



A NATIONWIDE SUPPORT ORGANISATION FOR ALLOTMENT HOLDERS AND GARDENERS

www.swcaa.co.uk

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NEWSLETTER



Welcome to our Spring newsletter and a warm welcome to all our new members. I just wanted to use this opportunity to say a big thank you to all of you who have sent me messages of support on my recent breast cancer diagnosis. Thank you for sharing your stories and positivity with me, it would seem that so many of us are affected by cancer in some way. Many of you have been members for a long time and I thought it best to be open about my situation as I really didn't want to let anyone down due to poor service. I can't thank you enough for your patience whilst I am going through treatment, after getting through chemo and a mastectomy I am now facing 15 rounds of radiotherapy 5 days a week for 3 weeks! I will do my very best to keep on top of things but I do not know how this will affect me so again I ask for your patience at this time. On a happier note I'm looking forward to getting out in the garden again soon, we've already had some very warm spells of weather but the next thing you know it's hailing! I used to be out on the allotment in all weathers but now I have definitely become a more fair weather gardener. I love Spring, the days are getting longer and everything is bursting into life, blossom is everywhere so hopefully it will be another bumper year for fruit of all kinds. 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.



Admin upgrade - We have just completed a long awaited update to our admin system. This now means that we will no longer be issuing the individual receipts to our group members. Instead the group representative will be issued with an up to date spreadsheet which will now be the confirmation of membership and renewal.

Our admin system is set up to work along side these spreadsheets which makes the renewal process more efficient at our end. We would be very grateful that when renewing or adding anyone new you use the spreadsheet that we send to you. 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.

All renewals will be sent out one month before your renewal date. Please make sure that you provide us with full contact details for all plot holders, as we cannot accept them without this. Providing their email address will give them access to our members area on the website which includes details of our seed schemes as well as plenty of other useful information.

Individual members will continue to get their confirmation receipt as normal.

Where possible please pay your fees via bank transfer. Banks are charging non profit organisations like ourselves for paying in cheques. We do of course understand that this is not possible for everyone. Our bank details are **South West Counties Allotment Association CIC, 91683225, 40-09-13**

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.



Why is sweetcorn best sown in blocks? Believe it or not sweetcorn is a type of grass and as such relies on wind pollination rather than insects. Its monoecious which means it has separate female and male flowers on the same plant. The female parts which will eventually become the cobs are further down the stem and have the 'silks' which catch the pollen carried in the wind whilst the male parts are the 'tassels' on the top. By planting corn in blocks rather than in rows each plant is better placed to catch pollen from its neighbour, this reduces the chance of insufficient pollination which can lead to disappointing cobs with gaps in them.

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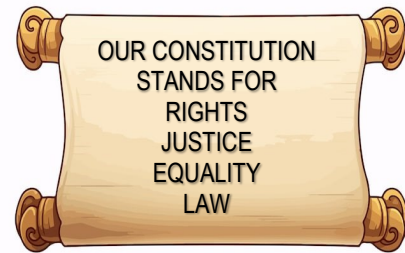
Constitutions for Associations - some guidelines

One of the things we deal with often at SWCAA are questions surrounding constitutions and their purpose but more alarmingly of late an increase of associations reportedly not having the correct or any constitution in place. Does your association have one?

An allotment association's constitution is its foundational **Governing Document**, serving as a written set of rules that defines how the association is run, its core purpose and the responsibilities of its members.

It acts as a legal and operational framework, ensuring the association remains fair, transparent, and legally compliant and is signed and adopted by your association.

It may also be known as a number of different things, a set of rules, terms of reference or something similar. If it covers the following points below then it acts as a Constitution.



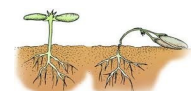
1. **Name of group**
2. **Defining the purpose and aims of the group.** This should state the association's objectives, of what they wish to achieve, such as promoting gardening, managing site facilities and protecting the interests of plot holders. A description of how the group may achieve its objectives or purposes, for example by fund raising, acquiring equipment or other lawful things that are necessary.
3. **Governance structure.** This outlines how the management committee is elected, (normally a Chairman/Woman, Secretary and Treasurer) elected at the annual general meeting for a period of one year and what powers they hold.
4. **Membership management.** This should define who can join (e.g. plot holders), what the membership fees are as well as the process for ending membership or terminating a tenancy for non-cultivation.
5. **Meetings.** This should include a description of what meetings will be held and when and who will be able to attend.
6. **Financial stewardship.** This sets out requirements for managing funds, including the need for a dedicated bank account, how many signatories will be required (always two or more) and proper record keeping by the Treasurer.
7. **Payments and benefits.** If expenses and other costs are made to members or the management committee. This should be explained.
8. **Conflict resolution and fairness.** This should provide the framework for resolving disputes between members and committee and ensures the group follows equality legislation and natural justice.
9. **Funding.** Most grant giving organisations and local councils require a formal constitution before they will consider providing funding or letting an association self manage a site.
10. **Closing down.** This is a description of what steps will be taken if the association is wound up. What would happen to any surplus funds or assets, for example, all remaining assets would be passed to a local group with similar aims. Sometimes called a dissolution clause.

