



AWSLG APRIL 2026

Welcome to your plot

April is when everything accelerates. The soil is warm, the days are lengthening, and the plot is full of promise. Tender crops that have been waiting patiently on windowsills and in the polytunnel are almost ready for their moment outdoors — almost, but not yet. Hardy crops are romping away. And this month, more than any other, the difference between a well-prepared plot and a rushed one becomes visible.

April in Croydon can be glorious: warm sunny days, light evenings, the satisfaction of seeing your own seedlings establishing in good ground. It can also be brutal: a late frost on a clear April night can wipe out unprotected tender plants overnight. Stay alert, keep fleece to hand, and resist the temptation to rush the tender crops outside before the risk has passed.

COMMITTEE CORNER

SITE SECURITY

Following the recent break-ins, the Committee has been taking steady, practical steps to keep the site as safe and secure as possible. Work to strengthen security is already underway, and a new secure office door has been installed.

Warm thanks go to Peter, our Ground Steward, and to Dave Guest for their prompt and careful repairs to several affected areas. Their work has helped restore the site quickly and quietly, keeping disruption to a minimum. The Committee is continuing to look thoughtfully at further ways to enhance security around the canteen so that everyone can feel confident and at ease on site.

DATES FOR YOUR 2026 DIARY

A year's worth of reasons to get together. Our social events are open to all members and their guests — no need to sign up, just turn up. The Tidy-Up Mornings are a great way to put in your voluntary hours whilst doing something practical and sociable. Tea provided.

SOCIAL EVENTS

Monday 4 May – May Day Celebration Sunday 6 September – The Annual Show
Sunday 5 July – Summer Celebration Saturday 14 November – Artisan Fair

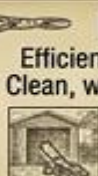
VOLUNTEERING & SUPPORT

Could You Spare a Little Time?

TIDY-UP THE SITE MORNINGS

Saturday 28 March Saturday 2 May Saturday 11 July Saturday 12 September

MOWERS WILL BE HIRED OUT FROM THIS COMING WEEKEND

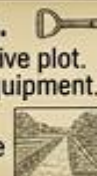


MOWER HIRE FUNDAMENTALS.

Efficient mowing ensures a tidy and productive plot.
Clean, well-maintained mowers are shared equipment.

Look after them for all to enjoy.

Plan your mowing schedule to make the most of your plot.



TOGETHER WE KEEP OUR ALLOTMENTS THRIVING!

QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Contact the Secretary or any Committee member **Email:** awslg.ltd@gmail.com

Members & Community News

KNIT AND NATTER GROUP

The Knit and Natter Group meets on the second Friday of each month from 2 pm until 4 pm in the hall. All are welcome to join for a natter and cake — the next session is **Friday 10 April**.

Come along, bring your knitting, and meet your fellow plot holders.

If you knit but cannot make it in person, there is still a way to join in. The group is currently knitting bunting to decorate the site for upcoming social events — a simple pattern that is a great way to use up odd bits of wool in any colour. Finished pieces can be left in the canteen. The pattern is free to find at [hobbycraft.co.uk](https://www.hobbycraft.co.uk) — search “how to knit your own bunting”, or ask in the canteen, and someone will be happy to point you to it.



YOU WILL NEED

- DK Yarn
- 5mm Knitting Needles
- Yarn Needle
- Scissors
- Ribbon

HOW TO MAKE

Using 5 mm needles, cast on 30 sts.
Row 1 (WS): Knit.
Row 2 (RS): (K2tog, yo) rep to last 2 sts, k2tog.
Row 5: Knit.
Rep rows 3-6 until there are 6 sts left.
Next Row (WS): Knit.
Next Row: K1, sl2tog, K1, pss0, K1.
Next Row: Knit.
Next Row: Sl2tog, K1, pss0.

MAKING UP

Draw yarn through remaining stitch and weave in ends. Thread ribbon through eyelets.

