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**OBSERVER  
ORGANIC ALLOTMENT  
BLOG**

## Things to do in April

Your expert guide to gardening this month



It's time to make small sowings of early peas

Compiling the list of propagation jobs for April has made me dizzy. But here is the list: sow the last summer cabbages, start off winter ones, sprouting broccoli, late sprouts (eg, 'Braveheart') in the seed bed for eating in winter and in the New Year. Sow maincrop broad beans and make small sowings of hardy peas (e.g. 'Early Onward').



Sow celeriac, kohlrabi, Hamburg parsley, leeks, spinach and spinach beet. Sow fenugreek and Good King Henry. Sow komatsuna, Florence fennel, radicchio and sugar leaf chicories, texel greens and red orach.



Swiss chard and early bunching turnips can also be started now. Carry on with successional crops – salad leaves, mizuna and mibuna greens, carrots, radish and spring onions. Sow basil indoors for planting out after the frosts. Sow fennel and summer savory in well drained loam in the cold greenhouse or under a cold frame. Sow parsley seed in deep soil outside.



At home (minimum temperature 16 C°), sow celery, French and runner beans and sweet corn. Peppers, chillies, aubergines and tomatoes need a bit more heat (20°C) and can be grown on a sunny windowsill to be planted out in May.



Don't forget to harden off and transplant seedlings sown last month. Now is a good moment to plant off-cuts of Jerusalem and globe artichokes, onion and shallot sets as well as asparagus crowns.



As a result of this endless list for April, I am beginning to see eye to eye with [Mel Bartholomew](#), deviser of the Square Foot Gardening method. Having run a community garden – and being a civil engineer (not a gardener with ingrained habits) – he came up with a piece of lateral thinking, which he claims cuts out most of the work. The main principle is to not take on more than you can cope with and not to over-sow. Get away from planting in wasteful, weed- inviting rows which is a method derived from agriculture. Work on simple, single units of one square foot. These would be on a raised bed filled with good compost (no weeds). In these squares you only sow the amount of seeds that actually will fit into the space without thinning e.g. one cauliflower or four lettuces.

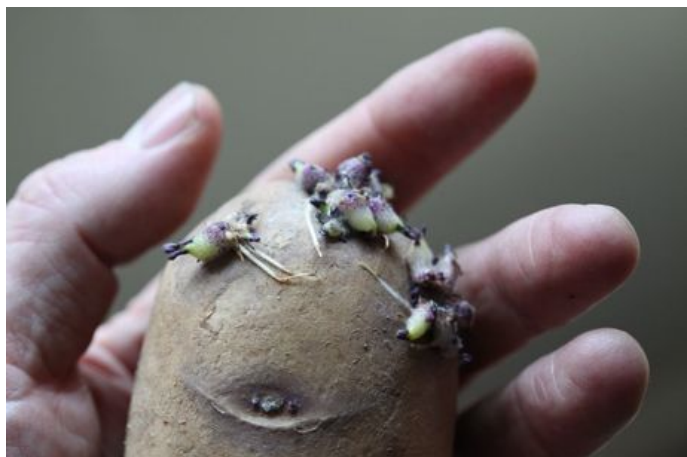


This may sound fiddly, but Bartholomew has proved with time and motion studies that [sowing an entire packet](#) with a return visit to thin takes twice as long as laboriously sowing one seed at a time at the final spacing without the need to thin. Take into account the amount of seeds you might get in a packet. Apart from some of the F1 seeds that can come in tight tens and are too precious to waste, you can get up to 2,000 carrot or lettuce seed.





One advantage of the coldest winter for three decades and with April [forecast](#) to be 'cooler than usual' is that there is no rush to plant potatoes. If you have any worries about disease, stick to earlies as they are less prone. I gather from the [Potato Council](#) that one unfortunate result (against the very many great and good results) of the grow-your-own renaissance is that blight is increasing. This is the devastating disease that caused the Irish famine. A new strain, Blue 13' has lowered the resistance of old allotment favourites. These include 'Orla', 'Cosmos', 'Valor', 'Verity', 'Remarka' and 'Lady Balfour' – the organic gardener's favourite. The Potato Council, who have blight scouts all over the country, are planning to set up some fresh trials on these varieties.



This does give the organic grower a bit of a problem. However, the breakthrough [Sàvârì, or Sàrpo](#) potatoes seem go from strength to strength. They are [trialled in Llanfairfechan](#) in North Wales and have proved to be unusually self-sufficient. Vigorous, they put out generous quantities of leaves that smother weeds, their deep roots are nutrient scavengers so they don't need fertilizers, and they have tolerance to drought. They even have a natural dormancy so they don't need to be chilled when stored. All this makes them the potato with the highest blight resistance and the lowest carbon footprint. [New varieties](#) are in the pipeline.

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**leadballoon**

31 March 2010 6:12PM

Your Youtube link to Mel Bartholemew is broken. Is [this the link you wanted?](#)

Perhaps it works in some circumstances. Grids often work better than rows I find, especially on a windy site where uniform spacing can provide some support using fewer canes.

But lettuce and carrot thinnings are crops in themselves. When you add in the pigeons, other pests and less than 100% germination rates the results are going to look pretty patchy. By all means sow one or two seeds to a module in the seed trays, then it doesn't matter if a few don't emerge. But you're not going to get many courgettes or sunflowers fitting in a square foot.

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**allanjenkins**

1 April 2010 10:05AM



Leadballoon, thanks for the heads-up on link, fixed now. Kind ofr on your side with sqaure foot thing, love thinnings, particularly baby carrots, and only have about 20sqm so cannot afford to grow too few things.... happy Easter everyone

[Recommend \(0\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Share](#)**Violetlea**

5 April 2010 10:20PM

I went to the Garden Centre, got some grit. Went home and proceeded to put the grit on the back garden. The plants are looking better, with alittle more sunshine. The bulbs are coming up. The frost was threatening during the last days of March. The rees are budding alittle. I hope to put some tomatoes in pots. This is my garden for April. Try to grow all my own plants. Garden is now getting attention. Sad that there seems to be more gardens than ever given over to concrete. Got some seed potatoes, and helping a relative with his compost. Watching Gardeners World. In other words hoping it might be a fine summer for the garden, for everyone. Happy gardening.

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