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ORGANIC ALLOTMENT  
BLOG**

## Caroline Foley's expert guide to a few things to do in March

Onion sets, broad beans, carrot and spinach seed: time to get gardening this month



Maincrop onion sets should be planted this month

In March, the pace is beginning to pick up. Harvest the last of the winter crops. Pile the debris onto [the compost heap](#). Pick out anything diseased for the green council collection as their heaps reach a high temperature.

Dig in overwintered [green manures](#). Chopping them up first will make the task easier. For the nutrients to be of maximum use, don't bury them but turn them over lightly so they are just under the surface. Winter tares, [clover](#) and field beans will release nitrogen which will be of benefit to brassicas you plan to grow.



Steal a march by

planting potatoes at the end of this month

You should be able to sow about two weeks later. However, after digging in a rye crop, wait for six weeks before sowing seed as the rye inhibits germination – particularly in carrot, parsnip and spinach – though the ground will be fine for transplants after two weeks.

If you have beds that won't be in use for a while, catch crop the space with a quick-growing green manure for a couple of months. Depending on your conditions, crimson clover, fenugreek and mustard are good candidates. All produce flowers that helpful insects will find irresistible. So even if you have to turn the green manure in before they flower, leave a few to grow on.



Carrots can be grown

in containers under cover

Get the seedbeds prepared. Aim for a fine tilth (breadcrumb consistency). Add general fertilizer.

As the weather warms, the weeds will start to grow apace. Keep a sharp hoe handy and catch them young.

Indoors, or under cover, carry on with February crops. Thin, pot on and harden off as necessary. Ten days is usually about right. In the greenhouse, shade plants on hot days and leave the doors open.

The green light for sowing outside is when the grass starts to grow. This means the ground temperature is over 5°C (41°) and warm enough for hardy vegetables to germinate outside. Suitable plants include brussel sprouts, kale, winter cauliflower, winter cabbage and broccoli. These can go into the seed bed as they won't need much space for several months. Fast growing hardy plants for summer eating include peas.

broad beans and spinach. They can either be started at home for transplanting or be grown in situ if the weather is warm enough.



Try sowing wrinkled

peas

Carrots will germinate at 5°C (41°F) but are happier and grow twice as fast at 10°C (50°F). You could grow the earliest carrots in a container under cover and move onto sowing the next batch outside. For outdoor carrots, take measures against the carrot fly. There are various precautions including timing and companion planting but possibly the simplest is to grow them under fine netting or Enviromesh in fresh ground.

A good tip for broad beans and peas is to sow a short row every three weeks between now and April, providing a constant succession of crops between June and October. For the first sowing of peas, choose a wrinkled pea such as 'Celebration', a delicious petit pois type, or try sugar snaps or mangetouts. A real beauty is 'Carouby de Mausanne', a C19th French mangetout with the added benefit of great good looks with lilac flowers.



Spinach is a

good companion plant with legumes

A companionable arrangement is to sow spinach in between legumes. The spinach will get its requirement of sun early in its growth and some shade later on. It should be out of the ground by June if sown now – ideal timing as it as it doesn't care for heat. Spinach doesn't belong to any of the main family groups so there is no worry about rotation.

If you want spinach more for salads and cut-and-come-again crops than cooking, grow the small leaved varieties like 'Baby Leaf Hybrid'. Other interesting additions to the salad bowl are the novel radish 'Saisai' and 'Edible Leaf Carrot' – both of which are grown for leaves as well as roots.

Plant out chives and mint – two particularly good hardy herbs that keep producing

over a long period to earn their keep. Dig up old clumps of both and divide them.

Parsley is another good performer but is usually grown fresh each year. Not the easiest to propagate, seed is best started off indoors having been soaked overnight – or take the easy way out and buy a couple of plants.



Sow broad beans

every three weeks between now and April

Maincrop onion sets should be planted this month or next as well as Jerusalem and globe artichokes.

Easter, the traditional time to plant potatoes, is going to be late this year, falling on April 24. If you are on a sites where there is a little friendly competition for the first potato of the season, and if the weather permits, you could plant them out at the end of the month, and steal a march, as it were, on the neighbours.

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**[allanjenkins](#)**

28 February 2011 4:37PM



Brilliant to catch up on allotment people posts and comments.  
Howard and I had sublime time, will post on it soon. Cooler  
than hoped here

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**gregbecker**

1 March 2011 8:00PM

Thanks for the tip about growing Edible Leaf Carrot, this hopefully means if the carrot fly get the roots you still have a crop of salad leaves? <http://plot52.blogspot.com>

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

4 March 2011 8:27PM

Really like the idea of growing spinach inbetween legumes. Thanks for the great idea. Naomi

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