*(These two items for local gardeners could not be fitted into the Free for All Magazine so are added to the website for their regular readers)*

Adam’s Topical Garden Tips for December

It may seem that December is a quiet month for the garden, but that is deceptive. There is much work to be done behind the scenes.

Planning rotations for the coming year leads us on to seed ordering. April enjoys reading the seed catalogues which come through the letter box at this time of year. They are beautifully illustrated and the descriptions are inspiring. In fact, sometimes making the final decision is very difficult. Decide which crops suit your soil; for example root crops tend to do better in sandy soil and brassicas prefer heavier land. Seed is not the only option available to you and plants can be ordered in plugs and other containers for spring delivery. April has had considerable success with these small plants especially dwarf beans.

If you have saved you own seed or have some left over from last year which you wish to plant, keep them cool and in a tin to thwart mice and other creatures. Some people even store them in the fridge to stop deterioration.

Whatever crops you have in storage, potatoes, apples and other fruits need frequent inspection to avoid mouldy and rotten produce spoiling the bulk of the crop. Keep an eye on the temperature and if potatoes are sprouting it is probably too warm. If you have frozen some of your summer vegetables don’t forget to eat them soon, there will be plenty more next year.

There are many jobs which can be done in the shed, such as, writing up labels for next year, cleaning and oiling equipment, washing pots and other containers. If you have nothing in the greenhouse it is a good time to wash the glass and clean both inside and out for next year, perhaps using the old gardener’s favourite, Jeyes Fluid, which is still available; if however you have plants overwintering in there, even in cold weather, don’t forget to provide adequate ventilation to prevent fungal infections.

Meanwhile Adam will be directing his attention to outdoor activities; bean sticks can be cut or acquired from coppiced woodland while the hazel is dormant. Turning compost heaps must not be forgotten to keep them aerated and encourage bacterial activity. Carry on with pruning activities as mentioned in November and digging, particularly on heavy soil, this side of Christmas. Ground which is not to be dug could have a mulch cover of carpet/plastic membrane to suppress weeds or better still organic matter which will feed the soil as well.

One more very important job in the garden is to feed the birds and make sure they have water for bathing and drinking particularly in frosty weather.

Lastly don’t forget at this festive time that there are a great many gardening related presents. Try your local independent garden centre for many ideas. This leads us to this month’s recipe which is a wonderful dish to be served with your Christmas meal, hopefully using a home grown red cabbage.

**December’s Recipe. Red Cabbage with apples.**

1 small red cabbage - hard stalks removed and finely shredded 3 onions – finely chopped 3 large cooking apples peeled, cored and finely chopped. 3 tablespoons of wine vinegar 3 tablespoons of brown sugar 1 garlic clove crushed or finely chopped A pinch each of ground cloves, cinnamon and a generous amount of ground nutmeg A generous knob of butter Salt and pepper

Use a large casserole and layer the cabbage with seasoning, onions and apples sprinkling the layers with garlic, spices and sugar until everything is in. Add the wine vinegar and the butter, cover and cook slowly at Gas Mark 2 or 150o C for two and a half to three hours. Stir occasionally. This dish freezes well and can be reheated. It is also good with cranberries added for that Christmas touch.