



# NEWSLETTER

JULY 2023



## Whither it's rain or shine there's lots to do this Summer

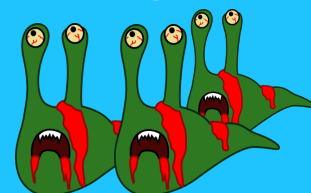
Welcome to July, the sun is supposed to be shining, what is more the allotments are at their peak with an explosion of colour from the flowers in full bloom at the moment.

As typically the warmest and sunniest months of the year, or maybe not. This is the time to really enjoy all of the hard work that was put in during winter and spring. Stay vigilant and keep



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on top of watering plants during hot spells - especially new tender plants.

The warm temperatures of July will also encourage the insects to multiply, causing pests such as aphids to wage war on your plants. There are numerous suppliers of organic pest control methods to give you the confidence to protect your plants and control pests.

Most of all, make sure to enjoy the space you have worked so hard to create all those months ago and enjoy your time spent amongst nature and greenery.

### July Jobs

- Harvest garlic planted last year.
  - Harvest onions once the leaves start to flop over.
  - Sow spring cabbages and plant out winter cabbages.
  - Water courgettes to encourage a good crop.
  - Finish planting winter brassicas.
  - Water fruit trees/bushes
  - Continue to keep your boundaries weed free.
  - Apply fertiliser for a nutrient boost.
  - Continue watering plants regularly, particularly during hot spells
  - Keep an eye on potential plant diseases and pests.
- .....

## Good Garden Netting Choices for Green Gardening



### Garden mesh: friend or foe?

How useful and necessary is garden netting? Is it just almost-instant landfill?

If you grow anything more than a few salad vegetables, you are probably going to

need some netting. Netting offers some protection against the ravages of birds and insects and even mammals. Sometimes, despite wanting to take a holistic view of growing plants, it can seem a bit of a war; half the animal kingdom is up for exploiting your hard work! It is one of the few downsides that from time to time your crops get eaten before you get a chance. This can be especially soul-destroying if you have put in hours or days of work or if you have spent a lot of money on seeds or seedlings. Timely use of some netting can often prevent this situation from arising. However, it's worth taking some time to work out what types of garden mesh are best from a green viewpoint, and which are best for your needs. What type of netting is best?

There are lots of types available, from insect netting to bird netting and even deer netting. The exact purpose you want it for will govern what's best. The garden net types found in most garden centres and shops is general purpose, mainly for deterring birds, small animals and larger insects. Most garden netting is made from polyethylene and similar

materials. It is durable if it is not snagged or torn but it can deteriorate quickly if weeds are allowed to grow through it, or if it is carelessly handled or stored.

## Stretch or non-stretch netting?

Stretchy black netting is good for small areas where you want a temporary shelter. Non-stretch netting is better for covering a large, defined area in a more permanent or semi-permanent way.

Non-stretch netting is usually sold in packs of different sizes. Stretch netting is more often sold on rolls and you buy a measured amount, as you would for fleece or other fabrics.

The quality of garden netting is variable. The cheaper kinds may snag and tear too easily, so check that what you buy is fit for purpose.

## Is there a bio-degradable garden netting on the market?

There is biodegradable netting for big environmental projects. It is often made from jute or other natural fibres. It is mainly used for stabilising soil while plants get established. Obviously there would be a big disadvantage to garden netting which biodegrades too readily. But a netting which biodegrades effectively after a decade or two would be a useful advance. Make sure you dispose of broken polyethylene netting by taking it to your local recycling centre.

## How best to use netting in the allotment

There are a countless ways to use garden netting effectively. You can make small cloche-like enclosures around your plants with bendy tubing (plumbing blue pipes are sometimes used as they bend yet hold their shape well).

**Please note that once the Association shop is up and running blue piping will be a stock item.**

You can fence off areas of your plot using garden netting, much as if you were using garden wire fencing. The problem with this is that weeds tend to invade the edges and gradually undermine your efforts and may even cause your netting to tear. This method is therefore best used over a shortish period of time, or if you are able to be diligent in keeping weeds in check.

You can also create a special structure on which to hang your netting. Special interlocking plastic tubes are good for this as they are adaptable and snag-free. Bamboo poles, or wooden poles can be used in this way, tied together to make a framework but they do snag more easily. Netting can be tied on or just draped over and secured at ground level with ground pegs (tent pegs are good, or you can buy pegs made for the job from some garden centres). Frame it!

