



Issue 46  
Summer 2024

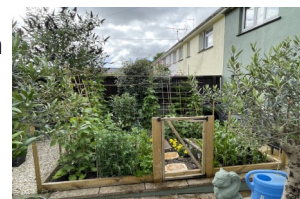
# NEWSLETTER

## A NATIONWIDE SUPPORT ORGANISATION FOR ALLOTMENT HOLDERS AND GARDENERS



### Welcome to our Summer newsletter.

How well is your garden growing? It's certainly not been the flaming June of previous years. The cooler temperatures have without a doubt had an effect on our crops and from what I have been seeing on various social media sites it is something that has effected plot holders across the country. From seeds not germinating to stunted and poor growth, crops are certainly suffering. My tomatoes outside have suffered with the cold and have been very slow to get going, they are producing tomatoes and have lots of flowers but have been a sickly grey colour. I freshened the compost around them and gave them a good feed and they are now starting to produce some healthy green growth. I have grown sweetcorn for years but this year some of the plants started flowering before they even had a chance to get out of the ground! I've never seen this happen before but I have let them go to see whether they actually produce anything. The weather has started to improve a bit down here in Devon but there is still a cold wind at times and days are mostly cloudy. On the plus side I have some fabulous beetroot, peas and French beans, the runner beans were slow to get going but they are looking stronger and are at last producing flowers. In the last newsletter I talked about climbing courgettes. I came across a couple of plants in my local garden centre so I thought I'd give them a try. I can't say that I am convinced just yet as the little courgettes aren't forming properly and are rotting off and I am having to tie them in regularly, so watch this space! I am always up for trying new vegies and this year I am growing cucamelons. The plants look like a tinier version of a cucumber and the fruit and flowers are so small but the plants are vigorous growers and can apparently get up to 8ft if left unchecked. The SWCAA plot has had a makeover this year, we have put in new edging and put up some fencing and a little gate. Fencing it was not really what we wanted to do but with so many cats in our neighbourhood we didn't have a choice. As it turns out its also provided good protection so far from slugs and snails who can't get in either. Lets hope the weather improves soon, why can't it just be lovely and sunny all day and rain at night, that would be perfect. If you've had any problems with your vegies it would be great to hear from you. Happy gardening... **Ayesha Hooper CEO**



**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 and other salad leaves as well as peas, French beans, spring onions, beetroot, and carrots. **JOBS FOR JULY** Weed regularly, keep hoeing as weeds grow just as fast 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 broad beans are finished cut down 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. **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 will probably have some vacant space now to plant out overwintering crops such as Brussel sprouts, spring cabbages, and winter cauliflowers. **JOBS FOR AUGUST** Harvest regularly. At this time of year, courgettes, runner beans, and French beans grow very quickly. Harvest runner beans regularly, before they grow too large and become stringy. Feed pumpkins and squashes once a week with high-potash tomato fertilizer. Lift them off the soil on to planks of wood to stop them rotting. Propagate strawberries. Strawberry runners that have been 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 added, and water well. Plastic sheeting stretched over the bed will also conserve warmth and moisture. **JOBS FOR SEPTEMBER** Now is a good time to plant overwintering autumn onion 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 showing at the surface. Transplant spring cabbages to their final position. Make sure to firm them in well. Any gaps you have can be used for sowing green manures. Phacelia, annual ryegrass and field beans 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 your sweetcorn crop. 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 it is clear then leave a bit longer.

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**Try something different** - Chinese Artichokes (*Stachys affinis*) A clump forming herbaceous perennial that produces tubers and can grow to 60cm tall. It has fine, hairy, textured leaves and in summer it produces lovely pinky-purple flowers that resemble those of a lavender plant. The knobby tubers can be eaten raw, cooked or pickled. Plant tubers in spring, in a fertile, humus-rich, well-drained soil in full sun. The tubers are very hardy and can be planted out between October and April. You can also keep your tubers in trays or pots of slightly damp compost in a light place and leave them to sprout. Leaves will begin to appear, when the plants are about 3 or 4 inches tall you can plant them out. Slugs do like these plants, especially when small, so putting them in pots first to get established will ensure



that they can survive pests. When planting out, space the tubers about 25cm apart and a 7.5cm deep. These also can be planted as part of a flower boarder in the garden.

