



A NATIONWIDE SUPPORT ORGANISATION FOR ALLOTMENT HOLDERS AND GARDENERS

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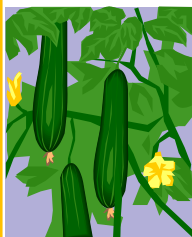
NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our summer newsletter and a warm welcome to all our new members.

I must apologise for the delay with this newsletter, we have had a few technical issues this end which we are working to resolve. Summer is here and it's already been hot!

I don't know about where you are but here in Devon we have had an explosion of aphids, they are on everything and in huge numbers. I made myself some organic spray with dish soap and water and I'm spraying regularly which along with the birds it seems to be helping. I decided to give the veg plot a rest for a couple of years and instead have planted a small garden with a wildlife pond and filled it full of insect friendly plants, especially ones for bees. I still had to plant some produce though, I just can't not do it! I have strawberries, tomatoes, cucumbers, courgettes and chillies growing in large containers.

The bee population is once again suffering and there is an obvious decline in numbers UK wide. We can all play our part to help them, so consider planting some of the bee friendly plants mentioned further on in this newsletter. Meanwhile 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.**



Getting the best from Cucumbers - cucumbers are an easy-to-grow crop as long as you know the basics on how to grow them and what problems you might encounter they are great for the beginner. This guide to help you grow them successfully for a great harvest all summer long. Once it gets going there's no stopping a cucumber plant, so if you want to get into your greenhouse again a little careful pruning will help. **Where to grow cucumbers** Cucumbers grow best in a rich well-draining soil that has lots of organic matter like compost. Generally any plant that produces a fruit, thrive in full sun. Choose a spot in your that receives at least six hours of sunlight per day .

Consistent watering is key Cucumbers can be picky when it comes to how much water to give them. They like to be watered consistently, especially once the plant starts to flower and set fruit. When this happens they will need more water than before. If left too long without water, plants can become stressed and yields low, it can also cause the cucumbers to taste bitter.

Support Most cucumbers benefit from good support, This not only keeps the leaves and fruit off the ground preventing leaf diseases and fruit rot, it also makes extra space in your garden for more crops. Canes or trellis work well for cucumbers. Start by training the main stem up a tall cane at least the height of the greenhouse (if you have one and tie it in with twine. Once it reaches the top pinch out the growing tip, this will encourage it to start producing more side shoots all the way up the main stem. Once a fruit appears on each one, count two leaves after where the fruit is growing and nip the shoot's growing tip back to this point. This helps the plant concentrate on developing its fruit. Keep a look out for any male flowers with a simple stem (females have a baby cucumber behind them) and remove them (greenhouse only) otherwise leaving them can result in bitter cucumbers. Keep this up throughout the growing season and you'll get a fantastic crop.

Top tips There are two main types of cucumbers – greenhouse cucumbers and outdoor types. Greenhouse cucumbers like plenty of heat, so need to be grown in a greenhouse or polytunnel. They are large plants that produce long, smooth fruits, similar to those in the supermarket. They don't need pollinating and the male flowers need to be removed to prevent this happening, otherwise the fruits will end up bitter and full of seeds. Some greenhouse varieties have been bred to only produce female flowers. Outdoor or 'ridge' cucumbers can tolerate lower temperatures and can be grown in a sunny spot outside. The fruits are shorter and fatter, with a rough, ridged skin. Flowers are pollinated by insects, so both male and female flowers are needed. Some cucumber varieties will grow in a greenhouse or outside. It's important, not to grow a 'ridge' type in the greenhouse alongside greenhouse varieties, as this will result in cross pollination and bitter fruits. When your cucumbers start to flower, feed weekly with a high potash fertiliser, such as a liquid tomato food. The more you pick, the more the plant will produce. Outdoor types can crop until September, while greenhouse varieties can fruit into October if it's warm. Don't leave cucumbers on the plant for too long as older fruits don't taste as good and their skins can get hard.



The law of attraction - Bees, sadly our little friends and other pollinators are in trouble. They are vital for pollinating many crops, including fruits, vegetables, and nuts. A continued decline in the bee population will lead to reduced crop yields and food shortages. They play a crucial role in the health of ecosystems by pollinating wildflowers and other plants. **Bumblebees** are social bees and there are around 24 bumblebee species in the UK and approximately 12 are commonly seen in gardens and allotments. At its peak in midsummer, a bumblebee nest may contain between 50 and 400 bees. The nests last one season and usually just the queens will overwinter

Solitary bees There are more than 260 species of solitary bee, some of which are rare and are confined to certain types of habitat. The female solitary bee constructs a nest on her own and has an annual lifecycle. Each species will have different nesting requirements, which range from holes in wood, or masonry, bee hotels, holes in the ground and hollow plant stems. Females of the same species often nest in close proximity to one another.