One of the best ways to use garden netting for small areas is to create wooden frames and attach the netting as permanent side walls. This works well for such plants as cabbages and dwarf peas. Big sprawly plants are less



easily accommodated. The advantage of this approach is that you can move your frame easily and swiftly when it's no longer needed, or to access the plants for weeding and other tasks.

You can certainly use garden netting to create fruit cages, especially if you are growing only a small crop. For larger areas it's worth buying galvanised wire netting.

Most garden netting is made from polyethylene which takes several hundred years to biodegrade.

If you use it be sure to dispose of broken netting properly as it can be a hazard to wildlife. All plastic netting is vulnerable to snagging and tearing, so it may be better to invest in wire netting for most of your allotment protection.

## Netting for deterring birds

Garden netting can deter birds reasonably well.

You will certainly find it invaluable for soft fruit, such as redcurrants and strawberries. If you are enclosing plants temporarily make sure that the netting used is suspended so that it does not touch by several inches. Pigeons are especially good at walking on netting if it is too close to the plants - then they rip a way through the netting, causing plenty of damage to the crop. Pigeons and other wild birds like nothing better than helping themselves to seeds and young seedlings.

Bird Block netting is available online in different sized rolls. If you want to protect permanent plants it may be better to go for wire netting as it is far more durable and is effective at keeping out the rabbits however sometimes they are partial to nibbling the netting.

Check the netting regularly as small birds can easily get trapped. If they find a way in, they seem to forget just how they did it and panic at the approach of humans, so it's good to have a section of netting which can be easily folded back to allow them to escape.

Many small seedling plants are at the mercy of birds in their early stages so it's a good idea to carefully net such plants. More mature and larger plants are generally less desirable so you may manage without netting ( - or switch to insect netting later in the season).

## Insect netting

Butterfly netting comes at approximately 7mm sized squares and is a great help when it comes to growing successful brassicas (cabbage family plants).



A very fine mesh netting can be very helpful as a way to keep insects off your crops. Anyone who has grown broccoli or other brassicas knows what a menace cabbage white butterflies can be. They can completely colonise a healthy crop and their emerging larvae make short work of the strongest green leaves. A good butterfly netting can make a huge difference - the difference between crop or no crop in many cases!

There is also insect netting available which will keep out small insects such as carrot fly from your precious crop.

Fine mesh polypropylene can be used as a "floating cloche" (as shown) over the whole crop. It is usually used as frost protection but also does a good job in keeping insect pests at bay.

This does not stop light, water or air getting to the crop but helps maintain a good temperature and deters insects such as carrot fly.

Products such as sacking, or burlap can also be pressed into service for heavy-duty netting and crop protection - from birds or cold.

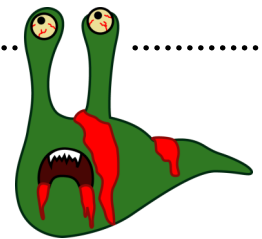
## Recycling net curtains

You can also save some money by recycling old net curtains. They will provide a fair amount of protection from insects and birds.

The same reservations apply - they can trap birds and they will mainly become landfill after a few seasons in the garden. They also do not tend to look very aesthetic, so are perhaps best reserved for out-of-the-way corners of the plot. There are also ways to reuse common household fabrics. The easiest and probably the best is curtain netting and other light fabrics such as muslin.

Plastics such as bubble wrap or polyethylene sheets and bags can also be used to good effect as a stop-gap solution. The problem with these is that they are unsightly and likely to degrade enough to be a nuisance. However, they do not biodegrade properly, so fragments of plastic can end up in your vegetable beds.

## Zombie Slugs



Slugs and snails are the bane of almost every plot-holder on the allotments. Slugs in particular have voracious appetites and are relentless in eating stems, leaves and shoots. No wonder we have sought and tried various methods to control or eradicate the spread of this crop killer.

