

## Allotment and Gardening Jottings

### Dilly's Diary

*The New Year started amid freezing conditions and a virtual standstill at the plot. By the time this article appears, thoughts will be turning to the spring season!*

After a very wet November much of December saw sub-zero temperatures with sustained icy conditions and intermittent light snowfall. The upside of December's cold weather was many bright sunny days which made the most of the daylight hours.

Understandably, work at the plot was at a standstill for much of the time. Also, several of the better days in November were given over to the planting of over 600 tulip bulbs as part of a friend's flower-growing project elsewhere in the locality. Given their susceptibility to 'tulip fire' disease, tulips are best planted after the first frosts. For the same project, a large quantity of daffodils, including several choice white narcissus varieties, were planted back in September.

#### Good Surprises at the Plot

**4<sup>th</sup> Dec:** a bright clear morning bathed in sunshine (not too cold yet!), ideal for an overdue visit to the plot.

I am surprised to find several of the dark purple *matucana* sweet peas in bloom as well as marigolds. The sunflower with its large seed-heads awaits the birds. Garlic planted in late October has sprouted shoots and the winter onions, leeks and brassicas have put on growth.

Fork through a bed which had broad beans earlier in the season and plant the remaining winter onion sets which had intended to put in weeks ago. Soil is still very moist after November's copious

rain. Harvest four lovely leeks and cut a few sprigs of rosemary and thyme.

**30<sup>th</sup> Dec:** plot now fully in winter mode. Cabbages, sprouting (not yet ready) and leeks are the main standing crops but the ground has been too icy recently to dig more leeks. The onions planted at the beginning of the month not yet sporting shoots. Despite the cold which has left the herb bed looking forlorn, the Rosemary, Thyme, Sage and Box plants still look vigorous. Do some general clearing up but it is too cold to stay very long.

Regret not having bagged up some of the compost from the bin at home to bring up here before the cold weather set in.

#### Yes, the Cold Blast Does Continue!

There may still be an opportunity if conditions ameliorate in January although the forecast so far is for the cold blast to continue for a while yet.

The fruits of the year's labours have been welcome additions to seasonal cooking recently, not least the leeks, onions, garlic and shallots (all except the leeks are hanging in a cool frost-free outbuilding in the garden at home). And the small winter squashes which hitherto had a mainly decorative role in the kitchen lent a wonderful taste and texture to a baked vegetable dish concocted after Christmas to use up a variety of root and other vegetables (including leftover sprouts!). Attention will shortly be turning to planting plans and sorting through the accumulated seed packets.

#### Dilly Marigold