Pattern: <https://www.hobbycraft.co.uk/ideas/how-to-knit-your-own-bunting.html>

This Month's Growing Guide

PRIORITY JOBS

1. Plant maincrop potatoes

First and second earlies went in last month; maincrops go in now. Plant in the second half of April, 37 cm apart in rows 75 cm apart, at a depth of 10–15 cm with chits pointing upwards. Earth up as shoots emerge. Keep an eye on the forecast: if a frost is predicted after shoots appear, draw a little more soil over them to protect them.

2. Pot up tomato seedlings

When your tomato seedlings show their first true leaves above the rounded seed leaves, pot them on into 9 cm pots with good multipurpose compost. Keep them under cover in the polytunnel or on a warm windowsill. They are not going outside until late May at the earliest — patience here pays dividends later.

3. Sow courgettes, squash, and pumpkins under cover

If not already done, sow courgettes, marrows, squash, and pumpkins indoors now — one seed per 9 cm pot on its edge to prevent rotting, in warm compost at around 18–20°C. They grow quickly and will be ready to plant outside in late May or early June once all frost risk has passed.

4. Sow the brassica seedbed

April is the time to sow a brassica seedbed: Brussels sprouts, purple sprouting broccoli, kale, and winter cabbage. Sow thinly in a prepared bed outdoors, or in modules under cover. These will be transplanted to their final growing positions in June or July, giving you the backbone of your winter larder.

5. Continue succession sowings outdoors

Keep the succession sowing rhythm going every two weeks: beetroot, carrots, lettuce and salad leaves, radishes, spring onions, and Swiss chard. Little and often is always the better approach — a continuous supply rather than an overwhelming glut.

PREPARE RUNNER BEAN SUPPORTS NOW

Runner bean supports take time to put up well. Do it now, before the rush of May. Canes, wigwams, or a double row of crossed canes — all work well. The beans will go in next month; having the supports ready means one less job when everything else is demanding your attention. **Canes off all sizes available in the Trading Hut the allotment shop**



This Month's Growing Guide

(continued)

WHAT TO SOW AND PLANT THIS MONTH

Outdoors in prepared ground

- Maincrop potatoes
 - Onion sets, shallot sets, and garlic (if not yet done in March)
 - Jerusalem artichoke tubers
 - Asparagus crowns — last opportunity this spring
 - Broad beans grown in pots indoors — ready to transplant now
 - Peas — direct sow, or transplant those started in guttering
 - Beetroot, carrots, Swiss chard, kohlrabi, radishes, turnips
 - Lettuce and salad leaves — every fortnight
 - Spring onions, perpetual spinach, summer cauliflower
 - Leeks — sow thinly for transplanting in June or July
- Take the Challenge- try something different**
- Salsify and scorzonera — unusual but genuinely rewarding.

💧 **Water butts:** If your butt is not connected to a downpipe yet, April is the moment. A single 210-litre butt fills from one good shower. Position it close to your main growing beds — carrying full watering cans any distance quickly becomes a chore.

UNDER COVER (POLYTUNNEL OR HEATED PROPAGATOR)

- Courgettes, marrows, squash, and pumpkins — sow now if not yet done
- Tomatoes, sweet peppers, chillies, cucumbers, aubergines — continue growing on
- Celery, celeriac, globe artichokes, salads
- Basil — needs warmth; keep in the polytunnel until June

💡 A note on French beans and sweetcorn:

The RHS advises that in very mild areas only, dwarf French beans and sweetcorn can be sown outdoors under cloches at the very end of April. For Croydon, the safer approach is to wait until May — a cold snap in late April can set them back badly. Starting them under cover in late April for planting out in May is a practical middle path.

AN ALLOTMENT GUIDE: WATERING YOUR VEGETABLES

KEY PRINCIPLE: Water Thoroughly, Not Too Often (RHS Advice)

Seedlings & New Transplants

→ Water the seed drill before sowing rather than afterwards. Once transplanted, **water in well and keep the root zone consistently moist** for the first week to ten days until plants establish. Avoid wetting the foliage — keep water at the base.