You can begin to harvest the tubers from October and over the winter months. Lift tubers as and when you need them as they keep well when left in the ground. If you leave a few tubers in the ground they will re-sprout and naturally spread in the spring. Tubers can also be lifted in January and stored until spring to re-planted in a different spot. The plant will produce larger tubers if you rotate them, but you will still get a good crop if they are left where originally planted as long as they are not to overcrowded.

### How to use Chinese Artichokes

The tubers have a delicate and delicious flavour. They have a relatively short shelf life once harvested so the Chinese artichoke is used primarily for pickling. A great vegetable to cook and eat during the winter months. They are lovely and crunchy with a nutty taste so make a good replacement for water chestnuts. You can also blanche them and cook with butter and herbs and they also make a delicious addition to homemade Kimchi and go very well with cheese and crackers! They can be bought as tubers or plug plants and are readily available to purchase on line.

**Pickled Chinese artichokes** - Rinse the Chinese artichokes under cold water and pat dry with paper towel. Heat the vinegar (use sushi vinegar if you can get it, but red wine vinegar also works well) and gently bring to the boil. Sterilise your jar by placing it in boiling water for 30 seconds. Carefully remove, and then leave to cool.

Place the artichokes in the jar and then pour over the hot vinegar. Cover with a lid (while still hot) to vacuum seal, and refrigerate until required.



**Doing our bit for the environment.** We have thousands of members across the UK, that creates a lot of paperwork! 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 and paying us via bank transfer as this would help us avoid bank charges.



### JOIN US and help spread the word

Your membership of SWCAA includes **FREE** public, product and employers liability insurance. Individual membership £10 per year Groups up to 50 members £5 per person per year

Groups 51 plus members £3.50 per year.

All prices include the **FREE** insurance and there are no admin fees. Other benefits for members include a quarterly newsletter, Members area on our website where you can access our seed schemes, as well as our help and support should you ever need it. If you are already one of our valued members please let people know about us by sharing this newsletter.

For further information or an application form please visit our website, email [swcaa.cic@outlook.com](mailto:swcaa.cic@outlook.com) or phone us on 077140255459

The glory of gardening,  
hands in the soil, head in the sun,  
heart with nature.  
To nurture a garden is to feed not just the  
body but also the soul.



**Onion downy mildew** normally occurs in mild, humid weather in late spring and summer and in damp areas. It affects crops such as salads, and the onion family. Downy mildews are a large group of plant diseases caused by microscopic fungus related to the pathogen that causes tomato and potato blight.

**Be on the look out for:** Yellowing leaves which die off from the tip downwards, a white mould developing on dead parts of the plant, bulbs can also be affected and often shrivel in storage or sprout prematurely. **How to control it:** Try to avoid overcrowding your crops and keep on top of weeds to ensure good airflow around the plants. Do not compost any infected material, remove all bulbs from the soil. The fungus stays dormant producing spores in the spring which are carried on the wind and then spread to new plants. Unfortunately there are no fungicides available to amateur gardeners to help with its control.



### Dealing with Horsetail - *Equisetum Arvense* (often known as maretail)

The bane of many allotmenters' life. If you've ever had it then you'll know. Horsetail is an extremely invasive, deep-rooted, fast-growing weed with rhizomes that quickly send up dense strands of foliage. The rhizomes are creeping root-like structures that are actually adapted stems. In spring, fertile light brown stems, about 10 inches tall, appear with a cone-like spore producing tip.

In summer, sterile green shoots develop into fir tree-like plants which can grow up to 2ft tall. The creeping rhizomes can go down as deep as 7ft below the surface,

making them hard to remove by digging out, especially if they invade a border. They often enter gardens or plots by spreading underground from neighbouring properties or land. Removing horsetail by hand is difficult.

