

Allotment Newsletter Spring 2026



Keeping you up-to-date with the latest news and handy tips for looking after your allotment garden in Stevenage.

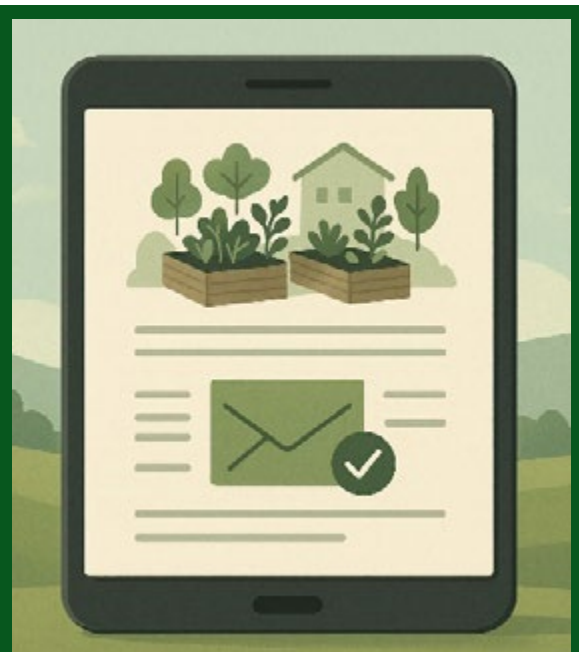
Dear Allotment Plot Holders,

As we step into another growing season, we're excited to share updates, tips, and reminders to help everyone get the most from their plots. Whether you're a seasoned gardener or just starting out, this newsletter brings together important information about site maintenance, wildlife-friendly growing, and the small actions that help our allotment community thrive.

Thank you for your continued care, enthusiasm, and dedication to creating vibrant, productive, and welcoming spaces. Here's to a fantastic year of growing, learning, and supporting one another across our allotment sites!



Key contact details: Email: allotments@stevenage.gov.uk Tel: 01438 242323



A Digital Update – Invoices & Communication

This year, invoices were sent electronically for the first time, and the move has been a real success. By sending this way, we were able to deliver the invoices to you much more quickly, resulting in only a small handful of outstanding invoices after the 40-day cut-off.

We also recently upgraded our records system, making it easier and faster to send important updates and information to plot holders, including Notices to Cultivate and invitations for those on the waiting list.

To help us keep communication smooth and efficient, please make sure we have your most up-to-date email address. If you need any assistance, we're always here to help.

Plot Numbers: A Small But Important Task

Please ensure your plot has a clearly visible plot number. This small addition makes a big difference, helping Volunteer Site Agents and staff quickly identify plots when responding to issues. If your number isn't currently displayed, please pop one up as soon as possible to keep things running smoothly for everyone.



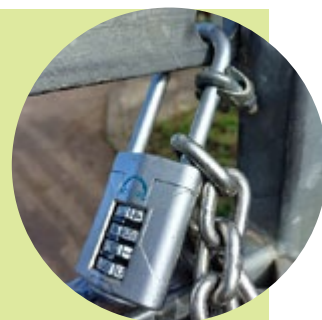
Site Security: Lock Those Gates

Our allotment sites are protected by secure fencing and gates, but this only works if the gates are properly closed and locked.

Please make sure to lock the gate both when you enter and when you leave, and remember to muddle the numbers on the lock.

Keeping the gates secure helps protect your produce and belongings and also discourages fly-tipping.

Thank you for helping maintain a safe and well-kept site.



Water Tanks: Use With Care

Water tanks are available at all allotment sites, but please remember they should only be used with watering cans to collect water. They must not be used for washing vegetables or any other items to prevent contamination.

After using a tank, always ensure the lid is securely replaced (if it has one).



Nature Friendly Allotments

A nature friendly allotment encourages biodiversity, supports helpful wildlife, and reduces reliance on chemicals. Here are a few tips for how you can make growing spaces more ecological and productive:

1. Companion Planting for Healthier Plots

Growing flowers and vegetables together helps create a natural balance that supports pollinators, beneficial insects, and soil health. Mixing plant shapes and colours confuses pests and reduces the need for pesticides. Flowers like coriander, fennel, Calendula, Californian poppy, poached egg plants, and white deadnettle are great to add alongside your vegetables to help attract predators such as ladybirds, lacewings and hoverflies and larvae will feed on aphids as they create a succession of pollen and nectar throughout the growing season.



Certain plants can also distract pests:

- Marigolds to draw whitefly from tomatoes
- Nasturtiums to attract blackfly away from beans
- Borage, Marigold and some herb Flowers to attract key pollinators such as Bees and hoverflies to bean plants
- Chinese cabbage to lure cabbage white butterflies away from brassicas
- Lettuce can also be used to divert Slugs from corn or squashes

2. Improving Soil Naturally

Healthy soil grows stronger plants. Adding nutrient rich leaves like yarrow and comfrey to compost, and growing clover between rows that can then be used as a natural mulch with cuttings are just some of the ways you can

improve the quality of your soil. In addition to this pairing crops with different root depths (e.g. carrots and onions) helps prevent them competing for the same nutrients.

3. Using Plants to Create Microclimates and shelter

Strategic planting can help protect crops. Planting lettuce can provide humidity around cucumbers, radishes and strawberries, and lavender can shelter the lower stems of lilies.