Honeybee is a social bee that forms large colonies that overwinter. They can be kept in hives and are the source of honey and beeswax. A strong honeybee colony may contain about 60,000 bees. Honeybees are not under threat and there are many hives maintained by beekeepers. Wild colonies of honeybees also occur in buildings or hollow trees. As allotment holders there is plenty you can do to help. Start by planting a diverse selection of pollinator-friendly flowers, reducing pesticide use, and supporting organisations working to protect bees. Include a variety of flowering plants that bloom throughout the different seasons to provide a continuous food source for bees. Try and plant single flowered rather than double flowered plants, as they offer easier access to nectar and pollen. Consider planting lavender, red clover, honeysuckle, foxglove, poppy, bird's foot trefoil, dahlias and various herbs like thyme and marjoram. Include fruit trees, raspberries, courgettes, runner beans, and squash in your planting scheme. If you have space create a designated area for wildflowers to attract bees and other pollinators. Include sunflowers, nasturtiums, pot marigolds, borage, and cosmos. **Water source** Offer a shallow dish of water with pebbles or stones for bees to land on while drinking.

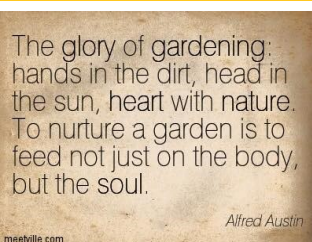
Nesting sites Create a bare patch of ground for ground nesting bees, especially those with a southern exposure and plenty of sun.

Habitat Consider creating a bee hotel using hollow canes or plant stems. Refrain from using pesticides, especially those that are systemic or persistent on plants, as they can harm bees. Allow dandelions and other "weeds" to flower, as they are valuable food sources for bees. Planting flowers in clumps or drifts rather than single rows can be more attractive to bees. **Did you know** Bees can see purple well, so lavender, alliums, and other purple-flowered plants can be particularly attractive. Best plants for the garden include salvia species, these have a long flowering period and bees love them. Hawthorne, hellebores, echinacea, rudbeckia, sedums and verberna.

Get involved here are a few projects monitoring the status of pollinators [UK pollinator and monitoring scheme](#)

[BeeWalk](#) [Garden butterfly survey](#) [Big butterfly count](#)

Worth a read - Get your wild about gardens action pack [here](#)



Organic Tips to protect your crops Grow dill, chives or chervil close to lettuces to ward off aphids. Planting carrots between rows of marigolds will keep away the carrot fly. A simple solution of dish soap and water can be effective against aphids and other soft bodied insects, add 2 teaspoons of washing up liquid to two pints (1 litre) of water. Steep peeled, crushed garlic cloves in water for a few days, strain and put into a spray bottle, use to keep greenfly and unwanted pests of your plants. Warning, it is very stinky!



Dahlias have long been a valued addition to allotment plots, but did you know that if you collect its seeds and sow them they will produce a completely new variety! Dahlia seeds are genetically diverse, which means that each seed will produce a unique plant, unlike the tubers which stay true to the original plant. When sown from seed the new flowers may share a few similarities with the original, such as foliage colour or the shape of the flower and height but they will most likely have variations in size, petal arrangement and colour, effectively they produce a new combination of genes. Start seeds indoors at least 4 to 8 weeks before you want

to plant them out. The seeds germinate sporadically, so be patient, they will come up but it can take up to 2 weeks. If your seeds aren't sprouting, try lowering the temperature to see if that wakes them up. Direct sowing dahlia seeds isn't recommended. Seedlings are extremely sensitive to cold so don't plant them out until the weather has warmed up. Flowers should appear within 10 weeks from sowing. Remove spent blooms often so plants put their energy into flower production rather than making seeds. To increase the overall number of flowers and encourage long healthy stems, pinch them out. Once plants are 8 to 12 in tall, use sharp pruners to snip off the top 3 to 4 in, just above a set of leaves. This causes the plant to send up multiple stems below the cut. Dahlias grown from seed offer lot of new possibilities as each one something that has never existed before and if you find one you love, you get to name it!

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, chicory, endives, and other salad leaves as well as peas, French beans, spring onions, beetroot, and carrots.

JOBS FOR JULY— Weed regularly, keep on hoeing as weeds grow just as fast as everything else will be 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 harvest is over cut down broad beans 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. Continue pruning side shoots on grape vines and if needed thin out the fruit. Removing some of the foliage will increase sun exposure and speed up ripening.

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 should have some vacant space on the plot once broad beans, and onions are finished to plant out overwintering crops such as Brussels sprouts, spring cabbages, and winter cauliflowers.

JOBS FOR AUGUST—Harvest crops regularly. At this time of year, courgettes, runner beans, and French beans grow very quickly. Check them every day and harvest runner beans before they grow too large and become stringy. Feed pumpkins and winter squashes once a week with high-potash tomato fertilizer. Lift them off the soil on to bricks or 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 dug in, and keep them well watered. Plastic sheeting stretched over the bed will also conserve warmth and moisture.

