



A NATIONWIDE SUPPORT ORGANISATION FOR ALLOTMENT HOLDERS AND GARDENERS

www.swcaa.co.uk

Issue 48
Winter 2025

NEWSLETTER

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.

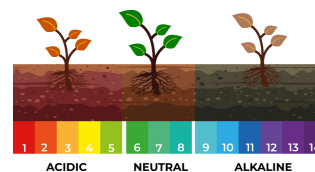


Spot on Soil, getting it right - The pH value of your soil determines which crops you can grow. There are six main types of soil: chalky, clay, loamy, peaty, sandy and silty. To test your soil, you need to take a look at it and feel it. Add water and try rolling it between your hands. Observe how your 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.

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Registration number 6512423



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.

Perfect imperfect



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 than 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.

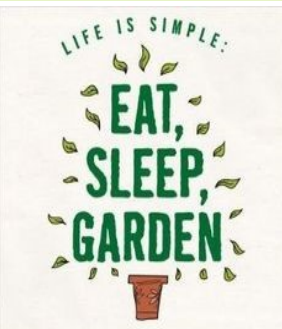
This will help keep the weeds at bay and stop the plot overwhelming you when the weather warms up and the weeds start to grow with a vengeance.

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.

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



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.

