



# A NATIONALLY RECOGNISED SUPPORT ORGANISATION FOR ALLOTMENTS AND GARDENERS

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

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# NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the summer edition of our newsletter. At the time of writing this we are experiencing amazing sunshine and high temperature's right across the UK. On the SWCAA plot here in North Devon we have been watering every other day either very early morning or late in the evening to keep the plants from suffering to much. (see are tips on wise watering on page 3) The lovely warm weather has really made an impact on the growth of the crops and after late sowing and planting out they have certainly caught up and are looking healthy and happy. Germination has been the best for years although we've had problems getting the French beans to grow as they all seem to have rotted off and we are on our 3rd planting of peas which are either eaten by pesky pea weevil's or pulled up by birds. Hopefully it will be third time lucky. The forecast at the moment is looking to stay pretty much the same for the next month, lets hope we don't get an awful wet August as normal just in time for judging!!



**Dealing with Thrips—**  
August is a good time to keep an eye on the leaves and flowers of your precious crops as they may come under attack from this troublesome insect. The minute bugs have fringed wings and are

about 2mm long. Extremely active, thrips feed in large groups. They leap or fly away when disturbed. Host plants include onions, beans, carrots, squash and many other garden vegetables. Both adults and the wingless larvae are attracted to white, yellow and other light coloured blossoms and are responsible for spreading tomato spotted wilt virus. They puncture plants, suck up the contents and prefer a dry environment and warm temperatures so are suited to typical August weather. Symptoms include dull leaves with a silvery discolouration and effected plants can also be twisted discoloured and scarred. To treat remove the infected foliage and use organic plant oils to prevent the problem becoming severe.

**Perfect pumpkins—** These fabulous vegetables can grow at an alarming rate especially when conditions are right. As the gourds rest heavy on the ground they can be vulnerable to pest damage particularly slugs who can do a lot of damage when the skin is still soft, this then becomes infected with a secondary rot which makes the pumpkin no good for storing. While the fruits are still small lift them off the ground and lay them on bricks or for the larger varieties a pallet, basically anything that can let the air circulate around the growing fruit keeping the skin dry. Turn the fruits a little each week being careful not to tear the stalk, exposing them to the sun will help them dry evenly.



Remove any leaves that are shading the fruit as they start to ripen. This cures and hardens the skin to form a protective layer to help it last at least 6 months in storage. Use this method for butternut squashes and other gourds.



**Have Happy Healthy Crops—** with these nutrient packed growing mediums. Organic matter such as compost or leaf mould is essential for healthy soil. Organic matter acts as a good surface for exchanging nutrients and also improves water retention stopping valuable nutrients from washing away. It also keeps the soil moist enough so that plants can take up all the nutrients they need. Soil also needs a good structure so that the roots of your crops can grow deeply. Try and avoid digging the soil when it is wet and grow green manures such as chicory or alfalfa which helps to break up compacted soil making it easier for you and your plants to

work with. Sourcing nutrients from organic natural materials rather than chemicals with help build up biological life in your soil, chemicals can have a highly negative impact on your soil. Garden compost is probably the best thing you can add to your soil but you could also try chicken manure which is high in nitrogen but needs to be well rotted before being applied, alternatively use pellets but applied in moderation. Home made plant feeds such as comfrey or nettle are good sources of potassium and nitrogen (tomatoes love this) dilute it down before use for best results.

Registered Office, 22 Miller Crescent, Barnstaple, North Devon, EX32 7DZ  
Phone 01271 327087 e-mail [swcaa@btconnect.com](mailto:swcaa@btconnect.com)  
Registered in England and Wales Registration Number 6512423



*July* **What to sow** Turnips, oriental vegetables, plant out leeks, chicory, fennel, autumn/winter salads, beetroot, peas, radishes and spring onions and carrots, keep an eye out for carrot root fly, especially when thinning. Plant out sprouting broccoli and brassicas.. This is the last chance to sow runner and French beans for a late autumn crop. **Harvest** Courgettes, shallots, runner beans, beetroot, carrots, peas, broad beans. In the greenhouse/polytunnel, cucumbers and chillies, possibly tomatoes. **Jobs to do** For lovely potatoes in time for Christmas plant now in pots or bags, bring under cover before the first frosts. Chillies, peppers and aubergines grown in pots benefit from being potted on now. Pinch out the tip of aubergines once they have 5 or 6 fruits. Continue to pinch out side shoots on tomatoes, remove any leaves growing below the lowest trusses or any that show signs of disease. Feed with a good tomato fertilizer once a week. Harvest garlic when the tops bend over and are yellow. Pick courgettes whilst they are young and tender as this encourages the formation of more fruits. (Nipping off the tip encourages branching) Marrows along with squashes and pumpkins will reach a good size by Autumn, let the skins dry and harden in the sun before harvesting in late September/October and storing them in a cool dry place. Picking runner beans regularly helps prevent them from becoming stringy and allows more pods to develop. Check for cabbage white butterfly eggs under the leaves of your brassicas (they will find them) keep covered with a fine netting. Feed crops with a general purpose fertilizer. Clear weeds regularly, as they compete with your crops for nutrients and water.