Leafy Crops (Lettuce, Chard, Spinach, Cabbage)

Need consistent moisture throughout growth. Lack of water causes bolting and bitterness in salad crops. Water regularly and generously, particularly as hearts begin to form.

Root Vegetables (Carrots, Beetroot, Parsnips)

Less frequent watering works well once established — every ten to fourteen days if there is no rain. Too much water causes roots to split; consistent rather than irregular watering is the aim.

Onions, Shallots, Leeks

Water to establish after planting, then only in notably dry spells. Overwatering encourages lush leafy growth at the expense of bulb development.

Peas and Beans

Water sparingly before flowering. At flowering and pod set, water generously. This is when water has the greatest impact on yield.

Potatoes

Water when tubers are forming — about six weeks after planting filling out. Before that, they largely look after themselves in our clay soil.

CLAY SOIL & WATER: THE DOUBLE CHALLENGE.

Croydon's heavy clay holds water well in winter but can set hard and form a surface crust in a dry April that sheds rather than absorbs water. If you notice water running off rather than soaking in, break the crust gently with a hoe before watering again.

Mulching bare soil with a 5–7 cm layer of compost after watering locks in moisture and suppresses weeds in one operation.

💧 Water usage reminder:

Hosepipes are permitted on mains taps when water is back in service We encourage the use of watering cans where possible especially during busy periods to maintain pressure for all members. Every drop saved on one plot helps the whole site.

New to Your Plot

Welcome to April — your first properly busy month. You will be juggling sowing, planting, watering, and protecting all at once, and it can feel overwhelming. It is not. Take one job at a time, start with the things that cannot wait, and enjoy the fact that your plot is finally growing.

YOUR APRIL JOBS IN ORDER

1. Protect tender plants from frost — every night until late May
2. Plant maincrop potatoes in the second half of the month
3. Pot up tomato seedlings when true leaves appear
4. Sow peas, beetroot, carrots, radishes, and lettuce outdoors
5. Test your soil pH
6. Set up runner bean supports — no rush for the beans yet
7. Stock up on your Stable Manure and Compost and Chicken Manure from the Trading Hut the Allotment shop

KNOW YOUR SOIL: THE TEST EVERY NEW PLOT HOLDER BENEFITS FROM

Why testing your soil transforms your growing

One of the most useful things a new plot holder can do is test the soil pH in each growing bed. Soil pH is a measure of how acidic or alkaline your soil is, on a scale from 1 to 14. Most vegetables thrive between pH 6.0 and 7.0. On our heavy Croydon clay, pH varies from plot to plot depending on what has previously been grown and how much lime has been applied.

When pH is wrong, plants struggle to absorb nutrients even when those nutrients are present in the soil. This is why plants can look hungry and yellow in apparently fertile ground. Brassicas — cabbages, sprouts, kale — need a pH of 6.5–7.0, and below this, they become vulnerable to club root.

THE ONE TASK THAT CANNOT WAIT: FROST PROTECTION

This is the most important thing to understand in April. Tender plants — tomatoes, courgettes, squash, French beans, sweetcorn — will be killed by frost. Keep them under cover (polytunnel, cold frame, or indoors) until late May. No exceptions, no matter how warm the days feel. A single clear night at the wrong time will undo everything.

Hardy plants — potatoes, onions, broad beans, peas, lettuce, carrots — can go outdoors now, though potato shoots benefit from a little extra earth protection if frost is forecast once they emerge

♥ **Nature note:** *Earthworms are the best indicator of soil health. A healthy, fertile bed on Croydon clay will have plenty of worms visible when you dig. Very few worms can point to compaction, acidity, or low organic matter — all things that improve over time.*

AN ALLOTMENT GUIDE: DIY SOIL PH TESTING

HOW CAN I TEST MY SOIL MYSELF?

