

A NATIONWIDE SUPPORT ORGANISATION FOR ALLOTMENT HOLDERS AND GARDENERS

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Welcome to our Spring newsletter and a warm welcome to all our new members. Spring is starting to appear, with blossoms and daffodils a plenty but as is the norm I expect there will be quite a bit more winter to come yet! It was pretty much of a non starter as far as summer was concerned here in Devon last year, I'm really hoping we will get some lovely long sunny days this year, we live in hope!



If you would like to be included in our future newsletters the please send any pictures of your site or produce, hints, tips, articles, recipes or anything else you think may be of interest to our members to swcaa.cic@outlook.com we would love to hear from you.

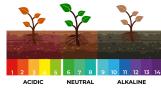
Ayesha Hooper, Director/CEO.



Spot on Soil, getting it right - The pH value of your soil determines which crops you can grow. There are six main types of soil: chalky, clay, loamy, peaty, sandy and silty. To test your soil, you need to take a look at it and feel it. Add water and try rolling it between your hands. Observe how your soil looks and feels, and whether it's sticky, gritty, slimy or friable. Friable soil means that it easily crumbles or breaks apart when lightly squeezed. This means you have a loose, well-structured soil with good aeration that is ideal for plant root growth. It is a desirable soil condition where large soil clumps can be easily broken into smaller pieces with minimal pressure.

In the UK pH ranges from 3.5 (strongly acid) to 8.5 (strongly alkaline), with 7 being neutral. Most fruit and vegetables prefer soils that have a neutral to slightly acidic pH. Most crops need a pH of 6.5-7. Collect a small soil sample, mix it with distilled water, and then use a pH test kit (either a liquid solution with colour-changing indicators or a digital pH meter) to measure the acidity or alkalinity of the soil by comparing the colour change to a chart or reading the digital display; for a basic check, you can also add white vinegar to a soil sample - if it bubbles significantly, the soil is likely alkaline. 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 soils add lime for alkaline soil 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. The soil's pH can also affect certain diseases such as clubroot, which attacks brassicas and prefers acid soil, while alkaline soil encourages scab on potatoes.



Key points when testing soil pH: Take soil samples from various areas of the allotment or garden. Avoid areas that have recently been treated with

fertiliser, compost or other materials, as these can affect the reading. Always use distilled water when testing the soil to avoid introducing additional minerals that could affect the reading.

Testing the PH of your soil is important because different plants thrive at different PH levels, knowing your soil means you can chose the right plants for the right spot giving you better end results. Soil pH effects how readily plants can access essential nutrients.



A Quick Guide to Growing Kale - This nutritious delicious crop is a must for any allotment holder as it is one of the easiest brassicas to grow, it is cold hardy and will grow in almost any soil. Sow indoors in March in trays of compost and keep warm and moist, a temperature of approximately 15 °C is ideal. Transplant into larger modules when large enough to handle. Gradually accustom young plants to outside conditions before planting out 45cm apart. Kale is versatile, tasty and packed full of vitamins, go for the tender young leaves. Young plants can

be treated as cut and come again and once you have eaten the main leaves, side shoots will form in late winter. This is an ideal crop for the beginner, just keep the soil moist and weed free and firm plants in well after planting as they do not like loose soil. Prevent wind damage by staking taller varieties and always cover with netting to keep off butterflies and pigeons. Delicious steamed, boiled or stir fried or try cooked with diced smoked bacon, garlic and cream.



THE FRIENDLY, MODERN DAY VOICE OF THE ALLOTMENT MOVEMENT

Ugly veg is beautiful - As keen growers of vegetables of all kinds, allotment holders have always know that it doesn't have to look perfect to taste amazing. The vegetables we buy in the



supermarket all conform to strict standards because they say that is what the public wants. A study showed that 75% of people would buy ugly veg if it was cheaper than regular produce...TV chef Jamie Oliver took up the cause and champions ugly veg. Jamie said: "If most Brits had half an idea of the amount going to waste, they'd be snapping up ugly veg by the trolley load. "This is perfectly good food that could and should be eaten by humans." There's no difference whatsoever in taste or nutritional value. In fact for some reason ugly veg tastes so much better. After successful trial most supermarkets now stock ugly/wonky veg. But for those of us who grow our own we can enjoy it everyday.

Discounted herb plants for SWCAA members.

Fyne Herbs are a specialist online seller of garden ready herb plants and herb plant gift collections. Themed herb gift collections include biodegradable pots, wooden labels, herb snips and growing guide.

