

✿ My Allotment Diary

You can tell it's been a good day when it ends with the need to scrub mud from your hands, and today has been such a day! At last the sun has warmed the ground, and planting at the allotment has been possible.

Many of my seedlings are still far too small, with progress having been stunted by the cold and wet weather throughout March and much of April, but my sweet peas sown back in October are now in the ground, and my roses and other perennials planted for cutting are flourishing.

I spent quite a long time planning what to plant where, but to be honest, it's not so important for flowers, but on the vegetable plots, 'companion planting' is well worth the effort. My dad always planted marigolds to keep whitefly away from his tomatoes and beans, but there are a lot more 'partnerships' that are beneficial - did you know that marigolds also help to keep eel worms away from potatoes?

Onions planted alongside carrots deter carrot root fly, and radishes and spinach should be planted together as leaf miner beetles are attracted to the radishes, and stay off the spinach (and don't harm the radishes). The logic seems to be that smelly herbs such as basil or lavender confuse insect predators, but you can also add 'sacrificial' plants such as nasturtiums that attract black fly and cabbage white butterflies – not great if you want pretty flowers for your salad, but good news for your tomatoes, broccoli or cabbage!

May is such a busy month at the allotments – lots of onion sets, beans, peas and spinach going in. Potatoes are getting earthed up for protection as the risk of a final frost isn't over. It pays to have horticultural fleece on standby just in case, but it's definitely time to look forward to great things to come, and sunny evenings with mud under your fingernails!

If you fancy 'growing your own', this is the perfect time to take a plot to get started! Contact helen.ripper@outlook.com

