

A NATIONALLY RECOGNISED SUPPORT ORGANISATION FOR ALLOTMENTS AND GARDENERS www.swcaa.co.uk

ISSUE 31 Summer 2019 **Welcome to the summer edition of our newsletter..** With summer fast approaching I am definitely missing the SWCAA allotment not a seed sown this year which feels very odd after 13 or so years of growing produce. On the plus side it has given me more time to focus on the garden at home and making it as wildlife friendly as I possibly can. It is now full of insect friendly plants and the pleasant sound of happily buzzing bees. I did notice a little tomato plant that has grown up in the decking where the greenhouse used to be so I will focus on nurturing it and maybe it will reward me with a few lovely tomatoes which along with the runner beans and beetroot I know I'm going to miss.

SWCAA is as busy as ever welcoming new members from across the country and being involved in the creation of some new allotment sites locally and further a field. This is always a good sign and shows that the demand for allotments is still going strong. If you are in the process of setting up a new site or an interesting project and would like it featured in our newsletter and on the website then just drop us a line. Here's hoping for another heatwave this year and happy gardening to you all... **Ayesha Hooper, Director/CEO**

Growing in hanging baskets...If you are short on space, only have a small plot or garden then growing fruit and vegetable in hanging baskets could be the answer. There are quite a few crops that will work well in a basket and they can be placed within easy reach of the kitchen for fresh pickings when you need them. Choose the largest basket possible for the space you have available, ones with holes mean you can plant through the sides as well and gives a fuller look to the finished basket.



There are plants you can buy that are specially bred to be grown in this way but ordinary lettuce, peas, beans, cucumbers and even beetroot work just as well. Place the basket in an area that is not to exposed to very hot sun nor somewhere to shaded, they will need to be fed and watered frequently, especially in very dry weather. Some good plants to start with are Strawberries like **Toscana** which is a good cropper right through the summer, blackberry **black cascade**, a thornless variety that can give you up to 1.3 kg of large, sweet berries from a single hanging basket and raspberry **ruby falls** is a compact summer-fruiting plant with trailing stems, ideal for growing in hanging baskets. An easy to grow and low-maintenance thornless raspberry produces crops that are ready to pick from June onwards, and are delicious when eaten fresh as well as for cooking.



Good tomato varieties include **cherry cascade**, a prolific cherry tomato yielding delicious small sweet fruits, **hundreds and thousands** vigorous tumbler and easy to grow produces hundreds of tiny fruit.

Chillies are great fun to grow and an SWCAA favourite try chilli pepper **basket** of fire, a colourful variety producing lots of small, hot chillies which mature from deep purple through yellow and orange to a bright shade of scarlet red, creating a fabulous display.

This variety shows good tolerance to cool weather and will continue to fruit outside well into the autumn.

You could also try planting up a basket of lovely herbs too, marjoram, parsley, chives and thyme are just a few of the many to try.

Excellent Epsom Salts... Not only are they good for us but good for plants too! A magnesium rich mineral Epsom salts encourage healthy crops and strong leafy growth and also prevent yellowing of the leaves, it's fantastic for your brassicas and other leafy crops as well as tomatoes and fruit trees. Before applying Epsom salt, however, it's a good idea to test your soil to determine whether it's deficient of magnesium. Also be aware that many plants, like beans and leafy vegetables, will happily grow and produce in soils with low levels of magnesium. Plants like roses, tomatoes and peppers, on the other hand, require lots of magnesium, and therefore, are more commonly watered with Epsom salts.



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THE MODERN, FRIENDLY VOICE OF THE ALLOTMENT MOVEMENT



Focus on Fennel.... Originally of Mediterranean origin fennel is easy to grow and low maintenance. It's soft fern like foliage will produce yellow flowers in summer which attract many useful pollinators to the allotment. Fennel can be sown direct or into pots where they will stay because as a member of the carrot family it does not like its roots disturbed. Sow seeds thinly from March to July and cover if the weather is cold, when seedlings are large enough to handle thin to about 12inch apart. Good varieties to try include giant bronze,

this has purple leaves and yellow flower heads and purpureum, a purple fennel which produces fine blue-grey leaves. Harvesting is easy, the leaves can be picked and used fresh or you could let the plant go to seed and once the seed head has turned brown and dried, cut and shake into a brown paper bag with a few tiny ventilation holes. After a week or so once fully dried the fragrant seeds can be stored in an air tight container ready for use in cooking. Florence fennel also belongs to the same carrot family but is different in that it produces large bulbous stems which can be eaten raw, grated into salads, steamed or baked in the oven. Sow in the same way as the herb but earth up around the base as they develop to maintain their flavour. One of the main problems with this type of fennel is its prone to bolting. To help prevent this happening keep plants well watered.