Fyne's mission is to educate and inspire gardeners to grow their own herbs for culinary, medicinal and cosmetic use and their bee and butterfly attracting awesomeness. They would like to encourage people to send living herbs, not dying flower bouquets as gifts. If you would like to purchase from Fyne Herbs they are offering SWCAA members a 15% discount using code SWCAA15. (excludes P&P) UK wide delivery is available. To see more about the plants they offer visit their website fyneherbs.co.uk



Getting your first allotment - Every allotment plot has potential...It's down to you to uncover it. Taking on your first allotment plot is a thrilling experience, but to the beginner it can also seem like a daunting task.

For many people they will have waited many months or even years to get their hands on their very own allotment plot. When you finally get the call to tell you a plot is available your thoughts turn towards what seeds to buy, bountiful harvests, must-have tools and all the fruit and vegetables you are going to grow.

Our best advice would be to not get carried away and start spending lots of money on things you think you might need (we know it's easier said then done).

Starting an allotment is not easy, you may be lucky and get to take on a plot that is in good order but more often than not, plots have been abandoned for a long time and have become overgrown and full of unwanted rubbish.

No matter what you find try not to be put off and think about tackling it a little at a time. Select an area you think you can happily manage to start with and try and cover the rest with some black plastic sheeting, weed suppressant membrane if you can get it or cardboard.

This will help keep the weeds at bay and stop the plot over whelming you when the weather warms up and the weeds start to grow with a vengeance.

Please don't be tempted to cover the plot in weed killer and hope for the best, a bit of consideration, patience and time will benefit your plot and the wildlife living on it in the long run, after all what is the hurry, you will find that taking on allotment is not so much of a hobby but a way of life.



Thinning seeds - It seems that however sparingly you sprinkle those smaller seeds they will never be as spaced out as they should be, this is not always a bad thing though as there is always a need for spares! When things get to crowded it's the time to get thinning, removing unwanted seedlings to leave the ideal amount of space between each plant. Choose the largest healthiest plants to keep and remove the rest being careful not to disturb the roots of the remaining plants. Use your thumb and forefinger to remove them at ground level. Some crops like carrots will provide an extra harvest if you thin them out gradually, pull every other seedling, then once they have grown a bit more and are rubbing shoulders with the carrot next to them repeat until you have about 5cm between plants.

Space saving crops to try - Not everyone is lucky to have a large allotment or garden to grow in so getting the best out of a small space is key. Try spring onions, watercress (can be grown just as well in soil) radish and cut and come again salad. Chillies are very easy to grow and are attractive plants that do well in pots as well as in the ground. It's important to grow what you love, if space is limited, choose crops you love to eat and that are expensive to buy. Avoid growing crops that take up a large amount of space (such as asparagus, or maincrop potatoes) Avoid crops that take months to grow (such as pumpkins, leeks and parsnips). Stretch the season - use cloches or horticultural fleece to cover early and late crops. Make full use of early varieties of veg such as carrots and peas, since these mature faster than maincrop varieties, for early and late cultivation. Have seedlings ready. As one crop comes to an end have the next batch of young plants ready to take their place. Just clear the row and add some good compost and fertiliser.



What to sow, March, April and May - There are many crops you can begin to sow now but don't 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 in March 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 March up until the beginning of June for continuous crops.

Lettuce, this can be sown throughout the year, sow thinly in rows about every fortnight for continuous crops. Herbs, nothing tastes better than fresh herbs picked form 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.



Asparagus - Considered a delicacy of the vegetable world asparagus has a distinct, intense savoury flavour. Sprue is the term for young, very slender asparagus and it comes in many different varieties. French asparagus is purple, British and American varieties are green and Spanish and Dutch asparagus is white, this is because it is grown beneath the soil and cut just as the tips emerge. It is also exceptionally good for you as it contains high levels of vitamins A and C, potassium, iron and calcium Asparagus is also diuretic, giving urine an unmistakable aroma (which, apparently, not everyone can smell!).

Asparagus and lemon risotto



Ingredients

50g butter, a small onion peeled and finely chopped 200g arborio rice, a glass of white wine (optional)

400g asparagus chopped into short pieces, 1 litre hot chicken stock

2 lemons, 3 tbsp grated Parmesan

Method

Melt the butter in a wide, high-sided pan over a very low heat. Add the onion and let it soften in the butter, stirring it from time to time so that it does not colour. Using a wooden spoon, stir in the rice and coat the grains well in the butter. Then pour in the wine.

Let it bubble down until the liquid has pretty much absorbed. Add a large ladleful of the stock, turn up the heat a little, and let the liquid almost disappear, before adding the pieces of asparagus and a second ladle of stock. Continue adding the stock as it boils down to almost nothing. Stir the rice often, grating and squeezing in the lemons. Season with salt, pepper, the lemon zest and juice, and continue cooking till the rice is creamy but has a little bite left in it. Stir in the cheese, cover with a lid and leave to rest for a few minutes before eating.