Unfortunately, the most common response – slug pellets – can have a terrible effect on other wildlife. One alternative is the parasite *Phasmarhabditis hermaphrodita*, a nematode worm which naturally kills slugs and snails. Until recently, we had little idea why this parasite was so effective. Recent research shows that after *P. hermaphrodita* infects the slug, it takes control over its behaviour, essentially transforming it into a zombie. By delving further into how this parasite takes control of the slug's behaviour, we can gain a better understanding into the molecular intricacies of mind control and even how to control the behaviour of slugs en-masse.

Slugs are notably very hard to control because they can move deep into the soil and produce a tremendous number of offspring. Control methods that have tended to focus on slug pellets can be washed away easily and are highly toxic to a range of other wildlife. For decades, these pellets

have contained methiocarb and metaldehyde, both of which can be harmful to the environment. Methiocarb has now been banned and the use of metaldehyde around waterways is under strict regulated use.

The *P. hermaphrodita* parasite on the other hand is an organic and effective alternative for controlling slugs. When added to the soil these nematodes will hunt, infect and kill any slugs they find within 21 days. Then the nematodes reproduce on the cadaver and go in search of any slugs that previously escaped them. There are 108 species of nematodes that infect slugs and snails. But unlike others, *P. hermaphrodita* is highly specific and does not affect other invertebrates such as insects or earthworms.

Research also showed that the nematode worm *P. hermaphrodita* has the remarkable ability to control the behaviour of slugs. Ordinarily, when in the presence of parasitic worms, slugs sense danger and slither away in fear of being fatally infected. But when slugs are already infected, they seem to be attracted to areas where the parasite is present and will happily remain in an area where they risk further infection.

By directing the slugs towards more parasites, *P. hermaphrodita* lead the slugs to their death, after which the nematodes can feast on the carcass and reproduce. It has been shown that several slug species avoid *P. hermaphrodita* but researchers were very surprised to find that several other species, when infected, were attracted to the nematodes. This behaviour was caused specifically by *P. hermaphrodita* but no other nematodes. If you decide to try this method of reducing the number of slugs on your plot, remember to only purchase *P. hermaphrodita* species of nematode if you want the benefit of "The Zombie Slug". Please remember this nematode "dispenses" with the majority of slug species -not all.

## Community Hub Update

Included in the Winter 2022/23 edition of the Association Newsletter was an article on the proposals relating to the relocation of the Community Hub. Colin Smith, single handedly, dismantled the shed and first two raised beds, he relocated the raised beds to their new site which have now been allocated. He has also re-purposed the shed and is making planters and trugs and they will be on sale via the new online shop. (Further details to follow).

FFGS have increased the height of two corner fence panels that are at the perimeter with Fernhill School and between the allotment officers and the Association they have been increasing the amount of security planting throughout the site.

However, we all know that we must be hyper-vigilante regarding the ongoing security problems that are unfortunately too frequent on site.

The Association's committee have discussed the various options to have a community hub that was robust enough to withstand the vandalism that unfortunately occurs with regularity.

### Option1 - Self Build

The building would be made of an internal wooden frame and the external walls clad with a metal skin. Metal roller shutters on the windows and door and would be erected on site. Fully insulated and fitted with solar panels on the roof and incorporating a kitchen. The build to be constructed by plot-holders.

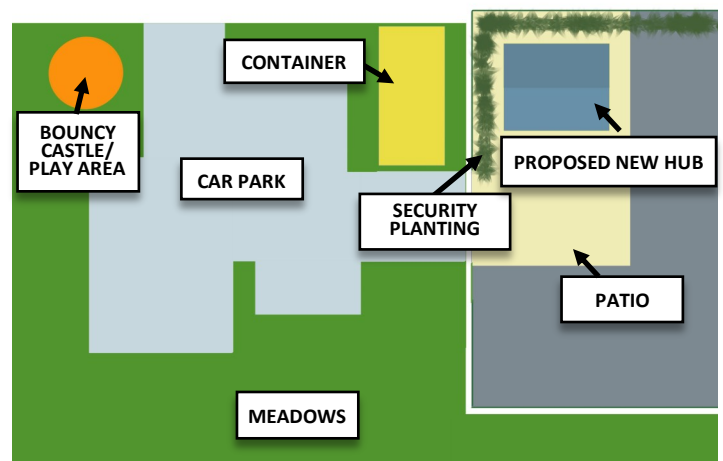
### Option2- Two Joined 20 Foot Containers

Committee received a quote to supply and deliver however this proposal is not viable as the delivery of containers would be by a 65-foot-long low loader. Access to site is impossible.

