



# A NATIONWIDE SUPPORT ORGANISATION FOR ALLOTMENT HOLDERS AND GARDENERS

[www.swcaa.co.uk](http://www.swcaa.co.uk)

Issue 43  
Summer 2023

# NEWSLETTER



**Welcome to our summer newsletter.** Flaming June has come and gone, where did that month go! We've all been busy sowing and planting out crops and trying to keep on top of the weeding, watering and tying in. The SWCAA mini allotment is growing like mad and we are starting to get some lovely produce, we've had smashing little gem lettuces, peas which we love raw in salads, the taste and smell of these always remind me of my Grandads allotment that he had Wythenshawe, Manchester, it was a big allotment site and he used to push me and my little Sister there in his wheel

barrow. We always used to pinch his peas when he wasn't looking.. Grandad and Nanna grew all sorts on their allotment and used absolutely everything they grew. Nanna never wasted anything, she was Spanish and a great cook. I have lovely memories of preparing the veg and cooking with her in her tiny kitchen and I think my love of growing came from them both. It looks like there's going to be a bean explosion anytime soon, We've got climbing and dwarf French, runners and broad beans all coming as well as the courgettes, cucumbers, aubergines, sweetcorn and squash, the tomatoes and chillies are a bit slow but they are getting there especially now we have had a few days of rain. Everything just goes crazy when it rains, not to mention its a welcome top up for the water butt. We are still on a hosepipe ban here in North Devon but according to South West Waters website the watering of vegetable crops only on a domestic premises is permitted which is a relief as we have had some very hot dry spells here.

Now seems to be the time when the bugs like to attack, I've had no problems up until now but I've noticed tiny caterpillars on my peppers and larger ones on the lettuces, I don't like to use chemicals of any kind so I'm checking and removing them and any affected leaves regularly, I've not seen many butterflies this year but I'm sure the cabbage whites will be out in force soon. Enjoy the summer and all your gorgeous home grown produce. **Ayesha Hooper, Director/CEO.**



**Save water and get your butts out** - With our summers getting hotter by the year and hosepipe bans becoming more common many allotment communities are feeling the pressure when it comes to collecting and storing precious rain water.

If you have an allotment site in the South West of England then a South West Water initiative might be just the thing to help. SWW are looking at new and innovative ways to get their customers and communities involved in water conservation, which is why the fund has been set up.

They are looking for projects big and small - whether it's rainwater harvesting loos, drought tolerant gardens, water butts in your community allotments, educational displays in your school, or harnessing new technology to educate people about water use. Successful applicants so far include Lanjeith Allotments in St Austell and Heathfield allotment Trust in Lympstone.

Grants range from £1,000 to £30,000 and projects must meet these specific requirements:

**Water efficiency** – the project must save tap water and be able to demonstrate a reduction in water use (litres saved as a result of the project)

**Benefiting the community** – the project must be located within our service area and demonstrate a benefit to the community SWW serve.

If this is something you think your allotment site would benefit from you can find out further information and how to apply on the SWW website <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/services/save-water/water-saving-community-fund/>



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**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 avoid bank charges.

You have enough plants  
But I don't have THESE plants



**Top tips for saving and using water and getting the best from your produce.**

**Having good soil is everything.** Improve your soil by digging in lots of well-rotted manure or home-made compost every spring. If that sounds like hard work, simply spread a thick layer of compost across your plot in spring (while the ground is moist), and let the worms pull it into the soil for you. Do you have any trees or shrubs on your allotment? These often have large root systems and take away valuable water from your produce so don't plant too close to them.

**Watering techniques** Your plants need less water than you think. Watering little and often does not help, as the water does not penetrate deep into the ground and encourages plants to develop roots near the soil's surface. One good soak every 10 days is better than a daily sprinkle. You can find out if you need to water by digging a hole a spade's depth and examining the soil: only water if the soil feels dry to the touch.

Make sure water gets to where it is needed by soaking around the roots. For thirsty plants such as tomatoes and courgettes, try placing plants in a saucer-shaped dip of soil so the water pools around them. Alternatively, you can bury a plastic bottle, cap removed and opening down, in the earth next to plants. Remove the bottom, fill with water and this will go straight to the roots.

Water in the early morning or late evening, this gives the water a chance to penetrate the soil rather than evaporating. It may take a little longer but watering around the plants gets the water to where it is needed. Spraying the whole plot or using sprinklers simply waters the weeds and the water doesn't soak into the soil. Soaker hoses and sprinklers should never be needed on an allotment plot.

**Mulches** These are great for stopping the soil drying out in the first place from evaporation by the wind or sun. A mulch is simply a layer of material placed on the surface of the soil that helps to stop weeds from growing, prevents water evaporation and improves the condition of the soil. They can be made from natural materials such as chipped bark, cocoa shells, gravel, grass cuttings, straw and plastic sheeting. Simply just plant the vegetables in slits in the material. Soil that has been mulched will need considerably less water than soil without, the thicker the mulch the more effective it is - a mulch of at least 5-10cm will make a big difference.