Renewing your Membership A note to associations. When your membership is due for renewal we will email you with your renewal list as an excel spreadsheet a month before the renewal is due. Our admin system is set up to work along side these spreadsheets which makes the renewal process an easy one from our end. The lists are in alphabetical order by first name and the cancel membership column is there so we know at a glance who needs to be removed. We understand that some associations like to send us their own lists and in the past that wasn't a problem but now we have so many members, using the spreadsheet we send you helps save us a lot of time. Please, especially to our larger groups can you use and edit the spreadsheet we send you. Where possible please pay the fees via bank transfer. Banks are now charging non profit organisations like ourselves fees for paying in cheques. We do of course understand that this is not possible for everyone.

Please could you make sure that all your members are forwarded copies or made aware of our newsletter, terms and conditions of the insurance and the discounted seed schemes we offer via Suttons and Kings seeds.

When adding new members, please make sure you include their full name and address as we will not be able to process any new additions or renewals without these details.





Microgreens - If you are keen to get growing then give microgreens a go. Full of nutrients and flavours they can be grown from seed in as little as a week. Microgreens are the seedlings of leafy herbs and plants that we would usually allow to grow to full size before harvesting. Choose varieties that have good flavour when fully grown and their flavour will be even more intense in micro form. Microgreens are quick, easy and take up very little space - a windowsill is ideal. Here are some of the best.

Radish One of the fastest to grow, with red stems and a peppery heat is pairs well with a good egg sandwich and tastes great in a stir fry. Coriander With flavour-packed leaves that can be sprinkled onto curries, soups and stir fries and salads. Rocket Growing this peppery leaf in its mini form is a good way to avoid the problem of flea beetle that can affect the adult plants. Broccoli This has a distinct flavour from the full-grown plant, it has a spicy flavour that works well in salads and omelettes. Beetroot With a mild earthy flavour the red stemmed leaves add a splash of colour to salads and goes well with grilled mackerel. Spinach These nutrient packed leaves are great for salads, their mild flavour compliments other more peppery leaves. Add to soups, omelettes or a risotto. Basil With an intense flavour, micro basil is much easier to grow than adult plants, which can be prone powdery mildew. It's delicious scattered over a tomato and mozzarella salad, or a bruschetta. Try purple varieties for that extra pop of colour.

Fennel Grown in micro form fennel avoids the tendency of adult plants to bolt, but still has all the aniseed flavour you need. Lovely with fish or stirred through pasta. Mustard With a pretty intense flavour go for the frilly and redleafed varieties for extra interest, sprinkle through stir fries and other oriental dishes for a fiery treat.

The importance of crop rotation. Crop rotation is used in allotment plots and kitchen gardens for most annual vegetable crops. Vegetables such as rhubarb and asparagus do not fit into the rotation. Certain annual crops such as cucurbits (courgettes, pumpkins, squashes, marrows and cucumbers), salads (endive, lettuce and chicory) and sweetcorn can be grown wherever convenient, avoiding growing them too often in the same place. Plan your crop rotation before the growing season starts, and mark out the plots on the ground so you know where to plant each crop.

Benefits of crop rotation

Soil fertility:

Different crops have different nutrient requirements. Changing crops annually reduces the chance of particular soil deficiencies developing as the balance of nutrients removed from the soil tends to even out over time.

Weed control: Some crops, like potatoes and squashes, with dense foliage or large leaves, suppress weeds which in turn reduces maintenance and weed problems in following crops.

Pest and disease control: Soil pests and diseases tend to attack specific plant families. By rotating crops between sites the pests tend to decline in the period when their host plants are absent which helps reduce build up of damaging populations of spores, eggs and pests. Common diseases that can be helped avoided by rotation include clubroot in brassicas and onion white rot. 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,

Brassicas: (you can add well-rotted manure) include broccoli, sprouts, cauliflower, cabbage, kohl rabbi, 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 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.



The law regarding the keeping of chickens - applicable from October 1st, 2024. All bird keepers in the UK must register their birds with the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA): The law applies to all birdkeepers, whether it's a large commercial farm or someone with a single bird. Previous registration was only required for keepers of more than 50 birds but the new measures announced by Defra has reduced this to anyone with just one bird. Why the new law? To protect the health of poultry and other captive birds, protect public health and to

protect the poultry sector from future avian influenza outbreaks. For further information go to https://www.gov.uk/guidance/register-as-a-keeper-of-less-than-50-poultry-or-other-captive-birds

