



# A NATIONAL SUPPORT ORGANISATION FOR ALLOTMENT HOLDERS AND GARDENERS

[www.swcaa.co.uk](http://www.swcaa.co.uk)

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# NEWSLETTER



Welcome to our Spring newsletter. As a new gardening year begins we are full of positivity and hope for what is to come. With the terrible things happening in our world right now we are very lucky to be able to escape to our own little bit of paradise, whether that be your local community plot, allotment or your own garden. As the SWCAA plot has somewhat shrunk in size to a micro allotment in my garden, I have to resist the urge to plant too much stuff. I have decided to plant only what we really love to eat and use a lot of so this year it will be beetroot, salad crops, runner beans, chillies, tomatoes and lots of different herbs. I

grew a very successful kale crop over winter this year so will definitely make some space for that too. I didn't plant it out until the threat of butterflies had past and it was really the best ever! I have a few boarders in my garden where I grow lots of perennial plants and flowers, but this year I am going to try and grow some edible flowers, good for wildlife and tasty too. I can't wait to get going and feel the warmth of the sun on my face again, its been a pretty miserable few years for us all, so wherever you are and whatever you're growing I wish you the happiest of times and the best of harvests. [Ayesha Hooper, Director ,CEO](#)



## MEMBERSHIP

**Important information for our members** - Here at SWCAA we are experiencing a very high demand for our services, to help us serve you better please take note of the following points.

Please can representatives were at all possible use the excel spreadsheet list that we send you for your renewal, this especially applies to the larger groups. Our admin system is set up to co-inside with this list and is done alphabetically if you could edit this spreadsheet accordingly then that would make life easier at our end. Please only include plot holders on the list that wish to join, if you wish to add a spouse or other family member please list them separately. When adding new members at renewal or throughout the year please provide their full contact details, we cannot accept them without this.

Our bank HSBC, has now decided after 14 years to start charging us for money paid into our account via cheques. Please again where possible can you make your payment to us via bank transfer as this will help massively in reducing those charges. Our bank account details are. Account name, South West Counties Allotment Association CIC, account number, 91683225, sort code 40-09-13.

Due to a large increase in telephone calls, the lines may be busy and you may not be able to get through. The best way to contact us in the first instance is via email at [swcaa.cic@outlook.com](mailto:swcaa.cic@outlook.com)

In the case of more than one person working the same plot, it is recommended that anyone working that plot on a regular basis have their own membership and insurance cover.

If you require any further information regarding the above points, please do not hesitate to contact us.



**Test Your soil** The pH value of your soil determines which crops you can grow. Most crops need a pH of 6.5-7. Soil testing kits are cheap and available at most garden centres. You can change the pH of your soil if you need to. To acidic add lime or to alkaline add sulphur or aluminium sulphate, following the packet instructions carefully.

Alternatively you could always try growing your crops in raised beds filled with good quality compost.



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**Helpful Herbs** - Herbs are a wonderful addition to any allotment plot or garden, with so many different varieties its hard to choose a favourite. Each one has its own uses and characteristics and can contribute to the garden and encourage wildlife throughout the year. Here are some of the best.

**Oregano** - An essential ingredient for Mediterranean cooking it is closely related to mint, thyme, marjoram and basil and like most herbs has a more intense flavour when dried. When allowed to flower it produces beautiful purple flowers which pollinating insects love. It makes great ground cover and happily self-seeds itself all over the place. Its best sprinkled on top of pizzas, a great marinade for lamb and roasted vegetables or delicious fresh or dried on a cucumber and tomato salad. Marjoram is a close relation of oregano but it is a different species. Marjoram has a gentler flavour and is sweeter than oregano and not quite as pungent.

**Bay** - This is a fantastic herb to add to the garden, it is evergreen and when allowed to grow, can reach heights of 12m, making it an ideal nesting spot or shelter for garden birds. It can be clipped and shaped to keep it small. Fresh or dried bay leaves are used in cooking for their distinctive flavour and fragrance. The leaves should be removed from the cooked food before eating. The leaves are often used to flavour soups, stews, braises and pâtés in many countries. The fresh leaves are very mild and do not develop their full flavour until several weeks after picking and drying. A great addition to any bolognese dish or a stew.

**Rosemary** - A beautiful evergreen fragrant plant with light purple flowers that insects, especially bees love. It flowers earlier than most herbs from around the beginning of March and it can easily be grown from heel cuttings just after it finishes flowering. It is native to the Mediterranean and Asia, but is reasonably hardy in cool climates. Lovely of course fresh or dried on a nice leg of lamb but also tasty when added with garlic to roast potatoes.

**Thyme** - This Mediterranean plant loves a free draining soil and probably is the best herb for attracting insects. The Egyptians used it for embalming and the Greeks in their baths and burnt as incense You can use both the leaves and flowers in cooking and it comes in many different varieties from lemon to caraway scented. The fresh form is more flavourful, but storage life is rarely more than a week. However, the fresh form can last many months if carefully frozen.

