



A NATIONWIDE SUPPORT ORGANISATION FOR ALLOTMENT HOLDERS AND GARDENERS

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NEWSLETTER



Welcome to our Autumn/Winter newsletter. How was your gardening year? It was a bit of a mixed bag of weather here in North Devon. A flaming hot June again this year saw my crops get off to a flying start but not everything faired well. I tried at least 4 sowings of French beans but just couldn't get any of them to germinate either in the ground or in pots. I had to buy young plants from the garden centre in the end. I don't know if it is the quality of the seed but I've had the same issue for the past 2 years now. I have been reading quite a bit from other gardeners who have been questioning the seed quality of many different crops. Is this something any of you have experienced? If so we like to here from you. My first sowing of beetroot was a success but subsequent sowings totally failed as did some of my salad crops and out of 5 courgette plants I hardly got any. I would have hoped that gardening on a smaller scale in a sheltered spot

as I am now that I wouldn't come across the same issues as growing on an allotment site. But it seems that pests and disease can strike no matter where you garden. Everything was fine until the weather changed and the rain came in bucket loads. I had caterpillars munching their way through pretty much everything and the main crop of lovely big Italian tomatoes got blight. The cherry varieties were untouched in the planters and are still producing lovely little flavour bombs! By far the best and our favourite crop this year has to be the runner beans, they loved the wet weather and just kept coming, our freezer is packed full of them which will keep us going all winter. I also had great success growing aubergines outdoors, they seem to like the wet as well. The trick, I think that really helps is hand pollination. I kept a fine paintbrush by the plants and whenever new flowers appeared transferred pollen from plant to plant, the bees do help with this too but doing it by hand pretty much guarantees success. I managed to cram so much into such a small space and on the whole I was very pleased with what it produced. I'm already thinking about next years crops and how I can create more growing space with the addition of more planters. I have also developed a bit of a passion for growing dahlias. What fantastic plants they are, so many different varieties and beautiful colours that just keep on flowering, the bees just love them.



Ayesha Hooper CEO



Soil friendly crops - Invest in your soil for healthy crops by planting three of the top soil boosting edibles

Peas and beans as they grow they capture nitrogen from the air which they use to put on growth throughout the growing season. They also fix a proportion of this nitrogen into the soil which make them great to rotate each season. Legumes help protect the soil against erosion as well as giving your soil a bit of much needed tender loving care and are a great choice for sowing before nitrogen hungry brassicas such as cabbages, kale and cauliflowers.

Daikon radishes are often a huge root vegetables that are well-suited for growing in clay soils. As well as breaking up compaction they are also very delicious. However, when soils are particularly compacted, and we are trying to do no-dig garden beds, daikon radishes left in the ground to rot will open up pathways for water infiltration, organic material, and nutrients to congregate. This will help to naturally till these soils back into good condition.

Alfalfa A nutritious edible which is not only full of nitrogen that it returns to the soil but its also great for helping to retain moisture in the soil. This benefits surrounding edibles and other plants so is a great addition to your plot. All parts are edible, though the leaves can become bitter as the plant matures. The purple blooms are a lovely addition to salads.



Tip Don't leave carrots or beetroot in the ground over winter. Though they will survive, the longer they are left in the ground the more likely they will be attacked by slugs or other pests. They will keep on growing during milder spells but will become woody and loose their flavour. November is a good time to dig them up and store in boxes of damp sand which will preserve them until needed.



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Storing and drying chillies - Chillies are easy to grow from seed and a popular crop to grow. They do well in a polytunnel or greenhouse and they will produce good crops when grown outdoors, but they do best in containers making them ideal if you don't have much room to grow. There are now so many different varieties to try, in a huge range of colours, shapes, sizes and levels of heat, from mild to extremely hot. Many have unique flavours, with some offering a hint of lemon and others having a more fruity taste. A chilli's heat is measured on the Scoville scale, a test created in 1912, in which the more water needed to dilute a chilli solution before a human taster can no longer detect the chilli determines the



number of Scovilles. A score of around 3,000 Scovilles is deemed hot, with record breaking chillies such as 'Carolina Reaper' topping two million mark. Chillies are tender plants and will not survive the winter. It's best to sow seeds for fresh plants each year. For a mild flavour, pick chillies while they're still green, or leave them to mature for more heat. Chilli plants will produce an abundance of these sometimes fiery wonders which don't tend to ripen that quickly. Below is a great way to speed up the ripening process and store your produce for later use. You can use this method for all varieties.



You will need a large needle and cotton folded to double thickness and knotted at one end. Simply push the needle through the chilli at the base of the stalk and thread it on to the cotton, keep adding them in this way until you have nearly filled the length of cotton. Leave enough cotton to be able to tie a loop at the top for hanging. You can make a hanging hook by shaping a length of tying wire or use a large paperclip.

