

A Year on the Farm at Growing Well

Here at Growing Well we're a Soil Association registered farm. This means that everything we put on the land is organic, and our produce is certified organic. We use growing methods that work in harmony with the land, and carefully plan our growing to take advantage of the seasons.

You are welcome to come and see us on the farm, ask questions and take new ideas away. We're the largest organic producer in Cumbria, so you might be surprised about the scale of our operation, tucked away over the hill from Low Sizergh Barn.

Over the winter we've been busy prepping the beds by muck spreading and ploughing, chitting potatoes (this is the process of leaving them to develop little sprouts before we plant them out), apple pruning and grafting the apple cordons ('cordons' are where fruit trees are grown at an angle against a wall or fence - growing them at an angle means that you can fit more trees into a smaller space, for greater productivity) and we've also inoculated several large piles of logs with mushroom spores, so we can start growing our own organic mushrooms in 2015.

Both the apple grafting and mushroom cultivation activities were open to anyone to attend, so do keep an eye on our website (better still sign up for our newsletter) to hear about our courses.

April.

Traditionally Easter is the time to plant your potatoes, but we've also been sowing French Bean, Squash, Cucumber, Leeks, Basil, Broccoli, Spinach, Runner Bean, Fennel, Radish, Shallot, Leek Potato, Carrot brussel sprout, Broad bean, Turnip, Beetroot. Khol rabi, and Courgette. Phew! Our volunteers are kept very busy making compost 'blocks' and then carefully seeding these before germinating and moving to the heated beds of our propagation tunnel.

We're planting Spring Onion, Red and White Onion 'sets' (i.e. the tiny little bulbs, rather than growing from seed) directly outside into the field.

We grow salad leaves and lettuce year round under cover (in the polytunnels). This is harvested regularly for the shop at Low Sizergh Barn, where you can buy it from the chiller and also on your plate in the tearoom.

May

May is still a season of sowing. Over the year we'll change the produce in our polytunnel three times, careful planning is needed to ensure that young vegetable plants are ready for planting out as produce is harvested and removed. Swede, Chard, Runner Bean, Fennel, Pea, Turnip, Beetroot, Sprouting Broccoli, Carrots, and Savoy Cabbage are still being sown at this point in the year.

Leek, Calabrese, Runner Bean, Tomato, Pepper, Aubergine, Chilli, Cucumber, Kohl rabi, Courgettes, and Squash will be planted out into the polytunnels in May. It's quite incredible to walk into a polytunnel of chilli plants, the spiciness gives a great hit!

Salad leaves are in full swing, and it's difficult to keep up with them to stop plants going to seed, though the rabbits do occasionally help!

June

In June we're mainly focusing on planting out the vegetables that have been sown the previous month. The June sun can make the polytunnels tropical to work in, so we're careful to have a good mix of activities for our volunteers both inside and outside. Sun hats and sun cream become important work kit as we head for the summer!

Red Cabbage, Brussel Sprouts, Runner Bean and Leeks are still being planted out, some of these won't be harvested until late autumn, and last year we lost our whole crop of brussels sprouts to hungry rabbits (much to the relief of several children no doubt!).

We're now coming to the end of what we call the 'hungry gap' (where everything is growing brilliantly but nothing is quite ready to harvest), and we'll start to harvest Spring Greens, Broad Beans, French Beans, Peas, Broccoli, chard, Spinach, Beetroot, Turnip and Khol Rabi, as well as the regular salad leaves and lettuce.

July

This year in July there'll be Mooli (no, I have no idea either) and late Onions being sown, with Savoy Cabbage and Sprouting Broccoli being planted out for winter crops.