**Coriander** - You either love it or hate it, but it adds so much flavour to many dishes, from a Thai green curry, Mexican fajita or simply added to a salad. The herby leaves give way to spicy seeds. It is best sown successionaly as it tends to bolt easily, it will over winter in milder areas, dying back then growing again in spring. Another great plant for insects like hoverflies and other small insects.

**Basil** - Another beautiful fragrant herb and essential to the kitchen garden. It is sensitive to cold, and grows best in hot, dry conditions. Basil grows best if sown under glass then planted out in late spring/early summer (when there is little chance of a frost) It does best in well-drained soil with direct exposure to the sun.

Although basil grows best outdoors, it can be grown indoors in a pot and, like most herbs, will do best on a sunny windowsill, kept away from cold drafts. If allowed to go to seed, a basil plant will grow back the next year. Basil plants require regular watering, and can also be propagated reliably from cuttings with the stems of short cuttings suspended for two weeks or so in water until roots develop.

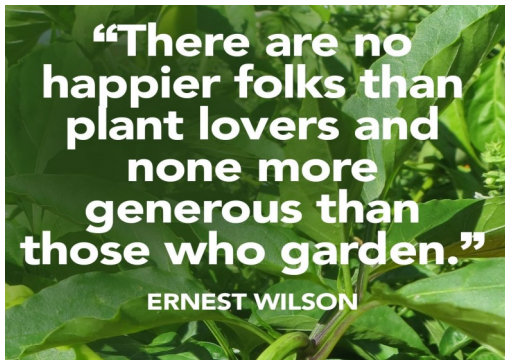
Once a stem produces flowers, foliage production stops on that stem. To prevent this, pinch off any flower stems before they are fully mature. Once allowed to flower, it may produce seed pods containing small black seeds, which can be saved and planted the following year. Picking the leaves off the plant helps promote growth. Basil is recommended as a companion plant to the tomato as it may help to deter pests.

**Mint** - An aromatic and almost exclusively a perennial herb. All mints thrive near pools of water, lakes, rivers, and cool moist spots in partial shade. In general, mints can tolerate a wide range of conditions, and can also be grown in full sun. Mint grows all year round, they are fast-growing and spread rapidly via a network of runners and if left can become invasive. To keep them in check they are best planted above ground in containers.

Mints are supposed to make good companion plants for repelling pests and attracting beneficial ones. They are susceptible to whitefly and aphids.

Fresh leaves should be used immediately or stored up to a few days in plastic bags in a refrigerator. Optionally, leaves can be frozen in ice cube trays. Fresh mint also makes a refreshing tea or iced drink.

**Parsley** - Last but not least probably the most popular of all the herbs. Whether its curly or flat both have a flavour that enhances almost any dish. Parsley grows best in moist, well-drained soil, with full sun. Parsley attracts several species of wildlife. Some butterflies use parsley as a host plant for their larvae. Bees and other nectar-feeding insects also visit the flowers. Birds such as the goldfinch feed on the seed. The two main groups of parsley used as herbs are French, or curly leaf and, Italian, or flat leaf. Flat-leaved parsley is preferred by some gardeners as it is easier to cultivate, being more tolerant of both rain and sunshine, and is said to have a stronger flavour whilst curly leaf parsley is preferred by others because of its more decorative appearance in garnishes. A third type, sometimes grown in southern Italy, has thick leaf stem resembling celery.



ERNEST WILSON

*Wasps may not be the most loved of insects, but did you know they play a key part in pollinating crops and feed on aphids, flies and caterpillars!*



**Edge your beds** - A closer inspection of you vegetable beds or borders will probably reveal a small no mans land between the edge of the bed and your crops. Why not use this wasted space and plant some annual flowers. Not only will they look pretty but they will attract a whole host of insects to pollinate your crops. Go for low growing varieties so as not to cast too much shade over your crops.



Try the nectar rich yellow and white flowers of the poached egg plant, some scented sweet Williams, white alyssum or dwarf marigolds. Just make a shallow drill around the edge of the bed then sprinkle your seeds thinly in the bottom, cover lightly with soil and keep them well watered until the seedlings emerge.

**Jobs for Spring**

**March** - Weed asparagus beds and plant more crowns for future harvests. Prepare runner beans by digging troughs and filling with compost which will add goodness to the soil. Sow a variety of crops like summer cabbage, broccoli and leeks in a nursery bed ready for transplanting in April.



**April** - Start sowing varieties of vegetable which are suitable for container growing such as spinach, peas and beetroot. Continue to plant out chitted potatoes, second earlies can go in at the beginning of April, maincrop varieties towards the end. Put up supports for your beans and use twiggy sticks to support any emerging pea crops.

**May** - Sow sweetcorn direct outside after the risk of frost has passed, plant in blocks to maximize pollination. Harden off young outdoor plants like squashes, pumpkins, tomatoes and chillies ready for planting at the end of June. Keep up with successional sowing to provide you with a constant supply of tasty crops.

