



A NATIONALLY RECOGNISED SUPPORT ORGANISATION FOR ALLOTMENTS AND GARDENERS

www.swcaa.co.uk

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NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Spring 2020 edition of our newsletter. Here we are again at the beginning of another gardening year, I always think January and February are the hardest months to get through but as I'm sitting here writing this with the sun streaming through the window I know that spring and hopefully a lovely warm summer are just around the corner. We've had so much rain and with many parts of the country flooded this has had an impact on many plot holders with some plots still under water! Hopefully we have seen the worst of the rain now and the ground can start to dry out. But even if you can't get on to the allotment there's plenty you can do to get going on a windowsill at home. If you've just got and allotment or are a seasoned professional with any top tips, let us know what you're sowing and growing, we'd love to hear from you. **Ayesha Hooper Director/CEO**



Can Dandelions really help save the bees? A lot has been written in the press and on social media on this subject of late but are dandelions really that beneficial to the bee population and its survival....Bees emerge in early spring, hungry about the same time dandelions start to bloom, they are richer in both pollen and nectar and bloom earlier than other spring flowers

The Dandelion was named after the French dent de lion which means lion's tooth, referring to its toothed leaves.

The young leaves are edible and contain many vitamins and antioxidants, roots can be ground into a coffee substitute, and the flowers can be made into wine. In days gone by the sap of the plant was said to cure warts, whilst a tea made using its leaves was supposed to help calm stomach aches.

Some herbalists still use dandelions to treat skin conditions, asthma, low blood pressure, poor circulation, ulcers, constipation, colds and hot flushes. Approximately a third of our wild bees have disappeared over the last decade and the dandelion is a great source of food for all types of bees, hoverflies and many other pollinators.

Each bright yellow head contains around 100 individual flowers. The British Ecological Society recommend that people should avoid pulling out dandelions in their gardens in order to save the bees, we can take action to protect pollinators, by resisting the urge to get the lawnmower out every week, and leaving flowers to bloom.

Grass verges, lawns and allotments filled with dandelions are far better for bees than a weed free ones.



Just to let you know we have new contact details. Our new email address is swcaa.cic@outlook.com and our new phone number is 07714 255459. Please continue to send all post to our registered address below.



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Avoid sowing seeds too closely— When you're sowing tiny seeds it's sometimes hard to imagine the big plants they will turn out to be, therefore giving them plenty of space to grow and expand is essential for healthy crops in the future. Sowing too close can also bring many other problems like damping off which can wipe out trays full of seeds overnight and etiolation, where seedlings struggle for light and grow weak and thin. Large seeds are easy to space and should be placed at around 1-2 cm apart other seeds are so tiny some even like dust making the job much

trickier. A good tip for fine seed is to mix it with some silver sand before you sow it, this way you will be able to see where you have already sown or you can try a seed dispenser this lets you space your seed evenly with one click.

Alternatively you could try seed tapes, these are becoming ever more popular and are now widely available. These strips have seeds embedded in them at regular intervals, so they won't need thinning out later. Lay the seed tape in a tray or seed drill and cover it with soil, making sure it's in full contact with the ground.

Thin seedlings as soon as they're large enough to handle, water them a few hours before thinning this minimises root disturbance and makes it easier to pull them out. Select the plant you wish to keep, place your fingers on either side of it then gently remove all the surrounding unwanted seedlings. The spare seedlings of most plants can then be transplanted to fill out any gaps elsewhere although there are some vegetables that won't tolerate being moved, like carrots and parsnips. Do not leave unwanted seedlings lying around as this can attract pests and diseases.

SWCAA get many enquires from people that have been served with eviction notices due to non cultivation of their plots and most plot holders think this is unjustified and can't understand why it has happened. When you take on an allotment plot you will be issued with a tenancy agreement which you must sign and abide by. In order to not interfere with the enjoyment of your neighbours or the reletting of the plot in future, the tenancy agreement basically sets out your obligations to keep your plot tidy, free from weeds and in a good state of cultivation. Most councils and association run sites have regular site inspections so it is important to keep your plot clear of both annual and perennial weeds as well as rubbish which can make the site untidy and also look like a plot is being used as a dumping ground.



It is important that the plot is well stocked with produce relevant to that time of year this is referred to in the tenancy as the percentage of the plot being used.

Many of the calls we get are from plot holders who have been unwell or who have had to care for family members and were unable to get to the allotment. In these cases it is vital that you contact either the council or the association running the site and let them know your situation rather than just leaving the plot to go wild.

Councils and associations cannot just evict people from their plots without good reason and any notice of such action should be sent to you in writing preferably as a warning in the first instance. Normally at least forty days' notice is required in any written termination of tenancy that has been sent. If you have a genuine commitment to "no dig" or permaculture methods, show evidence of your commitment, and make sure you cut back weeds and keep the plot tidy, if you are a beginner and have fallen behind, ask for help, allotment holders are often willing to share their knowledge and lend a hand.