TEST 1: The Alkaline Test (with Vinegar)

1. Place 2 tablespoons of soil in a bowl and add ½ cup vinegar. If the mixture fizzes, you have alkaline soil.

TEST 2: The Acidic Test (with Baking Soda)

2. Place 2 tablespoons of soil in a bowl and moisten it with distilled water. Add ½ cup baking soda. If the mixture fizzes, you have acidic soil.

My Pantry Soil pH Notes:

1. Test 1
2. Test 2
3. Results

Autumn Leaves

pH 1-14

AN ALLOTMENT GUIDE: USING A SOIL TESTING KIT

KEY PRINCIPLE: Plan for your pH, Prepare for Autumn

STEP 1: Collection

1. Take a tablespoon of soil from each growing bed at about 10 cm depth.

STEP 2: Mixing

2. Follow the kit instructions to mix the soil with the testing solution.

STEP 3: Comparison

3. Compare the colour result to the chart provided.

STEP 4: Action

4. Note the result for each bed. If pH is low, plan to add lime in autumn.

pH Colour Chart

4.5	7.5
5.0	7.0
5.5	6.5
6.0	6.0
6.5	5.5
7.0	5.0
7.5	4.5

pH Record Card

Bed 1	Bed 2

Autumn Leaves

GARDEN LIME

WHAT YOUR PH READING MEANS:

What your pH reading means:

pH 6.0–6.5: Slightly acid. Good for most vegetables. Potatoes prefer this range.

pH 6.5–7.0: Ideal for the majority of crops, including brassicas.

Below pH 6.0: Too acid for most vegetables. Apply lime in autumn to raise pH gradually.

Above pH 7.5: Alkaline. Potatoes and carrots will struggle.

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT CROYDON CLAY

Heavy clay is naturally fertile and holds nutrients well. The challenge is structure and drainage, both of which improve every year as you add organic matter — compost, well-rotted manure, leaf mould. Your soil is not your enemy; it simply rewards patient, consistent work.

Grower's Tips

SUCCESSION SOWING: BUILD THE HABIT NOW

April is when the succession sowing habit pays its first dividends. If you sowed a short row of radishes and salad leaves in March, you are already picking. Now sow another row of each, and repeat every two weeks through to July. Ten minutes every fortnight means continuous harvests rather than a brief glut followed by nothing. A simple calendar reminder works well.

THINNING SEEDLINGS EARLY

Seedlings left crowded compete for water, nutrients, and light, and the results are poor for all of them. Thin as soon as seedlings are large enough to handle — it feels wasteful but it genuinely improves the remaining plants. For carrots, thin in the evening and remove thinning's immediately to reduce the risk of attracting carrot fly. For beetroot, which produces clusters of seeds, thinning to one seedling per cluster is essential.

HARDENING OFF: THE DISCIPLINE THAT SAVES PLANTS

Plants raised under cover need gradual acclimatisation before going outside permanently. From mid-April, move them to a sheltered outdoor spot during the day and bring them back under cover at night. After a week, leave them out overnight if no frost is forecast. This process takes ten to fourteen days done properly. Mark your calendar now — in May's rush it is easy to skip steps and lose plants to transplant shock.

STAGGERED POTATO PLANTING

If you have not yet planted all your maincrop potatoes, staggering over two to three weeks stretches your harvest from late July into October and reduces the impact of any blight outbreak on your overall yield. Label each row with the planting date — a piece of cut cane and a waterproof marker does the job well.

? To Dig or Not to Dig?

The debate that divides allotment holders — and what the evidence says

Few topics divide experienced plot holders more reliably than digging. The no-dig movement has grown enormously in recent years, driven largely by one gardener — Charles Dowding — and backed increasingly by scientific evidence. But is it right for every plot, and particularly for Croydon's heavy clay? Here is a fair look at both sides.