These are the key points that all constitutions should have. All allotment associations should have a constitution and this should be given to all members taking on an allotment plot. SWCAA can provide you with a draft constitution which can be adapted to suit your needs. If you would like any further help on this subject, please contact us.



An Quick Guide to Growing Kale - This nutritious and 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 April 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.

Damping Off is caused by a fungus and can be spread via infected compost, it causes seedlings to rot, collapse, and die at the soil level, often due to overly wet, humid, and cool conditions. Overcrowding and seedlings that are sat in warm wet compost are most at risk. At the first sign prick seedlings out into clean compost or remove covers and thin seedlings if they are in crowded trays, It cannot be cured, so prevention via clean equipment, proper drainage, and good air circulation is key.





General allotment issues and how to resolve them.

Allotment issues range from physical challenges like overgrown weeds and poor soil to social and legal disputes with committees or neighbours. Managing these effectively requires strategic planning, regular maintenance, and clear communication.

Common Physical Issues, overgrown plots and perennial weeds. Neglected plots are often dominated by stubborn weeds like brambles, bindweed, and couch grass. **Solution.** Try and tackle the plot in sections to avoid getting overwhelmed. Cover unworked areas of the plot with cardboard or black plastic to starve weeds of light.

Soil Quality & Contamination. If you have inherited a plot you may have compacted soil or come across hidden hazards like buried plastic, glass, old carpets, or even asbestos in old sheds. **Solution.** To get the best from your soil test the pH and nutrients. Improve structure by adding organic matter like well-rotted manure, be cautious of herbicide contamination in horse manure.

Drainage & Waterlogging. Clay soils often suffer from poor drainage, making them unworkable when really wet. **Solution.** Try installing raised beds to improve drainage and extend the growing season. Observe where water collects after it rains to identify areas that may need re-levelling or drainage channels added.

Social and Legal Disputes.

Committee & Neighbour Conflict. Disputes often arise over plot maintenance standards, shared paths, or antisocial behaviour.

Resolution. Try to resolve grievances through amicable discussions. If this fails, follow your site's formal complaint procedure, which may involve mediation or an arbitration panel.

Documentation. Keeping a record of issues and taking photos of your plot's condition can provide essential evidence during disputes.

Tenancy Breaches. Failure to keep a plot weed free and tidy or building structures without consent can lead to a notice to quit. If a tenant fails to maintain their plot or breaches other terms, the notice period can be as short as one month.

Security of Tenure for Tenants.

Individual plot holders are protected by several acts that prevent arbitrary eviction.

Notice Periods Under the Allotments Act 1950, landlords must typically provide at least 12 months' notice to quit. This notice must generally expire during the non-growing season which is typically between September and April.

Compensation Rights. If a tenancy is terminated by the landlord (for reasons other than a breach of agreement), the tenant is often entitled to compensation for crops left in the ground and improvements made to the plot.



How to deal with leggy seedlings. Leggy seedlings are primarily caused by insufficient light, which forces them to stretch and reach, resulting in weak, thin, and pale stems. This is often combined with excessive heat, causing fast, spindly growth. Common causes include placing pots on a shady windowsill, leaving them under covers too long, or using weak artificial light.

How to put them right.

Bury the stem. For plants like tomatoes, peppers, and broccoli, carefully transplant them into deeper, individual pots, burying the stem almost up to the first leaves. The buried stem will then grow new roots, leading to a much stronger plant.

Increase light. Leggy growth indicates the plant is searching for light. Move them to a south-facing windowsill or, you could try using LED grow lights to prevent further stretching.

Lower the temperature. If seedlings are on a heat mat after germination, remove them and move to a slightly cooler spot to reduce the rate of stretching.

Adjust the airflow. A small fan on a low speed blowing gently on the seedlings for a few hours a day will mimic outdoor conditions and forces stems to become stronger.

