiful and great for attracting pollinators

Planting Out

Potatoes

One of the highlights of the March allotment calendar.

- Set **first early** seed potatoes in trenches from mid-March. Plant 10–15cm deep, 30cm apart, in rows 60cm apart. Earth up shoots as they appear to protect from frost and encourage more tubers. Alternatively put some old compost in a

bucket, add a handful of potato fertiliser, drop in a couple of spuds and cover to near the top then add a layer of mulch to stop evaporation.

Onion Sets & Shallots

- Push sets gently into prepared soil with the tip just visible. Space 10cm apart in rows 25–30cm apart
- Firm in well — birds love pulling them out so cover with low hoops and some netting for a few weeks.

Garlic

- If you missed the autumn planting, early March is your final opportunity to plant individual cloves pointed end up, 15cm apart, 5cm deep

Other Planting

- **Asparagus crowns** — March is the ideal month to start a new asparagus bed
 - **Rhubarb** — plant new crowns or divide established clumps
 - **Jerusalem artichokes** — plant tubers 30cm apart in a sunny spot
 - **Bare-root fruit trees and bushes** — get them in before they start leafing out
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Fruit Jobs

-  **Complete winter pruning** of apple and pear trees before bud break
 - Cut **autumn-fruiting raspberry** canes to ground level
 - **Mulch heavily** around all fruit bushes with compost or well-rotted manure
 - Remove dead foliage from **strawberry plants** and firm any crowns loosened by frost
 - Feed established fruit with a high-potash fertiliser to encourage blossom
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Plot Maintenance & Repairs

Now is the time to get your infrastructure in order before the busy months arrive.

- **Fix raised beds** — replace rotten boards and top up with fresh compost
 - **Clean greenhouse glass** inside and out to maximise light
 - **Repair sheds, paths, and fences** — much easier now than in the middle of summer
 - **Sharpen spades, hoes, and secateurs** — clean tools work better and last longer
 - **Set up water butts** if you haven't already; spring showers are free water
 - **Lay fresh woodchip or bark** on paths to prevent them turning into mud baths
 - **Turn compost heaps** to speed up decomposition
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Pest & Frost Protection

The average last frost date for Birmingham is between April 21 - April 30

-  **Keep fleece and cloches on standby** for sudden frost — check the forecast nightly
-  **Begin slug control early** — set beer traps, apply nematodes
-  **Net brassicas and peas** to stop pigeons stripping them bare

- **Inspect overwintered crops** for aphid colonies and remove by hand or with a jet of water
 - **Clear debris and hiding spots** where pests overwinter — old pots, planks, and long grass
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Planning for the Season Ahead

-  **Keep a plot diary** — note what you sow, when, and where for future reference
 - **Plan your crop rotation** — avoid growing the same plant families in the same spot as last year to reduce disease
 - **Audit your seed tin** — check dates, order replacements, and resist buying more than you need (good luck with that)
 - **Visit your local seed swap** or gardening club — March is peak season for events and shared knowledge
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Get out there and enjoy it. 