



A NATIONALLY RECOGNISED SUPPORT ORGANISATION FOR ALLOTMENTS AND GARDENERS

www.swcaa.co.uk

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NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the Spring edition of our newsletter. We have just come through one of the toughest years any of us have probably ever been through, Covid has changed all our lives and made many of us re-evaluate what is important. One good thing throughout the pandemic is that people were still allowed to visit their allotment sites and it also highlighted the value of having a local growing space, as well as much-needed social contact, at a safe social distance, of course.

Many of our members have been in touch to tell us how still being able to go to their plot has been the one thing that has kept them going. Just to be able to enjoy that outside space and fresh air and a socially distanced chat has been so beneficial to peoples mental health. With the first lockdown we were lucky to have a lot of beautiful days and hot sunshine, being outside was a pleasure. Being in lockdown this time in winter has been much harder for us all. With a possible end in sight to the lockdown over the next few months we are still not sure how what has happened will shape our future. I have been lucky enough to work from home throughout the lockdown, allotments haven't been affected by this pandemic. One thing is certain though SWCAA are still here for you should you need us and Spring and the new gardening year are just around the corner. Stay safe and happy gardening.

[Ayesha Hooper Director/CEO](#)

Unfair notice to quit for non cultivation due to Covid restrictions Since the first lockdown began last year we have been contacted by many people who had received 28 day notice letters or been given no notice to quit due to site inspections being carried out and plots being deemed not properly cultivated. This has been the case on both association and council run sites. When the first lockdown started it was thought that allotment sites would be closed but thankfully Michael Gove stated that allotments should stay open as part of exercise and mental health support as long as Covid guidelines were adhered to. Following that SWCAA and others such as the RHS and Gardener's World issued guidelines on how this could be achieved on allotment sites. It then became the responsibility of each landlord or association to issue new rules and guidance for their sites. More importantly, all the above organisations advised landlords /managers how to adapt their management practices during the pandemic.

Chief of these was that plot inspections should be suspended for the duration. Some people had more time to work on their allotments, others couldn't for work or health or shielding or childcare reasons. All the national organisations recognised that the only fair way was not to be judgemental about a situation beyond anyone's control.

Since last March the pandemic may have receded temporarily for some people but at the moment it's still worse than it's ever been. It therefore follows that plot inspections should still not be taking place and that associations and councils should be mindful of the difficult situations their plot holders may find themselves in and be supportive - perhaps offering to help maintain the plots of key workers etc. If this is something that has happened on your site don't be afraid to ask for the opportunity to explain your circumstances, you are well within your rights to do so. [Content contributed to by Peter Hunkin, SWCAA Cornwall Representative](#)



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SWCAA's insurance scheme has changed.

We are now please to be able to offer our members public, product and employers liability insurance with your membership at no extra cost to you. For further information on this please go to our website and search insurance. If you have any further questions regarding these changes please do not hesitate to contact our office.



Re use and recycle Save money and save the planet by re using some common items we all have at home. As long as it can support soil and allow for drainage, you can use almost anything to sow seeds and grow veg in.

Polystyrene boxes are perfect for sowing seeds as are the containers mushrooms and other veg come in from the supermarket. Instead of buying modules to sow your seeds try using empty toilet rolls. Simply make a series of flaps in the base to make a bottom, fill with compost and sow your seeds. Once the seedlings are ready to plant out just pop the whole thing in the ground as the cardboard will rot down. Yoghurt pots and tin cans also make great containers just add some drainage holes. Use upturned plastic bottles with the tops/bottoms cut off for mini cloches to protect plants For larger plants such as cucumbers, tomatoes, chillies and aubergines, try old buckets, compost

and shopping bags, wheel barrows, Belfast style sinks and even bath tubs. Do try to be mindful though especially on an allotment site as many end up full of unwanted rubbish and littered with plastic.

Other useful ways to recycle include putting all those kitchen scraps to good use and making your own compost, you can get great results from just a small compost bin. In no time at all it will be full of worms and other fantastic bug life and your plants will love you for it. Make your own plant feed using nettles or comfrey and if you are lucky enough to live by the coast seaweed makes a great fertilizer too.

Learning to be a thrifty gardener, one who offers a second life to items that would otherwise end up in landfill is good for the wallet and the planet

Pest Watch - Downy Mildew This is a soil borne disease and affects brassica plants such as kale, cauliflower, cabbages, sprouts and turnips. The infection occurs on the plants leaves and these create spores in wet conditions and can quickly spread from plant to plant. When gardeners hear the name downy mildew, they think this disease is related to another common garden disease called powdery mildew. While the two have very similar names, they are two very different diseases.

