

How to fill the Winter/Spring Gap:

So many allotmenters work really hard over this period but ignore resources that they have available. Most plots are just finishing off their last purple sprouting broccoli so, aside from rhubarb and a few hardy lettuces, there isn't much around at the moment. Here are a couple of ideas to help fill the gap:

Nettle soup

- 500g nettles
- 1 tablespoon (extra-virgin) olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 4 tablespoons basmati rice or 2 medium potatoes (coarsely chopped)
- 1L chicken stock (Veg stock is OK but best if strong with leeks, celery etc.)
- Crème fraiche or sour cream to garnish (optional)

Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil. Drop in the nettles, and cook for 1 to 2 minutes until they soften. This will remove most of the sting. Drain in a colander, and rinse with cold water. Trim off any tough stems then chop coarsely.

Heat the olive oil in a saucepan over medium-low heat, and stir in the onion. Cook until the onion has softened and turned translucent, about 5 minutes. Stir in the rice or potatoes, chicken stock and chopped nettles. Bring to the boil then reduce heat to medium-low. Cover and simmer until the rice or potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes. Puree the soup with a blender, and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Add crème fraiche or sour cream to garnish if you wish.

Broad bean tops

Many people remove the young, topmost leaves from broad bean plants to deter blackfly. Most people seem to just throw these away. Why? They're delicious. You can add them to salads and stir fries etc.

Tender and tasty, they complement whatever they're added to. If you've got plenty then have them on their own, simply steamed (only a minute or so) and for a special treat finish them off with a drizzle of olive oil, some parmesan shavings and a crack of black pepper.