Reduce Water. Overwatered, leggy seedlings are fragile. Allow the soil surface to dry out between waterings to encourage stronger root growth.

To prevent future legginess

Sow seeds later. Do not start seeds too early in winter when daylight is insufficient.

Use Proper Lighting. Avoid relying solely on weak winter sunlight; use dedicated lights.

Thin Seedlings. Remove weak seedlings to ensure adequate space and reduce competition for light.

Some interesting and unusual allotment facts. Beyond their standard use for growing vegetables, allotments have a history filled with unusual traditions, strange legal quirks, and unexpected secrets.

Anglo-Saxon Roots. The allotment concept traces back over a thousand years to Saxon communities who cleared woodland for common cultivation.

In the 19th century, urban "city allotments" were actually fashionable retreats for the middle class. Known as pleasure gardens, they often featured brick built summerhouses and elaborate follies where families could even stay the night.

In the UK, allotments are heavily protected by a series of Allotment Acts passed between 1908 and 1950. Security of Tenure. For statutory sites, councils generally must give 12 months' notice and obtain government approval before redeveloping the land.

The Right to Hens and Rabbits. Under the Allotment Act 1950, you have a statutory right to keep hens and rabbits on your plot for personal use, regardless of what your local council might prefer. However, keeping other livestock is usually prohibited.

Modern allotments grew from the 18th and 19th-century General Enclosure Acts, which privatised common land. Small field gardens were provided to the landless poor as compensation so they could still feed themselves.

Dig for Victory. During World War II, allotments were vital for national survival. The famous campaign produced 1.3 million tonnes of food from nearly 1.5 million plots across the UK. The Dig for Victory campaign was so intense that allotments were dug into the moat of the Tower of London. Royal parks like Hyde Park and St James' Park were also transformed into vegetable patches to feed the nation.

Allotments use an ancient Anglo-Saxon unit of measurement called the rod (also known as a pole or perch).

Standard Size. A traditional full-size plot is typically 10 rods, which is approximately 250 square metres (about the size of a doubles tennis court).

Dimensions. One rod is roughly 5.5 yards (approx. 5 metres)

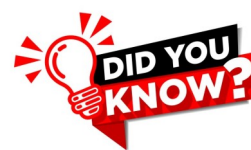
Urban Lungs. Well tended allotments plots can have a 30% higher species diversity than typical urban parks, acting as critical green corridors for bees, insects, and birds.

Climate Impact. Growing your own significantly reduces food miles and packaging waste, with much of the organic waste being recycled directly back into the soil via composting.

Waiting Lists. Since the 1990s, interest has surged. Some urban areas now have waiting lists lasting several years or even decades.

Social Prescribing. GPs increasingly use green social prescribing by referring patients to allotments to combat loneliness and improve mental health.

Potato Facials. In the 1930s, natural products were so prized that some allotment holders used raw potato as a cooling beauty treatment for the skin.



Wild garlic and asparagus risotto. A creamy, vibrant, Italian rice dish, perfect for spring.

Risotto rice is infused with the mild, garlicky flavour of wild garlic and the crisp texture of asparagus. Finish the dish with Parmesan, lemon, and butter. The wild garlic is typically blended into a purée to maintain its delicate flavour, while the asparagus is lightly cooked to keep its bite. (If you can't find wild garlic use spinach instead.)

Ingredients. Risotto rice, chopped garlic, green asparagus, wild garlic, vegetable stock, white wine (optional), butter, olive oil, a hard cheese like pecorino or parmesan. Lemon zest and

juice (optional but does add a bit of zing and flavour).

Method. Start by chopping the asparagus and wild garlic leaves. Leave some of the asparagus tips in tact to decorate the finished dish. Chop the shallots. Heat the olive oil and butter in a large pan, over a medium heat. Add the chopped shallots and fry for 3-4 minutes, until they start to soften. Add the chopped garlic and fry for another minute. Add the risotto rice into the pan, give it a stir, then pour in the white wine (if using) and keep stirring until rice absorbs it all. Start adding the vegetable stock, one ladle at a time. Only add another ladle once the previous one has been fully absorbed by the rice. Patience is definitely needed for a good risotto. After about 10 minutes, add the asparagus and wild garlic, followed by more stock. Don't add the vegetables too soon, as they will become mushy, it's best to add them towards the end of cooking. Add lemon juice and zest, plus grated cheese. Remove the pan from the heat and cover it with a lid. Allow the rice to stand for few minutes, this will give it a chance to absorb any extra liquid. Divide into bowls and sprinkle with some more grated cheese.



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