Although rhizomes growing near the surface can be forked out, deeper roots require a lot of excavation. Shallow digging is not effective if it chops up roots, and rotovating will just make the problem worse. Plants can regrow from any small pieces left behind. However, removing shoots as soon as they appear above the ground can reduce the spread if carried out over a number of years. If horsetail appears in lawns or pathways it can be kept in check by mowing regularly.

**Weedkiller control** SWCAA does not support the use of weedkillers and recommends that where possible alternative control methods are used. However, when gardeners struggle to control plants with cultural methods, weedkillers/pesticides are available for use legally. Garden centres and large retailers selling weedkillers have trained staff who can advise on suitable products for your needs. Although, these weedkillers do require many applications to achieve even limited control of horsetail.

### Controlling weeds without chemicals

**Mulching** Use deep organic mulches such as bark or wood chip to smother weeds around plants. To be effective, keep them topped up to a minimum depth of 10-15cm to smother established annual weeds. Keep woody stems clear of mulch to prevent rotting.

**Edging boards or strips** These can be used to edge lawns and grass paths to prevent unwanted grass growth into the border. Especially useful where invasive rooted grasses such as couch grass are a problem.

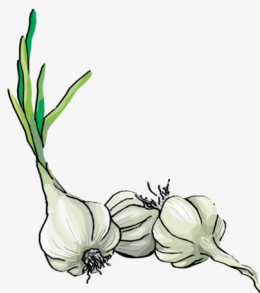
**Root barriers** These can be inserted into the soil to stop the spread of perennial weeds such as ground elder and horsetail into neighbouring areas or gardens. They can also be used to restrict invasive plants such as bamboos, shrubs and raspberries. A straight barrier can be formed from paving slabs or corrugated iron sheets, but for a flexible solution use a tough fabric root barrier.

### Weed-suppressant fabrics

Groundcover or landscaping fabrics can be laid over recently cleared soil to suppress re-growth of old weeds and prevent new weeds from establishing.

There are a number of different weed suppressant fabrics available, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Covering the ground with black plastic can really help with keeping horsetail at bay.

**Medicinal elements of horsetail** This weed is one of the worst you can have on your allotment plot. The last thing most plot holders would think of is that it could be useful in any way. Traditionally it was used to stop bleeding, heal ulcers and wounds, treat tuberculosis and kidney problems. The medicinal use of Horsetail dates back to ancient Greek and Roman times. The name *Equisetum* is derived from the Latin roots, *Equus*, meaning "horse," and *seta*, meaning "bristle." horsetail contains silicon, which helps strengthen bone. It was also a favourite of the Native Americans who used horsetail tea as a diuretic and as a cough remedy for horses. Dating back to prehistoric times, Horsetail grew when the dinosaurs roamed the earth. Fossil records show that around 350 million years ago, plants reached 30 metres or more. There are many powders and teas available to buy should you feel like giving it a try!



**How to string onions** - Knot one end of some strong garden string back onto itself to make a sliding noose and tie the other end onto a strong hook or wooden beam. Wind the tops of three or four onions through the noose to create a 'pendulum' at the bottom of the cord.

Wrap the tops of each of the remaining onions around the cord, then slide them down onto the pendulum. As the onions stack up, their weight tightens the noose at

the bottom and pinches the onions in place. You can also find some good videos online which will show you step by step how to do this.

This technique also works well for garlic too.



Please do let us know if you have enjoyed this newsletter. If you have anything allotment or growing related or would like to write

a piece for future issues, please get in touch, we would love to hear from you.

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**Successional Sowing** — Shortages and gluts are common to most plot holders. However, with a little planning and know how, it is possible to ensure plants are ready to harvest in succession throughout the growing season. This technique involves sowing quick growing crops like radishes or salad crops every two to three weeks during the growing season and is something that is important if you have a small garden or allotment plot. Successional sowing allows you to harvest little and often and you will be less likely to waste anything.