 **AUGUST** **What to sow** Swiss Chard, radishes are very easy to grow and reliable, make direct sowings for harvesting in the Autumn, try sowing winter radish varieties. Sow Pak Choi and other oriental vegetables. Direct sow now as they are prone to bolting. Continue to sow salad leaves for a regular supply. You can still make direct sowing of carrots, but choose a fast maturing variety such as Adelaide. Lettuce such as Winter Gem can be sown in modules for planting out later this month. Make final sowings of spring cabbages into a seed bed, ready for harvesting in April. **Harvest** Tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, chillies, potatoes, carrots, French and runner beans, beetroot, artichokes, spring onions, courgettes and plums. Onions and shallots can also be harvested but leave them in a sunny spot to dry out first. **Jobs to do** Some fruit trees can be pruned in summer, including plums. Trained apples and pears can also be pruned as can spur-fruiting, established apple trees. Keep an eye out for flea beetle on brassicas and related plants such as Swiss chard and rocket. Watch out for blossom end rot on tomatoes, which is caused by irregular watering. Plant out summer/autumn cauliflowers for an autumn harvest. Finish planting out winter cabbages early in the month. Cut back summer fruiting raspberries down the ground level Plant out kale for winter and spring cropping.



**What to Sow** Spring cabbages, spinach, winter salads, broad beans and peas for earlier harvests next spring and quick-growing crops such as turnips and radish. Try oriental leaves, perpetual spinach, winter lettuces, radishes, rocket, winter hardy spring onions, corn salad, mizuna (these crops will probably need some form of protection over winter. Sow a green manure, such as grazing rye, over any patch of soil that is going to be left bare over winter - it suppresses weeds and will add nutrients when dug into the soil in spring. **Harvest** courgettes, aubergines, swiss chard, cabbages, cauliflowers, onions, potatoes, runner/French beans, chillies, peppers, tomatoes, beetroot, carrots, cucumbers, radish, spring onions and autumn-fruiting raspberries and apples. Check if sweetcorn is ready to harvest. If the tassels have turned black or brown, peel back the outer leaves and push your nail into the sweetcorn. If the juice is milky then it is ready to eat, if the juice is clear then leave a bit longer. **Jobs to do** Plant out spring cabbages, over wintering onion sets and strawberries. Wasps can be a real pain at this time of year. To minimise damage, pick fruits as soon as they are ripe, and pick up any fallen ones. Try to keep birds off crops such as apples and pears, which can be pecked at by birds which in turn attracts wasps. Cut down the foliage of asparagus when it turns brown. Take care of the spines, and give the plants a good mulch afterwards. You still need to keep on top of the watering at this time of year as irregular watering can lead to problems with blossom end rot in tomatoes and splitting of root vegetables. Water well during dry spells. Keep watering winter squash and pumpkins as this will prevent their growth from being checked. Celery can be earthed-up for the final time this month, leaving just a tuft of foliage sticking out of the trench or collar in order to blanch the stems.

**Corn Chowder** - Ingredients: 25g butter, 1 small onion finely chopped, 1 garlic clove chopped, 1 stick celery chopped, 1 small green pepper deseeded and cubed, 1 large potato peeled and cubed, 600ml semi skimmed milk, 300ml vegetable stock, 300g can sweetcorn drained or rinsed (or use fresh cooked sweetcorn), few drops of tabasco sauce, 2 tbs chopped fresh chives to serve. For the croutons, 2 thick slices of bread crusts removed and cubed, 2 garlic cloves crushed, 2tbsp olive oil.

Method: Heat butter in a pan, then cook onion, garlic, celery, pepper and potato for 5 mins. Stir in milk and stock, bring to the boil, then simmer for 15 mins. Stir in corn, cook for 3 mins, then add Tabasco and seasoning. For the croutons, place the bread in a bowl with the garlic, oil and some salt, toss well. Heat a non-stick pan, then gently cook cubes until golden and crisp. Serve the soup topped with the chives and croutons.

