



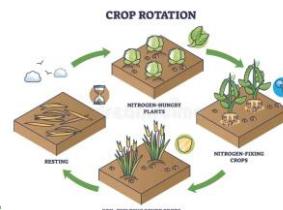
Gather the best of summer, keep winter crops moving and cover newly cleared soil. A few well-timed jobs now will make the plot easier to manage when the days shorten.

Welcome to our new look grower's digest, and a warm welcome to all our new members.

This year has certainly been a roller-coaster of extremes, dominated by the hottest UK summer on record. Allotment plots across the country have faced relentless heatwaves, severe dry spells, and strict hosepipe bans. Managing a plot this year meant transitioning quickly from spring frost management to survival-mode irrigation. The weather has heavily impacted allotment crops across the country, creating distinct successes and failures. The UK has endured 40 days of temperatures above 30°C and five distinct heatwaves, peaking at 38.1°C in mid-August! Vast areas of England and Wales fell into official drought conditions with weeks of zero rainfall baking the soil hard and leaving plot holders entirely reliant on watering cans due to hosepipe bans. If you would like to share your stories of your successes/failures and feature in future newsletters, please get in touch swcaa.cic@outlook.com **Ayesha Hooper, Director/CEO**

Five 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. Alternating with crops that have dense, spreading foliage like squash or potatoes naturally shades the ground and reduces weed problems. Potatoes also 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.
4. **Adds natural nitrogen** Growing legumes like peas and beans fixes nitrogen in the ground, enriching the earth for leafy crops that follow
5. **Enhances drainage** Deep-rooted vegetables break up compacted earth, which improves aeration and structure.



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. For those associations out there with their own website please consider adding a link to SWCAA.

A LITTLE NOTE

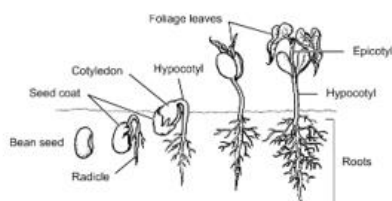
If you have your allotment site registered with us on our website, please check to see if the contact details for your site are up to date, if not please let us know as soon as possible. Email us at swcaa.cic@outlook.com

JOBS TO TACKLE OVER THE COMING WINTER MONTHS—Things are now starting to wind down on the allotment but there are still plenty of jobs to be getting on with..

JOBS FOR OCTOBER— Now is the time to be harvesting the last of the crops including, tomatoes, squashes, pumpkins, courgettes and runner beans. It's also the time to harvest your maincrop potatoes. Stake Brussel sprouts which when laden can be blown over by heavy winds. Improve your soil with a good mulch or sow some green manure like winter tares or Italian ryegrass.

JOBS FOR NOVEMBER— There is still plenty to be harvested including celeriac, carrots and cabbages. Plant garlic cloves and onions sets and cover with fleece to protect them from the worst of the weather. Prune fruit bushes, black currants, red currants, white currants and gooseberries can be pruned anytime between November and March, prune out any dead or diseased wood. Cut down autumn fruiting raspberries to ground level. Net your brassicas to protect from hungry pigeons.

JOBS FOR DECEMBER— The shortest day is on the 21st December. But if the weather allows you then a couple of hours spent on the plot can be very rewarding. Harvest Christmas veg, including parsnips leeks and winter cabbages. Harvest sprouts when about an inch in diameter and be sure to catch them before they “blow”. December is also the month to winter prune apple and pear trees; this will help control their shape and size as well as increase their productivity.



Sow broad beans for over wintering These delicious beans are amongst the first of the early crops of the season and should be ready from early summer if you sow them in October/November to overwinter. Do make sure you pick a variety that can withstand the coldest of winters Aquadulce Claudia, Masterpiece, Long pod

or Sciabola Verde are good ones to try. Sow in a good peat free multi purpose compost about 3cm deep into root trainers or recycled cardboard loo rolls. Plant out when the seed have germinated and grown their first few healthy leaves. They can be sown direct during these months, but you do risk the seeds being eaten by mice or slugs munching on those first tasty new shoots.



How the hot weather has affected many of our crops this year. Crops that thrive on sunshine and Mediterranean conditions had a spectacular year, provided they received basic hydration.

Tomatoes, Chillis, & Cucumbers: Greenhouses and sunbaked polytunnels acted like incubators. Outdoor cucumbers, tomatoes and heat-loving chillis boomed. Sweetcorn cobs developed rapidly under the intense sun, while sunflowers and late-sown flowers like calendula put on a massive display which is excellent for the bee population and other nectar loving insects.

Pumpkins & Squash ripened and died back weeks earlier than usual due to the accelerated summer heat. Cool-weather crops and thirsty plants bore the brunt of the scorching weather. Peas, runner and French beans produced early but quickly grew tired, tough, and stringy due to the parched soil. Brassicas leafy greens, salad leaves, spinach, and spring onions wilted rapidly or bolted to seed immediately.

Courgettes are usually an unstoppable allotment staple, but many courgette plants looked exhausted by August, yielding far less than their usual abundance. Ground that wasn't heavily mulched became concrete-hard, making it incredibly difficult for carrots and parsnips to swell without splitting or bolting.