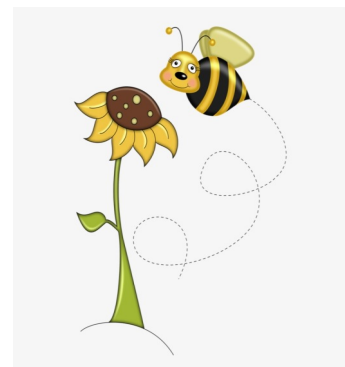
**Water butts** A water butt or two will help to harvest rainwater from the roof of your shed or greenhouse. A lot of water can be collected from the average shed roof so this is no small contribution to your water supply. Water collected in this way is a valuable resource and 100% better for your produce. Make sure all butts are sited in a safe place and are never left uncovered. Water butts cost anywhere from £20, although some water companies do offer special deals.

**It's all in the timing**

Sow crops or plants at times when the soil is already moist. Grow seedlings and plug plants to get a quick establishment.

Sow early (weather permitting). Early sown crops are usually well established when the drier summer months arrive. Often less can mean more. Over watering can lead to lots of slugs and snails, which will feast on your crops and plants. Too much watering can make a plant lazy! It'll keep roots short, making it less able to cope with dry weather

**It's a Myth** Don't spray your beans. Insects and bees do the pollinating - not water!!





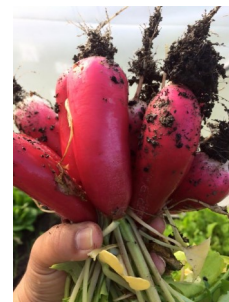


**Re-discover the radish** - Radishes are a member of the brassica family and are one of the easiest crops to grow. But if you're only eating the roots, then you are missing a trick! Whatever your growing space the humble radish can offer much more than you can imagine. If you've not discovered radish pods, then you've been missing out on some free food. (You can also add young radish leaves to salads as the whole plant is edible)

There are a number of different types of radish, from winter Daikon to the more familiar round and French breakfast radishes grown during the spring and summer months. All types have the same growing habits and lifecycles.

When radishes suffer heat stress or are left in the ground too long the plants will start to become leggy and will produce lots of flowers. These flowers are very attractive to insects and once pollinated seed pods will start to form. These long pods are common to the brassica family and are known as siliques, these will burst open when ripe. You can leave the pods on the plant to ripen and once dry and brittle you can remove the seeds and store them to sow the following year. If you are new to saving your own seeds then these are a great one to start with.

A single radish plant, if left to flower, will produce tens or even hundreds of edible pods. The longer the pods are on the plants, the tougher and more fibrous they become. Pick the pods when they are fat and juicy before they begin to dry out. You could also consider sprouting some seeds. The sprouts have a lovely spicy taste and can be added to salads or sandwiches much the same way as you would use cress. When harvesting root radishes, pick them when they are young as the roots are more succulent. If left in the ground too long they go woody and can become inedible. You can use radish pods in many different ways :



Raw pods are great added to salads, use them in anything you would use the normal radish in. They can be blanched then roasted with salt. Used in stews or stir fried, add them to pasta, risotto or curry dishes. You can also pickle them.

**Reader contribution - David Edmunds from Ascot, Berkshire** On page 4 of the autumn/winter newsletter you asked for contributions for future newsletters so I thought I'd let you know my experiences of the past year on the allotment. Firstly, the successes. Despite the hot dry, weather of last summer we had our best harvest of tomatoes ever, in 40 years of growing. We always grow them at home to minimise the risk of blight that is higher if grown on the allotment with everyone else's toms & potatoes. No exaggeration, every flower set a fruit, that is a first for us. We grew two Mountain magic variety tomatoes that I would certainly recommend.

On the allotment we had a good crop of potatoes & parsnips (still harvesting the latter) This despite the occasional water (if any) from the watering can. As you will appreciate to give sufficient water to potatoes with a watering can would take hours. Salsify did well. I wouldn't say we had any failures but we did not harvest many runner beans until after the hot spell although the dwarf bean harvest was good. Carrots, spinach & chard were average but beetroot & courgette harvest was much lower than normal. Then came winter with the short but very cold snap in December. This along with heavy rain also during December devastated our autumn sown garlic & purple sprouting. We lost a third of the garlic & over half the purple sprouting. We did not get much snow, about an inch that only stayed around for a few days, about average for this area (east Berkshire) but it was the frost & heavy rain that did it for us. Really disappointing as prior to the bad weather garlic & purple sprouting were looking good. In closing I'd like to comment on the recurring theme in the gardening press regarding climate change. Many of the 'experts' suggest growing 'Mediterranean' plants to cope with hot, dry weather. That's OK but what happens to these tender (ish) plants if we have a winter like the last one. It would only work if everything was containerised & brought into a large heated greenhouse for winter & that would not be cost effective. Thanks for the work you do, much appreciated. I'm just going to pot up some young sage seedlings.

If you have anything at all allotment or growing related you would like us to add to future newsletters, please get in touch, we would love to hear from you. [swcaa.cic@outlook.com](mailto:swcaa.cic@outlook.com)



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