We are now well into overflowing vegetable bags for our cropsharers (we have 100 shares in a our produce available each year, so if you're interested let us know) and produce now being harvested will include Courgettes, Squash, Cucumber, Tomato, White Onion, Celery, Pea, Broad bean, Turnips, Spring Onion, Chard, Spinach, Salad Leaves and Lettuce

August

All hands on in August as everything is growing like billy-o. We're still planting out Calabrese and Kale for winter harvesting, but the focus is on harvest: Spring Onions, Radish, White Onions, White Cabbage, Potatoes, Carrots, Garlic, Broadbean, Turnip, Courgette, Tomato, French Bean, Pea, Pepper, Aubergine, Chilli, Squash, Cucumber, Chard, Spinach, Salad Leaves and Lettuce

Oh, and we're trying to keep up the with weeding, and stopping our camekaze resident rabbits from tunnelling under the electric fence to get to the runner beans (and everything else!). We think they have a technique where one rabbit takes a hit for the team whilst everyone else runs over him (or her!) to get to the food.

September

Onions grown for seed now going into the ground, but we're harvesting Pepper, Aubergine, Chilli, Courgette, Squash, Cucumber, Tomato, Celery, French and Bean, Pea, Turnip, Lettuce, Squash, White

and Red Cabbage, Potato, Carrot, Garlic, White and Red Onion, Leek, Kale, Calabrese, Beetroot, Spinach, Scorzonera, Spring Onion, Chard, Salad Leaves and Lettuce

September is also our annual harvest festival, this year on Friday 25th September, where everyone is invited to join us for an evening of singing and eating!

October

Late harvests of Swede, Calabrese, Kale, Chard, Spinach, Runner and French Bean, Pea, Mooli, Kale, Beetroot, Spinach, Spring Onion, Red and White Onion, Leek, Potato, Carrot, Parsnip, Garlic, Red and White Cabbage, Bean, Squash, Pepper, Aubergine, chilli, Tomato, Salad Leaves and Lettuce keep the vegetable bags full of interest.

November

Things are starting to slow down. Potatoes and onions will have been lifted (blight was an issue last year, we didn't fare badly as we got the crop up in time, but many growers were hit hard). Lettuce, Squash, Potato, Carrot, Parsnip, Garlic, Red and Savoy Cabbage, Pea, Courgette and Salad Leaves are still being harvested.

December

Sprouting Broccoli, Potato, Parsnip, White and Red Onion, Celeriac, Leek, Kale, Beetroot, Spinach, Savoy Cabbage, Brussels Sprout, Sprouting Broccoli, Salad Leaves and Lettuce are still being harvested, and we maintain a weekly supply to cropsharers until the week before Christmas.

December is the season of festivities, and Growing Well is no different, with a Christmas meal prepared and served in our Yurts for all our volunteers - last year there were 50 of us, and many thanks to our committed volunteers who prepare Turkey and all the trimmings for all of us hungry farmers!

We also hope to have a second Christmas Carol concert, donated by 5 in Bar acapella group, before Christmas. We sold out last year, and it was a great evening with music, mince pies and mulled drinks.

The site runs at a much less frenetic pace during Winter and Spring, so this provides time to take stock and prepare for the coming growing season. Jobs include washing Pots and Polytunnels, general tidying of the site, draining the water system and taking delivery of compost and manure, fixing things and doing jobs we're tried to ignore over summer, which includes digging out our composting toilet. You can probably guess that we really fight over that particular job! The compost that comes out of the chamber is surprisingly clean however, and we eventually use it on site as feed for the comfrey which we then use to make liquid feed for our tomatoes. Nothing wasted eh?

January

January is our bit of breathing space to think about any site developments for the coming year. We've been developing our soft fruit and cut flower production, and aim to develop an area with perennials which can be used by our Horticultural Tutor for training students.

We're sowing Pepper, Chilli, Spring Greens, Tomato, and harvesting salad leaves and lettuce

February

We're chitting potatoes, and sowing Tomato, Aubergine and White Onion seeds, harvesting salad leaves and lettuce

March

It all starts to ramp up! You'll see lots of sowing going on, and tiny sprouts in the propagation tunnel of Courgettes, Coriander, Celery, Tomato, Broad/French Bean, Peas, Leek, Parsley, Beetroot, Lettuce, Spring Onion, Celeriac, Broccoli, Chard, Spinach and Red Cabbage.

We're planting Beetroot, Lettuce, Spring Onion out, and harvesting Salad Leaves and Lettuce