

Have you thought about:

Wrapping up warmly and having a (quick) barbeque? Really! Juicy sausages and hot chocolate all round on a lovely bright and frosty day.

## The Winter Garden

**It's winter. Already! Here are some suggestions for activities inside and out for growing, making, cooking and fun.**

Have you sown:

If you have well drained soil and don't generally suffer from very severe frosts – or mice, try planting **broad beans** now for an early start next year. Good varieties include *Imperial Green Longpod* and *The Sutton*.



They say that **garlic** should be planted in mid-winter and harvested mid-summer. Allowing for a week here or there you should get your garlic in soon. Again, it is best overwintered in well-drained soil. If you don't have this, consider starting the cloves in modules or small pots in a cold frame or greenhouse. *Solent Wight* is a good variety for Scotland.

If you have a **polytunnel** there are masses you can continue to plant and harvest including salads such as mizuna and komatsuna. Or use it to start crops early to avoid the 'hungry gap' around May time.

And don't forget the **flowers**. Winter bedding really keep the garden going. Try viola, wallflower or cyclamen. And get **bulb planting** now for a fabulous show next spring. When I see a good stand of daffs I just want to roll in them out of pure joy. Have resisted so far!



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## Cooking up some warmth...

Still harvesting veg or wondering what to do with stored produce? Try these inexpensive and healthy recipes from the wonderful *Boxing Clever Cookbook* by Jacqui Jones and Joan Wilmot <http://www.theboxingclevercookbook.co.uk>

### Beetroot and Carrot Soup

2 tbsp vegetable oil	1 onion, chopped
1 medium potato, peeled and sliced	450g beetroot, peeled and diced
450g carrots, scrubbed and sliced	1 litre vegetable stock
Pinch nutmeg (optional)	small tub sour cream to garnish

Fry the onions and potato in the oil for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the beetroot and carrots and cook gently, covered, for 20 minutes. Add the stock and nutmeg and bring to the boil then reduce the heat and simmer for a further 10 minutes. Liquidise and add salt and pepper to taste. Ladle into bowls and add a swirl of sour cream.

This would be good served at your winter barbeque!



Have you thought about:

Having a bonfire to burn garden leaves (if you have permission). Then cook marshmallows on sticks in the embers

## Cabbage and Leeks in a Creamy Sauce

50g butter

½ cabbage

3 medium leeks

2 garlic cloves

2 tbsp dry white wine

**For the sauce:** 25g butter

25g plain flour

300ml milk

pinch grated nutmeg

1 tsp grainy mustard

Gently fry cleaned and chopped cabbage, leeks and garlic in the butter for 10 to 15 minutes until soft. Add wine and cook for a further 2 minutes.

To make the sauce, melt the butter in a pan, blend in the flour and cook over a low heat for 2-3 minutes stirring continuously with a wooden spoon. Gradually add the milk stirring all the time. When it has all been added, cook the sauce for 2 minutes continuing to stir. Season to taste with nutmeg, salt and pepper.

Pour the sauce over the veg, stir and serve. Good served with meat. Or sprinkle a generous helping of grated cheese on top for a veggie main course.



**Happy eating.**



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## Where there's a willow...

The months from December until March are ideal times for cutting and replanting willow whips, or using them for weaving. You can use willow to make all sorts of structures either living (they will grow and the new branches are then woven in to strengthen what is already there) or dead (for example sweet pea or runner bean supports).

There are around 18 species of willow native to the UK. You will need to source the right kind if you want to try some weaving. Try ***Salix alba***, ***Salix viminalis*** or ***Salix triandra***. You will find lots of sites on line offering help – or speak to gardening colleagues, not least Nikki Cole of the Walled Garden in Perth (01738 631777).



### Some activities for outdoors...

- It will soon be time to start gathering the foliage, seedheads, teasels, cones, etc you need for **Christmas wreaths and decorations**. A good excuse for a walk. The base of the wreaths could be made using willow whips you have gathered.
- Have a **snowman** competition when the inevitable happens – or create a community snowman with everyone working together. Path clearing will get the blood coursing too!
- Speak to your local **Countryside Ranger**. They may have winter activities that you could join in with

Have you thought about:

Running a Winter Warmer open day for your surrounding community. Raise both funds and your profile and make new friends.

### And for indoors:

- Plant prepared **bulbs** in containers as a winter fundraiser for your project
- Gather all the **photographs** of the garden you have taken throughout the year. Use them as a wonderful reminiscence session and as the basis of a fund-raising calendar which can be created cheaply through a number of websites or as a planning tool for next year
- Invite someone who knows about birds. Talk about what to look out for in winter, identify tracks in the snow, make **bird feeders** and bird food and ensure there is always water available for them
- Pour over **seed catalogues** and plan what is to be grown next year
- Share some **poetry** about gardening, wildlife, winter. Discuss how you felt as they were being read. Discuss memories they brought back. Vote to find out the favourite
- It is time to take **hardwood cuttings** – simple to do and a good idea for some potting shed work, once you have cut them of course
- Make **salt dough** and use to create decorations, beads or presents. Or press leaves, etc into the dough to create patterns. (Dissolve 300g table salt in 200ml warm water. Add 300g plain flour and 1 tbsp vegetable oil and stir until it thickens then knead it into a smooth ball. Flour a surface and then roll the dough to a thickness of around 1cm. Make the shapes you want using cutters or a knife. Or roll into beads and make holes with a cocktail stick so that you can thread them together once they are dried. Bake flat shapes in the lowest possible oven heat for around one hour and beads for around one and a half hours. Turn the oven off after this time but leave them in until they are cool as this helps prevent the dough from cracking. Decorate with water-based paints.



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