CASE FOR NO-DIG

No-dig gardening means applying a thick layer of well-rotted organic matter to the surface each year and allowing soil organisms — worms, bacteria, fungi — to incorporate it naturally. You sow and plant directly into this top dressing, disturbing the soil as little as possible.

CHARLES DOWDING AND THE EVIDENCE FROM HOMEACRES

Charles Dowding has practised and documented no-dig growing at his market garden, Homeacres in Somerset, for over forty years. Between 2013 and 2020, he ran side-by-side comparison beds: the same crops, the same quantities of organic matter, but one set dug and the other not. The no-dig beds produced around 855 kg of produce compared to 755 kg from the dug beds — a consistent 13% advantage from the same area of ground.

His explanation is straightforward: digging destroys the soil's natural structure. Worm channels, fungal networks, and the crumb structure that allows air and water to move freely are all disrupted by cultivation. Left undisturbed, these systems build and stabilise over time.

THE RHS AND WISLEY

Dowding's findings have found institutional backing. The RHS World Food Garden at Wisley now practices no-dig throughout. The RHS presented a dedicated No-Dig Allotment Demonstration Garden at Hampton Court in 2021, designed by Dowding and Stephanie Hafferty, showing the method working in beds, polytunnels, and containers. RHS horticulturist Liz Mooney, who worked at Wisley, describes herself as a convert.

? To Dig or Not to Dig?

THE CASE FOR DIGGING

The tradition of digging is not simply habit. There are genuine situations where working the soil makes sense, and experienced Croydon plot holders have often learned this the hard way.

THE CLAY SOIL CHALLENGE

No-dig advocates generally work on soils that already have reasonable structure. On heavy, compacted clay that has been poorly managed — particularly a neglected plot where soil has been walked on wet, or where drainage is genuinely poor — no-dig alone may not be sufficient to start with. The RHS acknowledges that digging can be valuable to relieve compaction and restore structure that has been lost.

One thorough incorporation of organic matter into compacted clay, done when soil is moist but not waterlogged, can open the structure significantly. The key is doing it once to rectify, then stopping.

What No-Dig Offers:

No-Dig Soil	Digged Soil
<p>• Higher yields: from the trials. </p> <p>• Fewer weeds: </p> <p>• Better soil structure: </p> <p>• Less work: </p> <p>• Carbon retention: </p> <p>• Reduced fertilisers: </p>	

Situations Where Digging May Make Sense:

- Taking on a neglected plot:
- Serious compaction:
- Correcting soil acidity:
Heavy clay soil
- Starting completely fresh:

Explore Further

- Charles Dowding's website:
- RHS no-dig pages:
- The canteen library:

www.rhsndowding.com

A FAIR ASSESSMENT

The evidence increasingly favours no-dig for established, well-structured plots. The yield data from Homeacres is compelling; the RHS's endorsement is significant; and the logic — that soil is a living ecosystem best left undisturbed — is sound.

For a Croydon plot holder, the honest answer is: it depends on where your soil currently is. If you have reasonable structure and manageable weeds, switching to no-dig this April makes good sense. Apply a 7–10 cm layer of well-rotted compost or manure to your beds — the Allotment Shop stocks manure — and sow and plant directly into it. You may be pleasantly surprised.

If you have recently taken on a neglected plot with compacted soil and established perennial weeds, one targeted dig to clear the ground first makes sense as a starting point. Once that foundation is in place, no-dig can take over.

★ The no-dig principle in a nutshell:

Feed the soil surface with organic matter every year, let the worms and soil organisms do the work below, and resist the urge to dig unless the soil genuinely needs it.

Nature & Wildlife Garden Watch

SIGNS OF SPRING April is one of the most rewarding months to spend a few minutes in the Wildlife Field. Everything is moving at once: birds are building nests, pollinators are appearing on warm days, the pond is busy with tadpoles, and the first butterflies of the year are on the wing..