TOP TIPS FOR SAVING AND USING WATER AND GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR PRODUCE

**Improve your soil**

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 you allotment? These often have large root systems and take away valuable water from your produce so don't plant to 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**

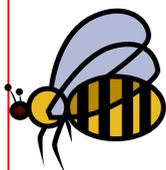
These are great for stopping the soil drying out in the first place from evaporation by the wind or sun. A mulch is simply a layer of material placed on the surface of the soil that helps to stop weeds from growing, prevents water evaporation and improves the condition of the soil. They can be made from 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 quick establishment.
- Sow early. 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!!

Gardening is about enjoying the smell of things growing in the soil, getting dirty without feeling guilty, and generally taking the time to soak up a little peace and serenity.

**Courgettes not setting fruit?** Although generally trouble free and a highly productive vegetable sometimes the flowers fall off without producing a fruit or fruits form, yellow and drop off. Courgettes abort their fruits when they are stressed so need plenty of sunshine, water and rich soil. The problem can also be caused by poor pollination in wet summers when insects aren't as active so you can help them along by hand pollinating them. Take a male flower and remove the petals to expose the pollen laden anthers. Dab into the centre of the female blooms and the fruits should start to swell within a few days.



FOR A SUCCESSFUL GARDEN

**DEALING WITH EVICTION**—Being faced with an order to quit can come as a distressing shock, but it is important to note that evictions can mostly be justified. If you are not using your plot, just want a storage shed or somewhere to sit, have let uncut weeds take over your plot, or given up because you are moving away, then the following advice is not for you. Offer an apology and step down gracefully. On the other hand, you may have too large a plot to manage, or as a beginner may be unable to cope, or have been ill or the victim of bullying etc. In cases like these it is vital that you act immediately. Due to a substantial increase in calls to our office regarding plot eviction here are some basic steps to follow if you find yourself in this situation.

**What to do?** It is best to reply openly, if you really have neglected your plot, and don't think you can cope, then accept that.

Review the rules in your tenancy agreement regarding evictions and right of appeal. See how you can overcome or meet any objections raised. Most evictions are based on accusations of poor cultivation and normally at least forty days' notice is required in any written termination of tenancy that has been sent. Look too for compensation for lost crops and plants. Check for any requirement for warning notices: did you receive them? Did the warnings include stipulations about resuming or improving cultivation? Or replacing a shed etc. Are they fair in your case? Where you given a time limit to reply and act? If so did you comply with this, and if not is there a valid reason. 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.

#### **RESISTING BULLYING AND INTIMIDATION ON ALLOTMENTS**

This topic is often glossed over, but unfortunately it is becoming very common especially on self managed sites. The most important action is to sit tight, write in rejecting the eviction notice and denying the validity of its claims. Offer your rent when it is due, getting a receipt, if necessary by recorded delivery mail. It does not matter if the payment is then returned. Your own mind - set is most important - do not consent to the bullying, never let doubts make you secretly complicit. You may be subjected to further threats, perhaps following what seems to have been the old fashioned NSALG 's approach. They often opt out, of helping, stating that they do not intervene in internal disputes. In the past they have even suggested that allotment laws deny plot holders any real rights...

#### **APPEALING TO AUTHORITIES**

It may be possible to appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman. For advice on making a complaint visit <http://www.lgo.org.uk/> They will not deal with general enquiries about local authority powers. The Ombudsman may suggest compensation be paid, and officers sent for training in "conflict resolution".

If you needs any further advice on this topic then please contact us and we will do our best to help. Please note we can only offer in depth help and advice to our members.

**Growing Chickpeas**—These plants make an excellent ground cover with silver leaves and pretty white flowers and the best thing is they are easy to grow and very tasty. They are drought resistant and don't suffer from pest attacks, you can sow them from a supermarket packet of dried chickpeas.

The pods are ready to harvest when they are slightly hard to the touch but are still a bright green and the mini pods will contain just one or two peas.

To prepare and cook the pods just shell them and boil for a couple of minutes they are delicious in salads, rice dishes or cous cous but are delicious simply cooked, drizzled with a little olive oil and sprinkled with sea salt. You can also try a Spanish twist by charring whole pods in a little olive oil in a frying pan until they just begin to blacken on the outside then add some smoked paprika and sea salt, lovely with a nice cold lager!



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