*Did you know that blight cannot survive in soil or fully composted plant material. It over-winters in living plant material and is spread on the wind the following year. If you had blight the previous year it will not happen again unless your plants have wet leaves in summer.*

**Grow some Soya** - With the current trend for eating a more plant based diet, why not try growing some soya beans, also known as edamame beans. A member of the legume family originating from South-East Asia, these beans usually need a long, hot summer of 20–30°C, although some newer varieties can cope in cooler conditions. They are an excellent source of protein and can either be picked and cooked when still green, or left to mature, then dried and stored. Soya beans can be sown indoors or outdoors, in May or June, but outdoors is best once the soil has warmed up in late spring, ideally under fleece or cloches.



They like a warm, sunny, sheltered spot, and fertile, free-draining soil. Sow the seeds 5cm deep, 15cm apart, in rows 45cm apart. Cover the surrounding soil with a thick layer of mulch, such as garden compost, to help retain moisture. Plants can grow up to 1.2m (4ft) tall and are usually self-supporting but a few supports can help especially in windy conditions. Hoe around plants regularly and keep them well watered. Harvest the beans either unripe as edamame beans or fully ripe as dried soya beans. They can either be shelled or cooked in the pods, and must be boiled for at least 10 minutes to destroy any toxins. Ripe soya beans are ready for harvesting from late September, when the leaves have dried out and you are left with lots of hanging pods.

The pods remain weatherproof during autumn, so you can pick as required.

The beans are easy to store on the plants or in airtight containers.

**Soya beans must not be eaten raw – boil them for at least 10 minutes to get rid of toxins.**

**SWCAA members area** - All our members have access to a whole host of information via the members area on our website. Here you will find information on a wide range of subjects including eviction, self-management, the discounted seed schemes, keeping chickens plus much more. Simply go to the top right hand corner on the website [swcaa.co.uk](http://swcaa.co.uk) and click on the key. Log in using your email address and membership number. You must have previously registered your email address with us to use this facility. If you have any problems with access please contact us.

**The ultimate chicken stew delicious and any time of the year.** You can add any and as many vegetables as you like to this. Place a whole chicken in a slow cooker with a few peppercorns a couple of bay leaves, two chicken stock cubes and some dried tarragon or fresh or dried rosemary and thyme. Cover with water and cook on high for about 4-5 hours until meat falls off the bone. If you don't have a slow cooker place in a large casserole dish in the oven cover with a lid or foil and cook at 200°C until meat is very tender. Chop up 1 large onion, as much garlic as you like, a couple of sticks of celery as your base, then add a leek, courgette, potato cut into cubes, butternut squash cubed, carrot, cauliflower, or broccoli, kale or shredded cabbage. Add a little olive oil to a heavy based pan and sweat it all down gently until soft. Take the chicken out of slow cooker/oven, strain the amazing stock and add to the veg. You might want to crumble in another stock cube...when the potatoes and squash are cooked, add shredded chicken and a tin of sweetcorn if you fancy it and heat through...season well and add some chopped fresh parsley. Proper comfort food :)



**Growing strawberries from seed** - Growing strawberry plants from seed is more difficult than simply buying plants, but, its far more rewarding. Many strawberry seeds need a cold spell to encourage germination. Simply wrap your seeds, put them in an airtight container, and place them in a freezer for about 2 weeks. Remove the seeds from the freezer and leave them in the jar or container as they gradually warm up to room temperature. Once your seeds are at room temperature and are ready to plant take a seed tray and fill with a good quality seed compost to a depth of about one half of an inch and moisten the soil. Sprinkle your seeds over the soil and cover lightly with more soil.

Ensure that the seeds are not completely covered and are exposed to light.

Keep them indoors in on a warm bright sunny windowsill and keep the soil moist. In two to three weeks the strawberry seeds should germinate. If the strawberry seeds sprout too close to each other, thin them when they are between 1 and 2 inches tall, keeping the biggest and most vigorous seedlings. Gently transfer the strawberry seedlings to larger containers or pots after they gain their 3rd leaves. Harden off and plant outside once the weather allows.

**Quick Strawberry jam**

150g sugar, 200g strawberries, 1 juiced lemon.

Hull the strawberries and chop into pieces.

Place the sugar in a heavy bottomed pan over a medium heat and add the lemon juice.

Increase the heat and continue to cook until the sugar has dissolved and is bubbling gently.

Carefully add the strawberries and stir gently. Continue to cook until the strawberries have broken down and the jam has thickened. Transfer to a bowl or sterilized jars and leave to cool.



**Countryfile Plant Britain** wants to get everyone planting in a big, ambitious two-year project where we can all do our bit in the battle against climate change and to help wildlife and our own well being. The goal of planting 750,000 trees – one for every UK primary school starter in 2020. From inner city estates to some of Britain's most breath-taking landscapes, it doesn't matter where you live. And however small a space you've got to plant, And while they are starting off with trees, over the next two years they will also be looking at fruit, veg and flowers. So

whatever you plant, be sure to log it on their interactive map. <https://www.plantbritain.co.uk/>

And don't miss out on their special planting ballot which gives you the chance to plant trees with Countryfile presenters at Woodland Trust sites across Britain.



<https://www.facebook.com/swcaaallotments/>

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