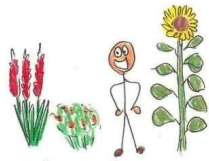




The secret to my "green thumb":



Planting SO MANY plants no one can tell that half of them died.

Joseph Tyshonievich

**Doing our bit for the environment.** With thousands of members across the UK that can create a lot of paperwork! Here at SWCAA headquarters we are doing our best to cut down on the amount of paperwork we have to deal with and in some instances go paper free. We would ask all our groups and individual members to consider emailing us with your renewal details (we can then choose what we need to print) and paying us via bank transfer where you can as this would help us massively.



**Crops to sow over the coming months** There are many crops you can begin to sow now but you don't need to panic as there is still plenty of time to get this done. If you have the room and right conditions to start your seeds now and the time to look after them and keep them going then below is list of the most popular ones to get you started. If not wait a month or so they will always catch up.



**Aubergines**, will benefit from an early sowing in February, as quite slow growing, but can also be sown up until April. Start them off in a warm environment, ideally between 18 and 21 degrees.

**Cucumbers**, choose a good all round variety like Telegraph for large, firm and tasty crop. Sow seeds on their side to prevent rotting.

**Chillies**, there are so many varieties to choose from but Cayenne and Jalapeno chillies are good all rounder's and ideal for the beginner.

**Tomatoes**, again so many varieties to choose from but Gardeners Delight and Moneymaker are the most popular or for something more unusual try Tigerella.

**Broad beans**, sow April and beginning of May, 5cm deep and 15cm, don't forget to stake taller varieties.

**Peas**, seeds can be sown from February to May in a flat bottomed trench 6cm apart and 5cm deep, mice love these so don't forget to protect them.

**Pumpkins and winter squash**, sow seeds on their sides in pots of compost from mid April to May, harden off well before finally planting out.

**Beetroot**, sow from April up until the beginning of June for continuous crops.

**Lettuce**, this can be sown throughout the year, sow seeds thinly in rows about every fortnight for continuous crops.

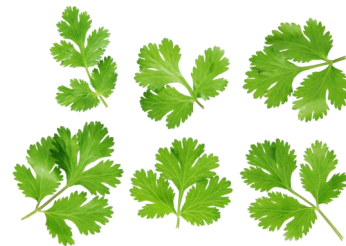
Herbs, nothing tastes better than fresh herbs picked from the garden, plot, window box or a pot on your windowsill, try basil, parsley, oregano and chives, not only are these tasty but chives produce beautiful flowers which can be used in salads and bees love them.



**Carrots**—Did you know that purple was the original colour of carrots? Orange only became popular in the 17th century.

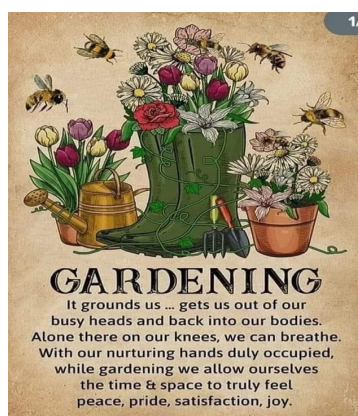
Carrots can be tricky to grow, from germination problems to fighting off the pesky bugs that seem to love them. By taking a few precautions you should be guaranteed a bumper crop. After sowing cover the ground immediately with fleece to keep off carrot root fly. Carrots do not like recently manured soil which causes them to fork. Thin your seedlings on a cloudy day and water after, this outwits the carrot fly which is attracted by smell. From early April all varieties of carrot can be sown. Sow every three to four weeks for a continuous supply, water well in dry weather and weed regularly.

**Coriander** - This versatile herb adds interest to a great number of dishes. A great cut and come again crop the leaves will regrow up to four times after cutting.



Sow indoors 0.5cm deep into small pots of compost, water, cover with clingfilm or a clear plastic bag (which you can remove when the shoots appear) and place on a warm windowsill. Harvest leaves as needed.