### Option3

The committee realise that a bespoke community hub or a double container conversion is expensive and they are open to ideas such as second-hand buildings, for example a Portacabin which we could convert. Do you know of any organisation that "donate" the type of structure they are looking for?

At present the committee are trying to source funding for this very ambitious project and will continue to provide updates regarding progress. As a reminder, please refer to the Schematic of the proposed new layout.



## From Plot to Pot



If you are lucky enough to have an abundance of courgettes, why not try the following recipes

### ROASTED SUMMER VEGETABLE CASSEROLE

#### Ingredients

- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 garlic bulb, halved through the middle
- 2 large courgettes, thickly sliced
- 1 large red onion, sliced
- 1 aubergine, halved and sliced on the diagonal
- 2 large tomatoes, quartered
- 200g new potatoes, scrubbed and halved
- 1 red pepper, deseeded and cut into chunky pieces
- 400g can chopped tomatoes
- Good handful of parsley, chopped

#### Method

Heat oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6 and put the oil in a

roasting tin. Tip in the garlic and all the fresh veg, then toss with your hands to coat in the oil. Season well and roast for 45 mins.

Remove the garlic from the roasting tin and squeeze out the softened cloves all over the veg, stirring to evenly distribute. In a medium pan, simmer the chopped tomatoes until bubbling, season well and stir through the roasted veg in the tin. Scatter over the parsley and serve.

### COURGETTE FRITTERS

#### Ingredients

50g self-raising flour  
½ tsp ground turmeric  
1 tsp cumin seeds  
3 eggs  
1 courgette  
spritz of spray oil  
rocket dressed



with olive oil and lemon juice, to serve  
hot sauce, to serve (optional)

#### Method

Tip the flour, turmeric, cumin seeds, one of the eggs and lots of seasoning into a bowl, then whisk in 50ml of water to create a batter that has a dropping consistency. Use a spiralizer to turn the courgette into long thin noodles, or use a grater, then gently fold into the batter.

Spray a non-stick frying pan with oil and put over a medium-high heat. Divide the batter into 4 (snip any long courgette spirals) and, in batches, cook for 2-3 minutes on each side until golden and puffed, then flip and repeat. Keep warm in a low oven.

Heat a large pan of water to a gentle simmer. One by one, crack the remaining eggs into a cup or ramekin, then gently pour into the water. Cook for 2 minutes until the whites have just set, then remove with a slotted spoon.

Divide the fritters onto 2 plates, top with a poached egg and serve alongside dressed rocket and hot sauce, if you like.

### EASY COURGETTE CAKE

This simple, subtly spicy easy courgette cake is deliciously moist and a great way to use up a glut of courgettes.

Preparation time

Less than 30 mins

Cooking time

30 mins to 1 hour

Vegetarian

#### Ingredients

80ml/2¾fl oz vegetable oil, plus extra for greasing  
150g/5½oz light brown sugar  
2 free-range eggs  
160g/5¾oz courgette, coarsely grated  
180g/6½oz plain flour  
2 tsp baking powder  
2 tsp ground cinnamon  
¼ tsp fine salt  
2 tbsp demerara sugar, for sprinkling

#### Method

Preheat the oven to 200C/180C Fan/Gas 6. Grease a 900g/2lb loaf tin and line with a long strip of baking paper. In a bowl, mix together the oil, light brown sugar and eggs until smooth. Stir in the grated courgette.

In a separate bowl, mix together the flour, baking powder, cinnamon and salt. Tip the dry ingredients into the courgette mixture and stir until just combined.

Transfer the batter to the prepared loaf tin and sprinkle the top with demerara sugar.

Bake for 45–55 minutes, or until a skewer inserted into the centre of the loaf comes out clean. Leave to cool in the tin for 20 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack and leave to cool completely before slicing.

### Recipe Tips

For extra texture and flavour in this courgette cake, stir 70g/2½oz each of chopped walnuts and raisins into the batter just before pouring into the tin. For extra decadence, drizzle with a lemony icing.

*If you make any of these recipes - your feedback would be appreciated.*



If you have any brambles on your plot growing adjacent to the perimeter fence, please feed it through to form a barrier in which to deter trespassers from climbing over.



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