4. Natural Weed Management

Dense planting reduces sunlight reaching the soil, making it harder for weeds to germinate. In addition to this certain plants naturally suppress problem weeds, some examples of these are:

- Mexican marigolds (inhibit horsetail and bindweed)
- Lupins (suppress fat hen)

5. Benefits of Polyculture

Growing many different plants together in a mixed bed reduces pest problems thanks to physical barriers, scent confusion, and increases in natural predators and parasitoids. Further information on these topics can be found at:

<https://sgaa.co.uk/companion-planting-what-is-it/>

<https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/expert-advice/how-to-grow/how-to-grow-flowers/companion-or-mixed-planting>



Composting: Turn Waste Into Gold!

Composting is a fantastic way to recycle organic waste into nutrient-rich soil for your plot. Not only does it help reduce waste, but it also improves soil health and saves money on buying compost. Here's a quick guide on what you can (and can't) compost:



Compost This	Avoid Composting This
✓ Fruit and vegetable peelings	✗ Cooked food or meat
✓ Grass clippings	✗ Dairy products
✓ Garden trimmings (soft stems/leaves)	✗ Diseased plants
✓ Coffee grounds and tea bags	✗ Weeds with seeds
✓ Eggshells	✗ Perennial weeds (e.g., bindweed)

Starting a compost pile is easy, and if you're new to it, there are plenty of resources online or advice available from your fellow plot holders!

<https://www.edenproject.com/learn/eden-at-home/how-to-make-a-compost-heap-10-top-tips>

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/soil-composts-mulches/composting>

If you do have any pesky perennial weeds like bind weed or dandelions and would like to compost them to make use of the valuable nutrients that they take from the soil, you can do so but it is important to start by first killing the roots to prevent regrowth. Effective methods include drowning them in a bucket of water for 4 weeks, drying them in the sun until brown/brittle.

Fly-Tipping: Report It!

Fly-tipping is a criminal offence, and once it starts, it can quickly snowball. All plot holders are responsible for removing their own rubbish – whether general waste or green waste.

If you spot fly-tipping, please report it (and the person responsible, if known) via our website:

[Report Fly-Tipping Here](#)

Remember, if you see fly-tipping in progress, dial 999 and ask for the police.



Foxes: Helpful Visitors & Gentle Deterrents

Foxes can benefit allotments by helping to control rabbits, mice, rats, insects, and other pests – reducing the need for chemicals and supporting a healthier ecosystem. To discourage foxes from lingering, keep plots tidy, avoid using animal-based fertilisers, and ensure compost bins are covered if they contain food scraps. Natural deterrents such as human hair, mirrors, or light sprinklings of chilli powder or pepper can help keep them away from specific areas.



Plot Boundaries: Maintenance Responsibilities

Plot holders are reminded that boundary areas form part of your rented allotment and must be maintained to an appropriate standard. This includes keeping boundaries free from rubbish, controlling weeds, and managing any overgrowth. Where plots adjoin site perimeters, hedges and shrubs should be regularly trimmed to prevent encroachment onto plots or pathways.



Plot Inspections: What To Expect

We'll conduct plot inspections throughout the year to ensure everyone is cultivating and maintaining their plots.

We work using an ABC/traffic light-style grading system.



Here's a quick breakdown of what this all means:

C: Major issues like no cultivation, excessive weeds or rubbish, or poorly maintained boundaries. A Notice to Cultivate will be issued, and failure to act may result in a Notice to Quit.

B: Minor issues, such as weeds, rubbish, or a lack of cultivation. We'll send a gentle nudge reminder to help you get back to an A standard.

A: Well-maintained, at least 70% cultivated, clear boundaries, visible plot number. Keep up the great work—no action needed!

We know that managing a plot is hard work, so if you're ever struggling to keep up, please let us know so we can explore options.

Enhancing Your Allotment To Attract Wildlife

There are lots of simple ways to make your allotment a welcoming space for wildlife.

If you have a structure, such as a shed or greenhouse, consider adding bird feeders and nest boxes for birds or bats, or creating a small "green roof" with sedum, mosses, or wildflowers. These additions provide food and shelter for a variety of wildlife.

A small pond—even something as small as a bucket—can offer vital support for dragon flies frogs and hedgehogs, which in turn help control pests such as slugs and snails. Just make sure there's a gentle way for wildlife to get in and out.

Bug hotels and other small habitats such as hollow stems for bees can also be introduced to encourage beneficial insects and animals onto your plot.

Planting green manure is another great option that helps retain moisture, reduce soil erosion, and suppress unwanted weeds. August is the perfect time to sow, as summer crops finish and new space becomes available. You can also boost biodiversity by adding a wall baskets filled with stems, cones, and plant materials to create cosy overwintering spots for insects. A shallow dish of water will attract bees and other pollinators throughout the warmer months.

A healthy ecosystem naturally keeps pests in check—frogs and ground beetles feed on slugs, and a family of blue tits can eat thousands of aphids in a season. To protect young plants, transplant seedlings in early summer when they're stronger, and use fine eco netting straight away to keep butterflies, aphids and their eggs at bay.

Further information on this topic can be found at <https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/allotments>



Thank you for taking the time to read through this newsletter. If you have any questions or suggestions for how we can continue improving our allotment sites, we'd be delighted to hear from you. Your involvement and ideas help us ensure our sites remain productive, welcoming, and well supported for everyone.

Wishing you a successful and enjoyable growing season.

Ella Brittain - Stevenage Borough Council