Sow outdoors in a prepared seed bed in warm well-drained soil. Sow thinly 0.5cm deep. When seedlings appear, usually after around 14-21 days thin to around 20cm apart. Keep plants well watered until they are established. Coriander is prone to going to seed especially in dry weather so sow crops every 2-3 weeks for a continuous supply.



1/ **So you've got yourself an allotment..** where to start? Having an allotment is hard work, you get out what you put in and this is where the work begins! Here are some SWCAA tips for beginners.

If you have taken on a plot that has been abandoned for a while make sure you clear any rubbish that's been left behind. If there's a lot, it may be worth asking your association if they run the site for help or contact the council to see whether they will collect it.

Begin clearing weeds as soon as possible. This is best done during the winter months. If left until spring you'll be losing out on precious sowing and planting time.

Use a strimmer to tidy unwanted growth or grass. Weed killers are generally not encouraged but for some of the more persistent perennial weeds it might be the only option. Leafy vegetation can be successfully composted. You could also consider a no dig garden technique. You can work a plot with no

more than a fork, spade, hoe, rake, and trowel. A ball of string and two sticks or a scaffold board will help give you a straight line for digging or sowing. The hoe is a very useful tool to have, use this often on the paths that you use to walk across the plot, and round your plants: little weeds are easier to deal with! Beyond this it is up to you to choose as you gain experience.

Try not to tackle the whole plot at once, especially if it's a full size plot. By doing a bit at a time you won't become overwhelmed. Simply cover any areas that aren't needed with cardboard or black plastic bags to stop weed growth. Old carpet is not advisable.

Make sure you check for wildlife, many insects and creatures like slow worms and frogs make allotments their home. Consider leaving a small section to grow wild to provide wildlife with shelter, they will benefit you in the long run by ridding your plot of pests like slugs, snails and aphids.

Start by digging over the soil and removing any weeds and roots, breaking up the soil as best you can as this aerates the soil and will aid drainage. If the ground is compacted double digging (the depth of two spades) is recommended. Buy a soil testing kit which will give you the Ph content of the soil and let you know what, if any fertiliser, soil improver you may need to add. Once the hard work is done, you can then move on to the fun bit, sowing and planting. Rake the soil to a fine tilth for sowing small seeds. You can use the handle of the rake, or a garden cane, to make a small straight groove for sprinkling the seeds in, and cover them with the fine soil by using the back of the rake. If the ground is dry or rough, and you can afford to take the trouble, sprinkle handfuls of compost along the drill and then set the seeds in that to get them started. Water seed drills before you plant the seed.

Make yourself a compost heap, most garden waste is suitable, and a free-standing heap works perfectly well. It is best to stand it on the ground to keep it moist and allow drainage. Leaves of all sorts, chopped-up hard stems, grass if it is mixed with the rest, and kitchen waste can be used (but not meat scraps or other cooked food as it can attract rats). Its all in the layers, don't add too many grass clippings as this can make the heap very wet and smelly, but don't let it dry out. Nature will hopefully do the rest.

Avoid the white roots of perennial weeds like couch grass and convolvulus. There is no need to mix in soil or manure, earth or lime, or additives of any sort.

Rotation of your crops is important as it prevents any one crop exhausting the soil and causing a build up of pests and diseases.

Just follow the circuit round - split the land into three.

**Roots:** (do not add manure or lime) include beetroot, carrot, chicory, parsnips, potatoes, Jerusalem artichokes, salsify

**Brassicas:** (you can add well-rotted manure) include broccoli, sprouts, cauliflower, cabbage, kohlrabi, kale, swedes, radishes, and turnips

**Others:** (add plenty of well-rotted manure when digging) includes beans, peppers, celery and celeriac, endive, cucumbers, leeks, spinach beet, lettuce, marrows, onions, tomatoes, sweet corn, peas, and spinach

A general-purpose fertiliser or blood, fish and bone can be used for all of them

Sometimes this rotation cannot be worked out exactly, if a large area is taken for potatoes, for example.