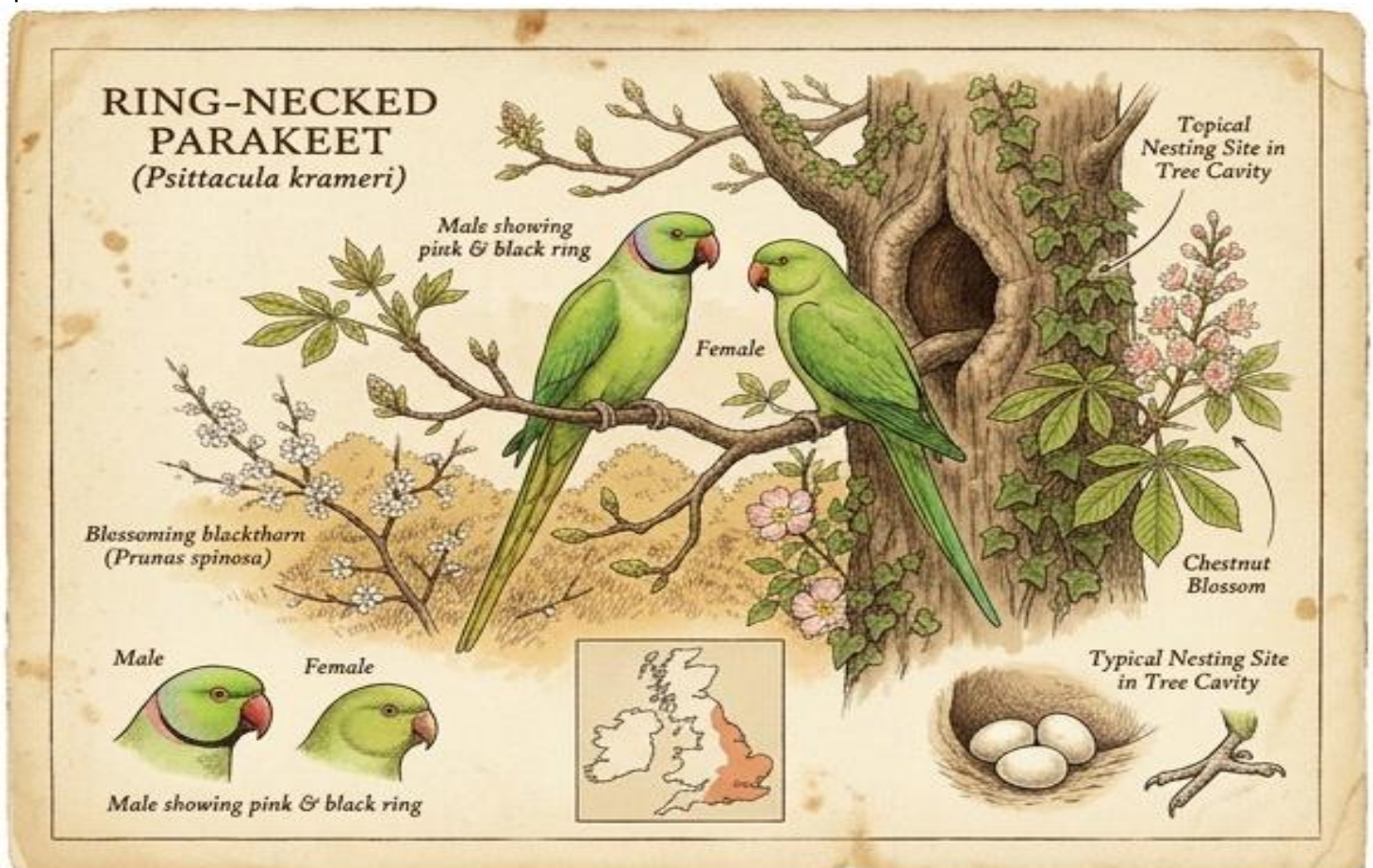
WILDLIFE TO WATCH FOR THIS MONTH

- Nesting birds: Robins, blackbirds, and wrens are building or sitting on nests. Keep noise low near hedges and rough vegetation, and avoid disturbing any area where you suspect nesting is underway. Disturbance can cause birds to abandon nests at this critical stage.
- Orange-tip butterflies: The male's vivid orange wing tips make them unmistakable on sunny April days. They are among the most beautiful early-spring butterflies — look for them nectaring on cuckoo flower and garlic mustard near the field edge.
- Tadpoles in the pond: Frogspawn from March is hatching now. The tadpoles that develop here will become froglets by summer, spreading across the site and providing completely natural, chemical-free slug control throughout the growing season.
- Bumblebees and solitary bees: Queen bumblebees are establishing nests, and solitary bees are visiting early flowers. Both are essential pollinators for your plot crops. Flowering brassicas left to bolt are a valuable early food source.
- Parakeet watch: Our noisy local residents are at their most active this month, pairing up and seeking nesting sites. Keep brassicas and soft fruit well netted — they are opportunistic and persistent.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Avoid trimming hedges or clearing rough vegetation until August — birds are nesting
- Keep bird baths and shallow ground-level water dishes clean and topped up
- Leave some brassicas to flower — the yellow blooms are important early nectar for bees
- Leave undisturbed piles of leaves or logs near the field — ideal hedgehog nesting habitat

♥ The tadpoles in the Wildlife Field pond take roughly three months to become froglets. Most will disperse across the allotment by summer. Each frog that reaches maturity here is a net benefit to every plot on the site — a completely natural ally in the endless battle against slugs.



From Plot to Plate

A Plot-to-Plate Recipe

Spring Salad with Radishes and Soft-Boiled Egg

Ingredients:

Fresh overwintered salad leaves, First radishes, Spring onions, Young chard leaves, Two soft-boiled eggs, Chive flowers.