How to regenerate your soil after a drought. Regenerating your allotment soil after a severe drought requires re-establishing its structure and all the life that lived in it. Autumn planting takes advantage of warm soil and returning rains.

Prolonged dry spells turn clay soil into concrete and sandy soils into dust. Taking immediate action in September and October will set your plot up for a highly productive spring. **Rehydrate slowly** Water repelling dry soil causes immediate run-off. Avoid heavy watering and instead, wait for gentle rain or apply water slowly to let it sink in deep. **Incorporate bulky organic matter**

Don't dig hard, baked soil, as this will cause damage to what remains of the soil structure. Instead, spread a 10 cm layer of well-rotted manure, garden compost, or leaf mould over the surface. Worms will love this and pull it down, breaking up compaction. **A No-Dig approach** will preserve natural moisture-retaining soil organisms like mycorrhizal fungi. **Sow green manures** empty beds will benefit from cover crops like phacelia, clover, mustard, or winter field beans. Their roots break up tough soil, protect the surface from winter erosion, and fix nutrients back into the ground. **Avoid compacting the soil** Baked soil that suddenly gets wet is highly vulnerable to compaction, use wide, flat planks to walk across your beds.

Anyone who
has time for drama
is not gardening
enough.

Autumn clearing creates the raw materials for next year's fertility. Sort them well and keep living soil covered.

Isolate disease by removing infected material and dispose of it carefully so as not to spread pathogens around the site. Collect fallen leaves for leaf mould, shred thick leaves first so they break down faster.

October is the time to ripen the last of those tomatoes. If you hang vines in the greenhouse, or place on a sunny windowsill you can still be eating home grown toms for the next couple of months. They will also ripen in a paper bag with a banana because of the ethylene gas given off.



Bravo for Beetroot! As Autumn approaches one crop that is still going strong on the allotment is beetroot. Easy to grow and with its edible roots and leaves it's packed with multi vitamins and is a must have on the allotment plot. Why not try making this tasty beetroot dip.

You will need 250g cooked beetroot, 1-2 cloves of garlic crushed, 1 small bunch of coriander and parsley, 50g of shelled walnuts, 3tsp red wine vinegar, salt and freshly ground pepper.

Method Roughly chop the beetroot and herbs and put into a food processor with the walnuts and garlic, blitz until you have a course paste. Add oil and vinegar and season well. Taste to check seasoning as you may need to add a little more vinegar depending on the sweetness of the beetroot. Cover and refrigerate to let the flavours mingle. Great served with toasted pitta bread pieces.

COMPOST CHECK

Too wet or smelly? Add torn cardboard and woody material. Too dry? Add green matter and a little water.

A tidy, wildlife-friendly site is safer for everyone

Most problems are prevented by ordinary care: clear routes, maintained structures, correctly stored products and a moment to think about neighbours human and wild.

Keep routes clear

Level paths, remove trip hazards and park wheelbarrows where they cannot obstruct others.

Put tools away

Store sharp tools safely; stack timber securely and repair sheds or greenhouses promptly.

Dress for the job

Wear sturdy footwear and gloves; cover cuts before handling soil, manure or compost.

Use products lawfully

Only use authorised pesticides and follow the label for use, storage and disposal.



Recipe: Sweet Allotment Harvest Pie

A classic, spiced harvest pie with a smooth, sweet pumpkin filling.

If you are using allotment pumpkins, use smaller culinary varieties (like 'Jack Be Little' or 'Munchkin') rather than giant carving pumpkins, as they have much better flavor and less water content.

Ingredients: 1 pre-rolled short crust pastry sheet (or homemade pastry) 450g cooked pumpkin or squash purée (steamed or roasted until soft, then blended smooth) 2 large eggs, 100g soft brown sugar 150ml double cream (or evaporated milk), 1½ tsp ground cinnamon, ½ tsp ground ginger, ¼ tsp ground nutmeg, Pinch of salt

Method

Blind bake the case: Preheat your oven to 200°C (180°C Fan). Line a 9-inch pie dish with the short crust pastry, then line the pastry with baking parchment, fill with baking beans or uncooked rice, and bake for 15 minutes. Remove the parchment and beans, then bake for another 5 minutes until the base is pale golden. Reduce oven heat to 180°C (160°C Fan).

BONFIRES

Follow site and local rules. Never burn waste in a way that causes pollution, health harm, nuisance or danger to traffic; compost or recycle where possible. (SWCAA insurance does not cover you for bonfires).

WILDLIFE NOTE

Favour healthy soil, crop diversity and physical controls before chemicals. Check leaf and material piles before moving or burning them.



Mix the filling: In a large bowl, whisk the eggs and brown sugar together until smooth. Whisk in the spices, salt, and your smooth pumpkin purée. Gradually stir in the double cream until fully combined.

Bake: Carefully pour the spiced mixture into your blind-baked pastry case.

Cook until set: Bake for 35 to 40 minutes, or until the filling is mostly set with just a slight, gentle wobble right in the very center. Leave to cool completely before slicing. Serve at room temperature or chilled with a dollop of cream.



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.