Why do we grow sweetcorn in blocks? Believe it or not sweetcorn is a type of grass and as such relies on wind pollination rather than insects. Its monoecious which means it has separate female and male flowers on the same plant. The female parts which will eventually become the cobs are further down the stem and have the 'silks' which catch the pollen carried in the wind whilst the male parts are the 'tassels' on the top. By planting corn in blocks rather than in rows each plant is better placed to catch pollen from its neighbour, this reduces the chance of insufficient pollination which can lead to disappointing cobs with gaps in them.



Simply Veg— Mushroom and Asparagus risotto

Ingredients

1 tbsp oil, 1 large onion, chopped, 1 large garlic clove, crushed, 275g (10oz) risotto rice, 100ml (3½fl oz) white wine, 150g (5oz) asparagus spears, stalks sliced into rounds and tips reserved, approx. 800ml (1 pint 7fl oz) hot chicken or vegetable stock, 350g (12oz) mixed button and chestnut mushrooms, sliced, 75g (3oz) Parmesan, grated, 1 bunch chives, snipped, A large knob of butter.

Method

Heat the oil in a wide-based shallow saucepan. Add the onions and garlic and fry for a few minutes over a high heat. Add the rice and stir the mixture to coat the grains. Pour in the wine and boil for a few minutes until nearly evaporated. Toss in the sliced asparagus stalks and add the hot stock, a ladleful at a time, stirring over the high heat, until all the stock has been absorbed, and the rice is just tender. Make sure that each spoonful of stock is absorbed before adding the next. From when the first ladle of stock is added, it should take around 20 minutes to cook.

Add the mushrooms and the asparagus tips and stir for about 3 minutes until well combined with the rice and just softened.

Remove from the heat. Add the Parmesan, chives and butter and season to taste with salt and pepper. Stir and cover with a lid, then leave to stand for 2 minutes before serving.



Transplanting self sown seedlings— letting some of your vegetables go to seed each year is a great way of saving time effort and money. Left to their own devices annual herbs like dill, chervil and parsley will self seed all over the place producing plants that are stronger and healthier than anything you would grow yourself from seed. Other veg that is good to leave to seed is lettuce carrots and parsnips. It is best to only let one variety run to seed otherwise you'll end up with some mutant of not great quality. Once the new seedlings have germinated



leave them until they have about 3 or 4 true leaves, then carefully fork them out keeping the soil around the root intact. Gently break apart any clumps of seedlings and keep the largest and strongest ones. Replant your new young plants where you want them to grow, firm in gently and water.

Jobs for the coming months:

April—Sowing

Aubergines, brussel sprouts, broad beans, cabbages, carrots, celeriac, chillies, cucumbers, florence fennel, kohlrabi, peas, salad leaves, shallots, sprouting broccoli, sweet peppers, tomatoes and turnips. Celery can also be sown now, frequent irrigation is a crucial part for this crop.

Plant

Strawberries, water plants in well to help them become established.
Pears, to plant, dig a hole no deeper than the roots but three times wider than their diameter.
Blueberries, this fruit likes acidic soil, this is vital for the plant to grow well.
Raspberries, prune the canes on a regular basis to ensure healthy growth throughout the season.
Asparagus, hand weed around the crowns to avoid damaging tender stems.
Potatoes, aim to get all your potatoes planted out by the end of the month. Plant out chitted second early potatoes in the first two weeks of the month and main crop potatoes in the second two weeks.

May—Sowing

Now is the perfect time for sowing dwarf, runner or climbing beans, sweetcorn, cucumbers, courgettes, pumpkins and squash in the greenhouse or under cover and parsnips. You can continue to sow lettuce, radish, spinach and beetroot direct outside, little and often will allow you to keep the harvests coming. Sow cabbage, kale and purple sprouting broccoli, for transplanting next month. When sowing carrots, protect against carrot fly with horticultural fleece.

Plant

Young plants sown last month can be planted out now including celeriac, courgettes, squashes, pumpkins and marrows and leeks. You can put this job on hold if the weather is cold even holding off till warmer weather in June won't do them any harm.

June—Sowing

Keep it going and keep on sowing for a succession of beetroot, radishes, spring onions and lettuce. You can also sow carrots but as always make sure you protect them from carrot fly.

Plant

Now is the time to plant out young of runner beans, French beans, courgettes, pumpkins, squashes and sweetcorn, plus outdoor tomatoes and cucumbers. You can also plant out Brussels sprouts, cabbages, cauliflowers and celeriac.

Harvest

It's finally the time to enjoy your harvests. Peas, gooseberries, currents, strawberries should all be ready now as well as salads, beetroot and radishes. Stop harvesting asparagus this month.



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