For Dressing: 1 tsp Dijon mustard, 1 tsp white wine vinegar, 3 tsp olive oil, Pinch of salt, Grind of black pepper.

Instructions:

1. Bring a small pan of water to the boil, lower in two eggs, and cook for 6.5 minutes. Transfer immediately to cold water, peel, and halve.
2. Wash and dry a generous handful of salad leaves, a few radishes, halved lengthways, two or three spring onions, sliced on the diagonal, and some young chard leaves, torn into pieces.
3. Make a dressing with 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard, 1 teaspoon white wine vinegar, 3 teaspoons olive oil, a pinch of salt, and a grind of black pepper.
4. Toss the leaves in the dressing, arrange the eggs on top, and finish with a few chive flowers if you have them.

April's hungry gap need not mean dull eating. This simple salad uses whatever the plot is giving right now and turns them into something genuinely worth sitting down to.

Chef's Note: For a richer salad, use a mix of any available hardy greens and consider adding toasted seeds or a shaving of hard cheese.

💡 **Top tip:** Radishes are ready just three to four weeks after sowing — the fastest return on any seed you will sow this year. Sow a short row every two weeks from now and you will have fresh radishes continuously through spring and early summer without any surplus going to waste.

VOLUNTEERING & SUPPORT

COULD YOU SPARE A LITTLE TIME?

Everything that makes this site special — the well-stocked shop, the welcoming canteen, the well-maintained paths and wildlife spaces — exists because members give their time. If you'd like to be part of that, we'd be very glad to have you.

All members are asked to give a minimum of 4 hours a year. Those who volunteer 10 hours or more earn a 10% discount on Allotment Shop purchases over £5 as a thank-you from us.

OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE:

- Allotment Shop — one weekend in three, or at peak times
- Saturday Working Party — keeping the site in good shape
- Canteen — Saturday and Sunday mornings
- Wildlife Field — tending our green and wild spaces

Get in touch at awslg.ltd@gmail.com — no experience necessary, just enthusiasm.

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