**Ideal for** - Fast maturing vegetables, which include carrots, salads, spinach, chard, beetroot, spring onions, radishes, peas and French beans. These are best sown regularly in small batches and will produce a continuous, supply for your table.

With plants that are prone to bolting, such as spinach, coriander and rocket, successional sowing is especially crucial. Gardeners can also choose to grow some longer-fruited crops such as runner beans, cucumbers, courgettes and sweetcorn in two batches to ensure they have plants that are in production well into the autumn. Choose a range of cultivars for continuous cropping. Choose quick-maturing varieties such as little gem lettuce and carrot Adelaide which work really well for successional sowing, some of the main crop varieties also work well and often remain in good condition for longer.

Don't try this with plants like peppers, tomatoes, onions, brussels and pumpkins as these need a longer season to mature.

Before you sow a new row of seeds always replenish the soil with some fresh compost. Sowings can be made every one to four weeks, from mid-spring through to late summer.

**How to sow** The easiest way is just to sow every few weeks. Raised beds are ideal for successional sowing, but if you are limited for space try growing in containers.

Sow seed thinly in pre watered rows. Leave space for the next row, spacing rows apart according to instructions on the seed packet and keep your seedlings weed free and well watered especially in dry spells.

Keep an eye on how quickly the crops mature so you can judge when to sow the next batch.

Try using salad leaves of the cut and come again variety so as to further extend the growing season.

Direct sowings in the height of summer can be challenging in hot weather, particularly for leafy vegetables and salads, sowing under shade cloth can help, or sow into pots/trays of compost and leave somewhere shady to plant out once the soil has cooled down towards the end of summer. It's easy to sow too many seeds at once, and most of us do but try and only sow a few of the seeds you are going to grow in succession i.e. a few lettuces at a time, a short row of spinach etc.

It doesn't matter if you have a small or large allotment, or you grow in your back garden or in a few pots on a balcony or window sill. Succession planting ensures you have maximum productivity throughout the growing season and in a cost of living crisis it might just save you some money too.



**Chive flowers** - Many gardeners will have a chive plant or two in the garden or on the plot, they are a beautiful plant in themselves but have many other uses. Chive blossoms are an excellent source of vitamin K for building healthy bones and blood clotting. The flowers also contain vitamin A to support cell growth and vision and vitamin C to support the immune system. Bees love them. They can be used to brighten up salads and platters, and go well with egg, pasta and potato dishes. They can be deep fried like courgette flowers, made into

pretty pink vinegar, chive butter or mixed with goat's cheese for a fresher, lighter take on cheese and onion. Give these two recipes a go, you won't be disappointed.

**Chive Butter** 115g or 1/2 cup of butter, softened, chive blossoms about 4-8 choose soft new blossoms, not faded, woody ones. salt, to taste. 1-2 tbsp of chopped chives, black pepper to taste (both optional). Soften the butter to room temperature, before you begin. Wash the chive blossoms and pat dry with kitchen roll. Separate the flower petals from the stem. Stir in the flowers and salt into the softened butter. Add the chopped chives and pepper if using. Transfer to a small bowl or shape into a log and wrap in kitchen parchment and let it firm for about 30 minutes in the fridge. Delicious used on warm bread or grilled meat or fish. When refrigerated, it will be really firm so take it out the fridge 10-15 minutes prior to serving.

**Chive flower vinegar** - 24 chive blossoms 1 1/2 cups white wine vinegar (or you can use red, apple cider or rice wine vinegar) 1 sterilised pint jar with lid and ring. Gently wash the chive blossoms, pat dry and then separate the flowers from the stem. Place them into the jar and pack loosely. Heat vinegar in a small pan over a medium-low heat until hot but not boiling. Pour the hot vinegar over blossoms and screw on the lid. Store in the fridge for about 1-2 weeks until desired flavour intensity is reached. Strain out blossoms and store vinegar in a sterilised glass container.



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