Do not forget the flowers and fruit - nasturtiums are tasty in salad (flowers or leaves) and the newly formed seeds preserved in wine vinegar are like capers. Flowers for cutting and to attract insects and butterflies are a great idea too.

Satisfaction is guaranteed: Allotments meet one of our basic needs- finding a patch of land and growing your own food is incredibly rewarding. But, they do far more than that - they let us grow beautiful things, let us work steadily with nature in this fast-moving age, providing solitude, peace and a place to think and unwind, they let us reconnect with the seasons and the soil. They also bring us into contact with other gardeners, who will offer advice and help.

Never hesitate to ask questions, or to seek help and advice. SWCAA are here to advise if we can. email [swcaa.cic@outlook.com](mailto:swcaa.cic@outlook.com)

**Successful Spinach** - Once loved by Popeye spinach is a very versatile vegetable and is one of the best sources of vitamins A,B and C and is higher in iron and calcium than most other greens. Originating from Iran it wasn't introduced to England until around the 18th century. Spinach grows best in cool weather so its best to sow it in the Spring or Autumn. It is essential to sow at the correct time as the seeds are sensitive to ground temperatures. Spinach like chard and beetroot prefer a neutral to alkaline soil, to ensure good growth add well rotted compost about a week before sowing. Spinach doesn't like to be moved so direct sowing is best, sow thinly at about 2cm apart. Keep the seedlings moist and water regularly in dry spells. It will take about 6 weeks from sowing to harvest Pick the leaves regularly to keep the crop producing and prevent it from bolting. In mild, humid weather the crop can be prone to spinach downy mildew, to help prevent this, ensure there is plenty of space around the plants to improve air circulation. Water at the base of the plants avoiding the leaves and choose mildew resistant varieties. Pigeons are partial to spinach so cover plants with fleece or netting but be sure to secure it properly to prevent birds becoming entangled. Baby spinach leaves are delicious added to salads, larger leaves shredded can be added to all manner of dishes.



**Spinach and ricotta stuffed pasta shells**

Ingredients 175g giant pasta shells, 1 tbsp olive oil, 2 cloves garlic, crushed, a pinch dried chilli flakes (optional)  
 1 tin of plum tomatoes, 1 large clove of garlic, one red chilli deseeded and chopped,  
 1 tbsp tomato puree, 2 tsp Worcestershire sauce, 2 tsp smoked paprika. Salt and Pepper. 200g spinach, chopped, 125g ricotta, ½ lemon, zested, 25g parmesan (or

veggie alternative), finely grated.

**Method**

Heat the oven to 190C/fan 170C/ gas 5. For the tomato sauce add the plum tomatoes, garlic, chilli if using, tomato puree, Worcestershire sauce and smoked paprika in a blender and blitz. Season and set aside.

Cook the shells following pack instructions, but drain when they are still a little al dente as they will cook more in the oven. Heat the olive oil in a pan and gently cook the garlic (and chilli, if using) for 2-3 minutes. Stir in the spinach and cook until wilted. Stir in the ricotta and lemon zest, then season well. Spoon the tomato sauce evenly across the bottom of a baking dish. Use a teaspoon to pack each shell with the spinach and ricotta mixture, then put into the dish, making sure the shells are evenly spaced apart. Any left-over mixture can be put on top. Sprinkle with parmesan and bake for 20-25 minutes or until bubbling and golden. Serve with a crisp green salad.

The perfect pumpkin it takes a lot to get a pumpkin plant to a full fruiting size, to help achieve optimum growth why not try making a pumpkin pit. A pumpkin pit is basically an underground compost bin which is packed full of lovely organic nutrients which will help give your pumpkins the fuel they need to grow. You will need to dig a pit in a sunny spot at least 60 cm wide and deep ( you can build a raised box if you prefer) Fill with the best organic matter you can find, home made compost or well rotted manure is ideal and finish off with a layer of garden soil.



Plant your pumpkins in the middle and water in well. The plant will soon get its roots down into the rich soil below. You can encourage the trailing stems to re-root into the rich soil below which will help produce and even better crop.

**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!



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