



Newsletter

April 2021

...for spring 

Welcome to your TCV Newsletter packed full of ideas, tips and activities for all ages!

Spring means the return of longer, brighter days and the promise of warmer weather. This is the time to explore the outdoors and make exciting new discoveries, connecting with nature and taking notice of the beautiful changes all around us.

DANDER IN THE DAFFODILS

These bright bulbs burst into life all around the county, signalling the arrival of spring from February onwards. Daffodils also symbolize friendship and new beginnings.

NOTICE THE BLOSSOMS AND BUDS

The returning leaves and flowers of native trees are a sign that winter is over and spring awakens, as the bare branches begin to develop new blossoms and buds.

WAKE UP TO THE DAWN CHORUS

Birdsong is definitely a better way to wake up than an alarm clock! Listen out very early in the morning from March to July. Listen for robins, blackbirds and thrushes just before dawn.

BATHE IN THE BLUEBELLS

Beautiful carpets of blue cover our woodlands between mid-April and mid-May. Steeped in magic folklore, they say that bluebells ring at daybreak to call fairies to the woods.

LISTEN TO THE BUZZING BEES

Spring flowers are vital early food for bees, who rely heavily on the flowers' nectar. See if you can spot bumble bees, honey bees and wild 'solitary' bees in your gardens and countryside.

If you or someone you know is struggling check out ***Minding Your Head.***
www.mindingyourhead.info

Signs of spring



Jobs in the garden

Spring is definitely upon us and even though the weather might be a bit undecided take every opportunity you can to get out into the garden. There are plenty of jobs to do to make sure your garden looks as good as possible throughout the coming months.



RINKIB/PKABAY



SUUU-FOTO/PKABAY



MAY HOKKAI/DO/PKABAY



HANS/PKABAY



ANGELSTAR/PKABAY

EARLY STAKES

Staking plants early, such as Delphiniums or Crocosmia Lucifer, which need an extra bit of support, means they look natural as they grow. Make frames and hoops using bendy twigs, such as willow, and place around the emerging plants.

ROSES

If you did not get your roses pruned last year, now is the time. When pruning, remember the three D's - anything damaged, diseased, or dead, and any spindly or crossing stems. Feed after pruning and follow up with another feed around mid-summer to ensure a vibrant plant with abundant blooms.

HERBACEOUS PERENNIALS

As these plants begin to emerge, it is an ideal time to divide, especially if they have become too big for their position, or if there is no growth in the centre. Simply chop off a section of the plant with a clean, sharp digging spade. Further divide if necessary and re-plant elsewhere.

GRASSES

Cut back to ground level deciduous grasses, removing all of last year's growth. This lets in light and air to the new shoots helping them to develop. Shred the old material before composting.

BUDDLEIA

To ensure lots of flowers in the summer, prune back hard to just above a new shoot. As long as you have new growth below where you cut you can go as low as you like.

GO GREEN - help the environment

SPRING CLEAN

Tackling those spring cleaning jobs while being kinder to the environment is easier than you think. By using everyday items that can be found in your kitchen you can reduce the amount of toxins entering our water systems and unnecessary plastic going to landfill. In your eco-cleaning kit include; distilled white vinegar, bicarbonate of soda, fresh lemons, castile soap, soda crystals and pure undiluted essential oils. Find some natural cleaning recipes online.



MORHOUS/PKABAY

LABEL IT

To help prevent a mix-up of new sowings, or even forgetting what you have sown, re-use clean, plastic milk cartons as plant labels. Simply cut into strips and write what you have sown on each strip then pop into the container.



BUEBUE/PKABAY

GOING POTTY

Ever considered repurposing items into interesting containers for your flowers or vegetables? Items such as pallets, tyres, plastic drums, and even old dining chairs can be converted into planters. Not only will they bring interest to your garden, you will also be reducing the amount of waste going to landfill.



YACAPAR/DO/PKABAY

FREE PLANTS

Consider those herbaceous perennials you have been dividing.. Why not have a plant swop with neighbours, family, or friends? It's a great way to save healthy plants from the compost heap and get new ones for your garden, plus spread some cheer along the way. The same can be done if you have sown too many seeds and have a glut of seedlings with nowhere to go.