Hang in a warm dry place and chillies will start to ripen in a few days. Leave longer and they will eventually dry and can then be ground up and used for cooking. You can also freeze fresh chillies, when you want to use them simply remove from the freezer and grate into your recipe (this is probably best done with the milder varieties).

Here is a good recipe for using the dried chillies

CHILLI MASH

300G Dried hot chillies, 300ml distilled malt vinegar.

Method Pack the dried chillies into sterilised jars. Cover with the malt vinegar. Seal and store in a cool dark place for about 2 weeks.

After 2 weeks the chillies will have softened. Tip the chillies and vinegar into a food processor and blend to a mash. Pour this mixture back into clean sterilised jars. It can be used immediately but does improve with age. Use this mash as a base for curries, chilli con carne or anything else where you like a bit of spice. Use carefully though as it packs a bit of a punch!!



Three good reasons to rotate your crops

1. **Plant Health** is the number one advantage of moving your crops around, this in turn gives any pests and diseases little chance of building up to problem levels. Soil diseases like clubroot, eelworm and white rot will be much less likely to occur.
2. **Soil Structure** depending on what you started with can take many years to get right. While an initial dig is usually the best way to start off a new bed, by growing different crops in successive seasons you can create a good balance with minimum effort. Potatoes have dense foliage which shades out weeds and they require plenty of digging which opens up the ground. Brassicas meanwhile will enjoy plenty of compost which is the best way to improve the chemistry and structure of the soil.
3. **Nutrition** Different families of plants make different demands on the soil. If the same plants are grown repeatedly in the same patch of soil the nutrients there will become depleted. By rotating your crops you allow natural processes to replace what has been used up.



Doing our bit for the environment.

We have thousands of members across the UK that can create a lot of paperwork! Here 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 (we can then choose what we need to print) and paying us via bank transfer where you can as this would help us

Anyone who has time for drama is not gardening enough.

Reader contribution - David Edmunds from Ascot, Berkshire

Some thoughts on my growing year commencing March 2023 I was hoping for a better year than 2022 and in some ways it has been. We planted less runner beans and because the weather was cooler we had an improved crop but, it could have been better but for extremely strong winds one day that blew off about 50% of the flowers!

Dwarf beans cropped well as have beetroot, carrots and broad beans. Parsnips are looking good as are leeks for later in the year. Potatoes have cropped well as they did last year and because we get a lot of slug damage we grow slug resistant varieties, Kestrel, Markies & Nadine. We had very little rain during spring and the heavy clay soil meant it was not possible to earth up the potatoes but they still cropped well. We grow tomatoes at home rather than on the allotment, to minimise the risk of blight and again we had an excellent crop. This year and 2022 were the best years ever since we've been growing tomatoes. Salad crops have not done well, the first sowings of radish were ok but later sowings were very poor. Lettuce was ok but could have done better and spring onions were very poor cropping. Chard and perpetual spinach were reasonable.

Much has been said in the media about it being a poor, wet summer weatherwise and whilst it has not been as hot and dry as last year, I wouldn't describe it as a wet summer, not in this area. Quite often we get rain forecast and either it doesn't rain or if we get anything it's only a few spots. A real annoyance is when it does rain as soon as it stops the wind gets up and dries out the soil. I wouldn't say we've had more than two consecutive days this summer when the soil has remained damp. Fruit has cropped well, loganberries and raspberries especially. We also had a reasonable crop of gooseberries, red and white currants.



If you have anything allotment or growing related you would like us to add to future newsletters, please get in touch, we would love to hear from you.

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Sowing Autumn Garlic – Autumn planted garlic is an easy crop to grow providing you give it a sunny spot and free draining soil. It needs little care and can be grown in a small space or even in containers. It's best to grow named varieties from a supplier, using supermarket garlic is not recommended, as it may carry diseases or be unsuitable for the British climate, so results may be disappointing. Keep weed free and water in dry spells, and you'll have garlic bulbs from early summer onwards, depending on the variety.

There are two main types of garlic – hard neck and soft neck.

Hard neck garlic produces bulbs with fewer, larger cloves and has a stronger, more interesting flavour. It often produces flower stalks and will only store until mid-winter

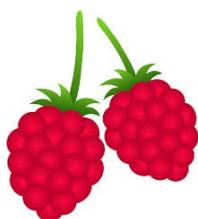
Soft neck garlic produces smaller, more tightly packed cloves and will store for longer. When planted in autumn it will keep well into the following winter. It only produces flower stalks in poor growing conditions

Elephant garlic is often sold as garlic, but it is more closely related to the leek. It needs a long, warm growing season and is best planted in October. Sometimes the cloves don't divide and will produce slightly larger single clove. Early planting will often reduce the chances of this happening. The single clove bulb can be harvested and eaten or planted again the following autumn, when it will often go on to produce a multi-clove bulb. Before you plant, work some homemade compost or some slow release pellets into the soil and plant your cloves about 5cm deep and allow about 18-20cm apart. Garlic like most of the onion family is prone to attack by the allium leaf miner, which can reduce plants to a mush in just a couple of days. The best protection would be to cover with fleece straight away. In order for garlic to produce nice big fat cloves it needs at least 30 nights below 10°C. You can get both spring and autumn varieties as well as a few that can be started from October to February.