Downy mildew thrives in humid areas and usually occurs on plants in cloches, frames, greenhouses and polytunnels although it is sometimes found on outdoor plants during wet mild weather. Larger plants and seedlings can both be affected and the signs are recognisable by yellow patches on leaves alongside fluffy white spots.

The best way to avoid this taking hold of your crops is to practice good crop rotation where as plants are placed in a different spot every year and ensure proper spacing between plants. As the mildew can spread so quickly it is important to pull up and dispose of any infected plant straight away.



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, and 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. The best advice for the new allotment

holder would be to not get carried away and start spending lots of money on things you think you might need. 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 if you can get it or old carpet or cardboard. This will help suppress the weeds 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.

Register your allotment site with SWCAA - Please register your allotment site and association with us and we will add you to our national register.



This register is also a guide to the allotments in your area and contains information about the site and how to get in touch if you want a plot. We hope to build a comprehensive guide to all the allotment sites across the country. A registration form and full details can be found on our website <https://www.swcaa.co.uk/find-site>



Did you know that as an SWCAA member you have access to discounted seeds. The seed schemes can be accessed via the members area on our website where you will find all the information on how to order. To take advantage of these offers you will need to have registered your email address with us previously. The seed schemes are not run by SWCAA, you will be dealing directly with the seed companies. If you don't have access to email and require further information then please contact us.



Make a compost pit Compost pits are a great way to recycle your raw vegetable scraps and shredded paper and improve your soil. Dig a pit at least 30cm in depth and 60cm width and then line it with shredded paper (not glossy), this helps keep in the moisture. Add your waste to the pit in layers, covering each one with some of the soil that you dug out of the pit in the beginning. Even if you already have a composting system in place having a trench is a great addition to your plot and great for getting rid of that extra waste you might otherwise throw away. Despite best intentions a compost heap can end up dominating a neglected corner of the plot, although it can be moved chances are you'll never get round to it, but once a pit is full you can dig another one where ever you please.

A dedicated bean trench can be sited to tie in with your crop rotation system. A pit also means your less likely to attract unwanted pests, as covering it with a blanket of soil should mask the scent enough to keep them away.

A few crops to Sow in March, April and May — There are many crops you can begin to sow now but you don't need to panic as there is still plenty of time to get this done. If you have the room and right conditions to start your seeds now and the time to look after them and keep them going then below is list of the most popular ones to get you started. If not wait a month or so they will always catch up.

Aubergines, will benefit from an early sowing in February, as quite slow growing, but can also be sown up until April. Start them off in a warm environment, ideally between 18 and 21 degrees. **Cucumbers**, choose a good all round variety like Telegraph for large, firm and tasty crop. Sow seeds on their side to prevent rotting. **Chillies**, there are so many varieties to choose from but Cayenne and Jalapeno chillies are good all rounders and ideal for the beginner. **Tomatoes**, again so many varieties to choose from but Gardeners Delight and Moneymaker are the most popular or for something more unusual try Tigerella. **Broad beans**, sow in March April and beginning of May, 5cm deep and 15cm, don't forget to stake taller varieties. **Peas**, seeds can be sown from February to May in a flat bottomed trench 6cm apart and 5cm deep, mice love these so don't forget to protect them. **Pumpkins and winter squash**, sow seeds on their sides in pots of compost from mid April to May, harden off well before finally planting out. **Beetroot**, sow from March up until the beginning of June for continuous crops. **Lettuce**, this can be sown throughout the year, sow seeds thinly in rows about every fortnight for continuous crops.

Herbs, nothing tastes better than fresh herbs picked from the garden, plot, window box or a pot on your windowsill, try basil, parsley, oregano and chives.

How to avoid bindweed Of all the allotment weeds bindweed is one of the worst as it can actively kill your plants by strangulation! The plants roots can go metres deep and it can regrow from just the tiniest fragment which unfortunately digging helps.



The only really effective method of control is persistence. Patrol your allotment every day if you can and pull up every bit you see without digging it out.



Make the most of that shady spot Grow shade tolerant plants, try rhubarb, gooseberries, redcurrants and Jerusalem artichokes and green leafy herbs like mint. For something a bit more unusual try Hosta's, all varieties are edible. Harvest time is early spring, when the plant sends up tightly-rolled shoots. Cut off a few at the root from each plant, much as you would asparagus.

Growing salad leaves such as rocket, spinach and lettuce in the shade will extend your growing period as they tend to bolt in the sunshine. Also try kale and Japanese greens such as mizuna.



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