

GARDENING

This being the winter season, it may be for some, a period of rest. For us gardeners though, it will offer up plenty of chances for some work out there in the garden, weather permitting. Where there are coldframes or a greenhouse, there is sure to be an odd job or two irrespective of the weather.

Cover over any celery you have in the veg plot if the weather gets too bad. Cover preferably with bracken, as this gives them protection, and also allows better access than if you use straw. As celery should be in steady supply now, lift each plant, as you require it. There is little need to wait for a sharp frost before harvesting in my opinion; there is minimal scientific evidence to indicate that frost improves quality. Start at one end of the row, which should have already been earthed up, replacing the soil to protect those plants that still remain.

For many, celery is a vegetable that is consumed raw. Sticks are often served whole with cheese, or chopped for salads. Maybe even diced and mixed with shrimps, apple and salad cream as an hors d'oeuvre. But the correct way to prepare celery for consuming raw, shows its flexibility. First, remove all roots, and cut off the outer sticks for cooking. The leaves can be cut off for use as a soup flavouring.

You are now ready to separate the sticks for a thorough scrub, but be sure not to stand them for hours in water before consuming as they will significantly lose their crunch. You could though, produce celery curls, by immersing paper-thin strips in ice cold water for 2hrs.

As I've said, celery can also be cooked, but never boil it. The outer stems can be sliced and used in soups, stews, and curries or stir-fried. If the leaves are chopped, they can be used for an unusual alternative to parsley. Or you could deep-fry them as an accompaniment for fish dishes. The hearts of celery can be boiled for 12 minutes, then braised under a low heat for 50 minutes. They can then be arranged with carrots, onions, and shallots in chicken stock, and braised again for another 5 minutes. Scrumptious!


Another job you could be getting on with is preparing the greenhouse for seed sowing. Wash down the inside of the greenhouse, tidy up the pots and boxes, and get the soil, leafmold, compost and sand ready. You could possibly even sterilise the soil first. If you have room, you can place pots of strawberries in a cold greenhouse to bring them on.

Check your potatoes you have in storage, picking out the tubers showing signs of decay. This will prevent disease spreading throughout the entire store. On good days, if soil conditions allow, you must get out there and dig. Few gardeners complete this work prior to Christmas, but it is advisable to endeavour to, so the elements can get to work and break the soil down to a fine tilth.

The wise gardeners digging motto should be "Little and Often", "A Little Less, Rather Than a Little More" is mine.

Finally, can I take this opportunity to thank Martin Thorne for being such a pleasure to write for? Happy New Year!

STUART MABBUTT

	<p>If you are interested in hosting a Body Shop at Home party, please contact LeeAnne on 07967 354014 for more info. You will receive a free makeover and a Body Shop gift.</p>
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CHILDMINDING VACANCIES

Registered childminder (NNEB childcare qualifications) has term-time vacancies. Call Anne on 391303

For hire - outdoor riding arena in Garford, rubber surface, 20 x 40 metres, floodlit. £12.50 inc vat per hour for first horse plus £2.50/hour each additional horse. Jumps available at £5 extra. Strictly by prior arrangement. Tel: 0787 66 85 444

SCHOOL REPORT

The end of the autumn term is always very busy. This year we decided to make things a little different by stepping back in time to relive a day of Victorian education! Staff and children all dressed the part, with many even remembering a basket or brown paper bag for their bread and cheese! *'I really liked the variety of costumes' commented Joseph Cauchi, aged ten.*

The children adapted quickly to forming neat, silent lines of boys and girls, but were startled by a morning hand inspection and the strict classroom discipline!

'It was a fantastic experience. The register was very strict and we had to face forward, stand up and reply 'Yes Mam.' Then we had a hand check and we had to turn our hands to see if we had clean finger-nails.' Adam aged nine

Having welcomed a local lady visitor to school, they settled into a hard morning's focus on the 3 Rs. This included plenty of dictation, rote learning, chanting and handwriting on slates with chalk.

'I reckon Victorian Day was very good because we wrote on slates. We also had to have our feet flat, our backs straight and our arms crossed. This was called posture.' Paul aged ten.

Applying mathematical skills to pounds, shillings and pennies problems proved a challenge! Only the upper class sampled the perils of pen and ink, but they managed to keep tidy enough ready for a second after-play hand inspection. Morning assembly was led by Marcham's 'Venerable sir' – Eddie Shirras whose stern manner and huge child-size Bible was as imposing as his hat! Thankfully, our dutiful children showed their ability to memorise lengthy hymns and extracts from the gospels.

Everyone enjoyed sampling hoops, hopscotch and skipping games at playtime. Many of the children had made their own marbles, cup and ball and skittle games too. Just lining up for drill seemed very daunting for our Upper Babies, but they all came in smiling from the exertion! Lunchtime tables showed an interesting array of old and modern fare, with many children managing to sustain themselves on hardboiled eggs, cheese, plain bread and a trusty apple.

The afternoon had a slightly more relaxed tone, although near silence was maintained for picture lessons, needle-work and instruction and dictation upon the subject of the British Empire! We managed to capture many images of our day using tripods and cameras.

'The Victorian day was excellent. The posture was a bit annoying but the drill and playtime was fun.' Guy Giles

We are also celebrating our current success in being placed eleventh in the national tables for showing most improvement in pupil progress. We are very proud of the teamwork and effort everyone contributes to our happy school. Teresa Sandall, our school caretaker, has recently received two awards – one for helping us maintain the safest play equipment in County schools and another for her sterling work in keeping Marcham so clean and tidy. It is fantastic that her pride and dedication in her work has been recognised beyond our village.

LESLEY CLARK

TALKING SCIENCE

Public lecture: Friday 9 January 2004 7pm

Space weather - from the Sun to the Earth and beyond with Dr Chris Davis, Space Scientist at the CCLRC.

The aurora borealis or northern lights is a wonderful phenomenon that owes its origins to enormous explosions of gas on the surface of the Sun. The lecture follows one such explosion and the journey of the gas cloud across interplanetary space and into the Earth's atmosphere. Recommended age 8 and over. To reserve a free place at any of the lectures, please contact Lisa Faircloth on 01235 445789 or email l.h.m.faircloth@cclrc.ac.uk.

ANSWERS TO DECEMBER CROSSWORD

ACROSS: 1 Tram, 3 Repeated, 7 Rug, 8 Cowl, 10 Moon, 12 Bellringing, 14 Littleworth, 18 Carol singer, 21 Cone, 22 I spy, 24 Orb, 25 Presents, 26 Bean

DOWN: 1 Throb, 2 Angel, 3 Roo, 4 Pal, 5 Thought, 6 Donkey, 8 Curators, 9 Wenceslas, 11 Minority, 13 Eel, 15 Incense, 16 Hoe, 17 Egg-cup, 19 Goose, 20 Robin, 22 Inn, 23 Pas

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