JOBS FOR SEPTEMBER—Now is a good time to plant overwintering autumn onions 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 at or just below the surface of the soil. Transplant spring cabbages to their final growing position. Make sure that they go into ground that has been well firmed down, this will encourage strong root growth. As gaps appear after harvesting now is also a good time for sowing green manures. Phacelia, annual ryegrass and field beans will 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 if your sweetcorn crop is ready to harvest. 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 the juice is clear then leave a bit longer.

Tip Don't forget to sow catch crops. Gaps between rows in your veg beds are ideal planting opportunities.

Sow fast growing crops like baby leaf salads, beetroot, rocket, turnips or fast growing radish. These crops will be in and out of the ground before surrounding crops will need the space and you'll have extra harvests to enjoy.

**Recipe - Courgette and lemon cake—serves 6-8**

150ml(5floz) sunflower oil plus extra to grease

250g(9oz) Self raising flower, 3 large eggs

175g(6oz) unrefined granulated sugar

½ tsp Bicarbonate of soda

2 medium courgettes or 250g(9oz) grated, the juice and zest of ½ lemon

Frosting

300g(10oz) icing sugar, juice of ½ lemon 30g (1oz)butter, melted

Method

Preheat oven to 180C/fan 160C/gas 4. Grease a 25cm (10in) square cake tin. Grate the courgette and set aside. Next beat the eggs, oil and sugar in a large bowl. Sift the flour and bicarbonate of soda and stir into the mixture. Stir in the courgettes, lemon zest and juice. Pour the mixture into the cake tin and smooth the surface.

Bake for 35-40 minutes, until golden and a skewer inserted into the cake comes out clean. Leave to cool slightly then remove from tin. Place on a wire rack to cool completely. To make the icing, mix the icing sugar with the lemon juice and melted butter. Mix well.

Decorate the cake with the icing and cut into equal squares.

Top tips for a successful allotment Don't try to do too much at once, especially in the first year. Select crops you love to eat, as this will increase your motivation. Mulching, hand-weeding and using weed barriers can help manage weeds. Water deeply but less frequently, and consider using a water butt to collect rainwater. Keep your plot tidy and maintain a record of what you've planted and when. Be aware of allotment rules, understand the rules and regulations of your specific allotment site. Be patient and enjoy the process, growing your own food is rewarding, but it takes time and effort. Most importantly enjoy the benefits, allotments provide fresh produce, exercise, and a connection with nature and a satisfaction that money can't buy.

Onion downy mildew

Normally occurring in mild, humid weather in late spring and summer and in damp areas. It affects crops such as salads, and the onion family, especially those that are spaced too closely together. 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 damp conditions, keep on top of weeds to ensure good airflow around your plants. Do not compost any infected material and try not to let any bulbs remain in the soil as 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.

Choosing the right crops for the right spot

Here are some suggestions for crops that will do well in different spots on the plot.

Shady: Salad leaves, oriental leaves, gooseberries, redcurrants and spring cabbage.

Cold: Parsnips, kale, salsify, cauliflower, broad beans, turnips and rhubarb.

Wet: Blueberries, celery, swiss chard, squashes, and watercress.

Sunny: Tomatoes, sweet peppers, chillies, French and runner beans.

Dry: Figs, grapes, asparagus and all types of artichokes.

Hot: Cucumbers, Aubergines, melons and okra.

Freezing herbs at their best in the summer months there is something quite special about them freshly picked herbs from the garden or plot. Freezing herbs is a way you can preserve this freshness for year round use. You need a large bunch of leafy herbs like basil, parsley, coriander, mint, marjoram, chervil and dill. These are best picked in the morning when they are full of fragrance and essential oils. Wash and then dry the herbs on some kitchen roll and then lay them out on some baking parchment and place in the freezer overnight. In the morning you can transfer them to a plastic freezer bag and store until needed. Alternatively finely chop the herbs and place into the sections of an ice cube tray, you can top up the tray with water but this can dilute the flavour so you could try using stock which is great for making soups or sauces, or try olive oil. Once these are frozen pop them out of the tray and into a freezer bag and use as required.



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. You can add any new members to the bottom of the spreadsheet. Please, especially to our larger groups can you use and edit this spreadsheet. 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.

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.

Help spread the word - If you are an allotment holder and individual member of SWCAA already you can help us by passing our information on to other plot holders on your site. Joining SWCAA as group gives you the benefit of cheaper membership. Perhaps you know of a site, association or local council that would benefit from our help, if so please pass this newsletter on or maybe display a copy on your site notice board if you have one.

We are always looking for like minded individual's and groups to join us. If you haven't done so already please consider registering your allotment site and associations details on our national site register and help us expand this useful resource. Please fill in the site register form which can be downloaded from our website and either post or e-mail it back to us and remember to fill in the part to give us permission to use your details on our website.

New sites and associations are being added all the time so it's a great way to find out what is available in your area. For those associations out there with their own website please consider adding a link to SWCAA.



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