Jobs to do in July, August and September

JULY—With the longest day now passed and the days getting shorter there is still time to sow lettuces, chicory, endives, and other salad leaves as well as peas, French beans, spring onions, beetroot, and carrots.
JOBS FOR JULY— Weed regularly, keep on hoeing as weeds grow just as fast as everything else will be on the plot. Water regularly, this will help prevent your crops from bolting. Certain vegetables have a natural tendency to flower and go to seed. Lettuces, rocket, spinach, cauliflowers, and fennel are particularly prone. Once your harvest is over cut down broad beans to just above the surface of the soil and compost them. The roots of the plants are rich in nitrogen. Dry out garlic, and onions. Choose a dry spell of weather, lift the bulbs and lay them out in the sun, the longer you can leave them to dry out the longer they will keep. Continue pruning side shoots on grape vines and if needed thin out the fruit. Removing some of the foliage will increase sun exposure and speed up ripening.
AUGUST—There are a few crops that you can still sow or plant out now for harvesting this year. Sow salad leaves, spring onions, carrots, Swiss chard and spinach. You should have some vacant space on the plot once broad beans, and onions are finished to plant out overwintering crops such as Brussels sprouts, spring cabbages, and winter cauliflowers.

JOBS FOR AUGUST—Harvest crops regularly. At this time of year, courgettes, runner beans, and French beans grow very quickly. Check them every day and harvest runner beans regularly, before they grow too large and become stringy. Feed pumpkins and winter squashes once a week with high-potash tomato fertilizer. Lift them off the soil on to bricks or planks of wood to stop them rotting. Propagate strawberries. Strawberry runners that have pegged down into pots to root should be ready for transplanting now. Plant in a sunny position, in ground that has had plenty of organic material dug in, and keep them well watered. Plastic sheeting stretched over the bed will also conserve warmth and moisture.

JOBS FOR SEPTEMBER—Now is a good time to plant overwintering autumn onions sets. Prepare the ground first so the sets go in easily, and add an all-purpose fertilizer. Bury the sets about 7-10cm apart with their tips at or just below the surface of the soil. Transplant spring cabbages to their final growing position. Make sure that they go into ground that has been well firmed down. As gaps appear after harvesting now is also a good time for sowing green manures. Phacelia, annual ryegrass and field beans will overwinter well. Earth up Brussel sprouts ready for any strong winter winds. Remove leaves from squashes and pumpkins so the sun can ripen the fruits. Check if your sweetcorn crop is ready to harvest. If the tassels have turned black or brown, peel back the outer leaves and push your nail into the sweetcorn. If the juice is milky then it is ready to eat, if the juice is clear then leave a bit longer.

Selling Allotment Produce

There is increasing interest in locally and naturally grown food. In urban areas especially, the most important sites for actual production of local natural food are allotment sites. By renting an allotment garden, people can get direct access to *food without food miles* by growing it themselves. The key legal restriction is contained in the Allotments Act 1922, whereby there is a general prohibition on any trade or business being conducted on the allotment garden or any part thereof. An allotment garden must, by definition, "be wholly or mainly cultivated for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by the occupier or his family". So allotment gardens can't operate as market gardens, or nurseries. Furthermore, carrying out any form of trade, however small, on the allotment site could also be interpreted as being in breach of this law. There is however, no restriction on the distribution, by sale or otherwise, of a certain proportion of the plot holder's crop. It may depend on the rules of your site. The general rule on sites is that you could sell a percentage deemed to be your surplus crops. Produce for sale is allowed on allotment land with various rulings from 10% to 30% of output. In short there is no reason not to minimise waste and sell your produce from your plot as long as you don't build a commercial empire out of it!

SWCAA NEWSLETTER



Tips for a pest free plot...You may not always see the culprit but the damage is all to obvious.

Know your enemy—If your not confident at identifying uncommon pests, there are plenty of good books on the subject as well as a whole host of information and pictures of possible suspects online.

Go hunting—Get into the habit of walking round your plot daily if you can on bug watch so you can catch them in the act before to much damage is done. Pests are very good at hiding so getting down in the dirt, checking under leaves and any fallen debris may reveal the culprit!



Take rapid action—Once you know who is to blame quickly decide on how you will deal with it. You have a few options here.

The hands on approach, a flick or squish can be quick and effective although not everyone is great with insects. Greenfly can be wiped off the tips and stems of plants with finger and thumb and the odd slug or snail picked by hand.

Barriers, If a pest cannot get to your crop it can't eat it (well that's the rule of thought anyway) You can use a fine protection netting such as Enviromesh or even fleece which can prevent event the smallest pests getting through, great for cabbage/carrot root fly, aphids and leafhoppers as well as butterflies and birds. You can leave this in place for the life of the crop or just during the periods of worst attack. Physical barriers can include sharp grit or crushed eggshells laid about an inch thick or copper tape and rings which work well against adult vine weevil, cabbage root fly and slugs and snails.