Make Leaf mould - With leaves still falling off the trees, now is the perfect time to make this super soil improver which is also great used as a mulch or part of a homemade potting mix. Simply place your leaves (deciduous are best) in a bin bag and pierce the bag several times with a fork. Leave the bag and forget about it. After a year it will have rotted down into a fine, dark material perfect for all your allotment and gardening needs!

Alternatively, make a square or round frame from chicken wire or similar, supported at the corners with stakes or bamboo canes and line the bottom with cardboard or weed suppressant membrane. Ideally this should be in a sheltered spot to ensure that the leaves are not blown away. Make your leaf heap as large as possible to hasten decay, do not let it dry out and moisten it if it becomes dry. You can collect leaves from the lawn using a mower, as this not only shreds the leaves and hastens rotting but also adds grass clippings, so increasing the nutrient value of the leaf mould. If your leaf mould pile is slow to break down, try turning it regularly to aerate the leaves and speed up the break down process.



Autumn Raspberries If there is one fruit that takes me back to my childhood days on my grandads allotment it is the raspberry. This gorgeous, sweet, easy to grow fruit is a perfect addition to any allotment. Buying this fruit in the supermarket can be so expensive so why not try growing your own. Autumn raspberries are prolific croppers and take the place of the summer varieties when they have run out of steam. They come into their own during August and are still going strong once the first frosts arrive (you can cover them with fleece to extend the season further) Winter is an ideal time to plant them, choose a moist, well-drained, sunny spot and plant the canes about 30cm apart. Most raspberries should be pruned straight after planting – cut the stems (or canes) down to 25cm (10in) tall. However, don't prune summer-fruiting raspberries bought as 'long canes', otherwise you will lose the fruit for that season. The raspberry canes are free standing so shouldn't need any support but you can put in some supporting stakes and wires before you plant. More compact autumn fruiting varieties like All Gold and Autumn Treasure are good options for growing in containers. Autumn Bliss, one of the first autumn varieties to be introduced, is naturally compact and ideal for smaller exposed plots. It's best to water plants at ground level, an irrigation system or leaky hose is ideal. Keeping the foliage, flowers and fruit dry helps to reduce the risk of fungal diseases.



Wildlife in winter -

Hedgehogs are the gardeners friend and a welcome addition to any vegetable plot, they will feast on slugs, snails, worms and caterpillars. If you want to welcome them onto your plot try enticing them with a saucer of dog food rather than bread and milk which can upset their stomachs. You can buy specialised hedgehog food online, try <https://www.spikesfood.co.uk/> for all things hedgehoggy. Try making them a cosy hibernation home, simply bury a wooden box under a pile of leaves in a quiet spot, making sure there is a small tunnel leading to the entrance hole, this will give them protection from foxes and other predators.

Insects and Bugs—Not all insects are pests that will munch their way through your crops, spiders, lacewings and ladybirds are all fantastic natural predators and will eat a whole variety of pesky critters.

Bugs are a vital link in the food chain so eradicating them altogether is no benefit to your allotment plot or garden. Attract the friendly bugs by providing habitats that they love. Piles of logs and prunings are ideal, or try stacking up stones or getting hold of a bale of hay or straw. These habitats are best sited away from your house or you will end up with unwelcome visitors. Bees are essential to the vegetable plot as they are top pollinators, it is best to try and attract the solitary species of bee such as the mason bee or bumble bee. You can do this by providing them with a small tube or tunnel with one end blocked up or fill an old tin can with drinking straw for any easy bee abode. Position your home facing south as bees prefer a sunnier site.



Green manures: Three to sow now

Crimson Clover—Good for smothering weeds.

Mustard—Quick growing, should be dug in before it flowers

Phacelia—A tough plant for the colder months, extensive roots break up the soil.



Help us 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.



Avoiding onion neck rot— Whilst most vegetable disease shows itself whilst the plant is still growing, onion neck rot only becomes obvious after you've dried and stored your crop. It is a form of botrytis and usually appears after around 6

weeks in storage. The rot starts at the neck of the onion and slowly spreads to the whole bulb, turning it grey and inedible.

The disease is present in the soil so good crop rotation should be practiced each year. Try to harvest the bulbs in sunny weather, make sure they are thoroughly dry and stored in a cool dry place.