Traps, these work by trapping the pest or luring them in so you can then collect and destroy them. Trap slugs and snails with a jar filled 2 thirds full with beer or sugary water buried in the ground with about a 1/2 inch lip left above the soil. A half grapefruit skin can work well too.

Biological controls, you can purchase a variety of natural predators on line which are easy to apply. They have the advantage over chemicals in that the target pest is the only one effected and cannot become immune to attack as can be the case with pesticides. This option is also better when used on edible crops. You can find treatments for a whole host of pests online, including ants, carrot and cabbage root fly, sawfly, caterpillars, vine weevils and slugs.

A good way to try and avoid a build up of pests in the first place is to use crop rotation. Split a large plot into three or four sections and move crops around these sections each year according to the family of plants they belong to. On smaller plots take a note of where each crop is grown and do your best not to grow it again there for another year or two. Use rotation to limit the risk of soil-borne pests such as cabbage and carrot fly, root aphids and potato eel worm as well as many plant damaging diseases like clubroot. Encouraging natural predators onto the plot will also help with pests, birds, frogs, slow worms, ladybirds, hoverflies and lacewings can all help so try planting lots of wildlife friendly plants and flowers on the plot too.



Get yourself a grant with Tesco...Gale Street Organic Gardeners Association in Barking Essex have been lucky enough to secure a grant from the Tesco Bags of help scheme. They used the money to install a large shed which will be fitted out with

solar lighting a composting toilet and a rainwater system. Bags of Help funds local projects in England, Wales and Scotland that benefit their community. Grants of up to £4,000 are available. To find out more visit https://www.groundwork.org.uk/sites/ tescocommunityscheme

HAPPINESS IS...



seeing a bee on the flower you planted

Register your allotment site with SWCAA - Please register your allotment site and association with us and we will add you to our National register.

This register is also a guide to the allotments in your area and contains information about the site and how to get in touch if you want a plot. We hope to build a comprehensive guide to all the allotment sites across the country. A registration form and full details can be found on our website https://www.swcaa.co.uk/find-site



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POLYTUNNELS AND PLANNING PERMISSION

This is an issue we keep coming back to and is something we get asked about a lot. "The Council have told me I need planning permission to put a polytunnel on my plot" In general you do not need planning permission for sheds, greenhouses, summerhouses or polytunnels. There may be some restrictions if you are in a national park, conservation area or area of outstanding natural beauty. So the answer is generally "no", at least for domestic tunnels (not large commercial ventures). The ordinary allotment tunnel should not be more than 3m high (or more than 4.2m at the ridge) or more than about 18m long and about 4.5 m wide at base in order to avoid planning



permission problems. SWCAA have just been successful in challenging North Devon District Council who were insisting that a plot holder needed permission and that this was going to cost around £80. The allotments are run by the Town Council but they take their guidance from the District Council. After many lengthy e-mails back and forth they admitted that planning would not be necessary. A polytunnel is not a permanent structure so if you are told that you need permission simply quote the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Section 55 (e) which states "the use of land for the purpose of agriculture or forestry and the use of any building occupied together with the land so used" does not constitute development" so does not need planning permission. Many people across the country are paying councils for planning permission un-necessarily because they are not aware of the laws and are baffled by council jargon...Stick to your guns and if you need any further advice please contact SWCAA.



Nettles...something we all have somewhere on our plots or in our gardens, historically they have been used to give flavour to traditional ales and are still occasionally used by brewers today. Why not have a go at making your own nettle beer if you want to give the recipe a more beery like flavour than add a few hops to the boil. For a more fiery taste try adding a teaspoon of chopped ginger.

You will need: 2/lb nettle leaves Zest and juice of two unwaxed lemons 1lb demerara sugar Ale or brewers yeast.

Method

Pick the young leaves towards the top of the nettle (using gloves for this is a good idea) make sure you remove any bugs.

Wash the leaves and add to a pan with the lemon zest and bring to the boil with 157floz,4.5L of water or as much as your pan can hold. It doesn't smell to great at this stage but don't be put off. Simmer gently for about 10 minutes.

Strain the liquid into a clean bucket and add the sugar and juice from both lemons and any remaining water. Stir to dissolve the sugar and cover with a lid or clean towel.

When the liquid has cooled add the yeast and put the cover back on and leave to ferment for three days before bottling into sterilized bottles. Carefully pour the liquid into the bottles, the beer will continue to ferment and can be quite lively so expandable plastic bottles are best. Release the gas regularly.

The beer will be ready to drink one week after bottling and at its best a few weeks later. It doesn't keep for a great length of time. This doesn't taste like regular beer, more like a substitute for a lager but

with an earthy tone it can also be mixed with lemonade or soda for a refreshing summer drink.





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