PUBLIC/DO/AN/PKABAY

Spring foraging

The days are getting longer, the soil is warming up and signs of spring are beginning to show. This is the perfect time to start a bit of foraging if you have never done it before. There are a few rules you need to follow when foraging but as long as you keep to them, foraging can be a great way to add another interest to a walk.



S. PUMPF/PIXABAY

FORAGING ETIQUETTE

Never consume wild food unless you are 100% sure of its identification. There are plants and fungi out there that can kill you. When in doubt, don't pick it!

ONLY TAKE WHAT YOU NEED. Only pick from abundant populations and leave plenty behind for wildlife and others to enjoy. Over-picking is not sustainable and will impact next year's crop.

DO NOT PICK ENDANGERED SPECIES. It is not only illegal to pick but unethical. Gather only those that you know grow in abundance and familiarise yourself with endangered species.

DO NOT TRESPASS TO FORAGE FOR WILD FOOD. You should only forage on property that you have gained landowner's permission to enter. Always leave it as you found it in the first place.

LEAVE NO TRACE BEHIND AND RESPECT NATURE. Minimise damage to the habitat and species. Do not disturb wildlife and avoid unnecessary trampling.

DO NOT REMOVE THE WHOLE PLANT. The plant will not have the chance to reproduce and you will not be able to pick leaves and flowers in the future.

SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE. Teach others to respect nature and learn about the environment.

Plants to look for in spring

WILD GARLIC

Wild Garlic, also known as Ransoms, is abundant at the moment if you know where to look. It grows in woodlands as a carpet of green with tiny white flowers on a tall stem. The broad green, garlic scented leaves are one of the foragers favourites as they can be used in so many ways.



The whole plant can be eaten and can be used in the same way as bulb garlic. It has a more subtle taste than bulb garlic and the bright green colour adds to any dish. If you are lucky enough to live in a house with a thatched roof a couple of wild garlic bulbs tucked into the thatch is said to dispel fairies but beware of it growing in the garden, not only does it spread, but bears come looking for it when they wake up from a winter's hibernation as a tasty snack!

NETTLES

Nettles are just poking out of the ground now and these

young shoots are the best to eat before they become tough and stringy. Nettles have an abundance of uses: they can be eaten, used to make clothing, used to make tea and beer, to die cloth and even used as a remedy to banish rheumatic pains!



Nettles have been very important in the past as they are one of the first edible plants to show. Many old wives' tales tell of eating nettles in the spring to purify the blood. Nettles are high in Vitamin C and iron amongst other vitamins and minerals and are a great antioxidant.

Nettles are sometimes associated with sadness, desolation, and eviction. Many people don't like to have a patch of nettles near the house as they feel they are unlucky. This folk memory stems from the Famine when many people had to resort to eating nettles, so much so that their skin turned slightly green from the chlorophyll. Abandoned farmsteads are quickly overcome with nettles and if you come across a stand of nettles on a hillside you can be fairly sure it was a site of a home.

CAROL ROSE/WIKIMEDIA

SIPA/PIXABAY

Cooking with foraged foods

WILD GARLIC PESTO



Ingredients

1 large bunch of wild garlic leaves
Rapeseed oil
50g pinenuts or hazelnuts
50g Parmesan cheese
Lemon juice
Salt and pepper

Method

Rinse and dry wild garlic and chop roughly. Add garlic, nuts, cheese and oil to a food processor and blitz until almost smooth. Add lemon juice, salt, and pepper to taste. Transfer pesto to clean jars. It will keep in the fridge for two weeks.

WILD GARLIC AND NETTLE SOUP

Ingredients

1 tbsp rapeseed oil, plus extra for drizzling
25g butter
1 onion, finely diced
1 leek, finely diced
2 celery sticks, thinly sliced
1 carrot, finely diced
1 small potato, peeled and diced
1.2l good-quality vegetable stock
300g young nettle leaves
200g wild garlic leaves (keep any flowers if you have them)
3 tbsp milk

Method

Heat the oil and butter in a large saucepan. Add the onion, leek, celery, carrot, potato, and a good pinch of salt, and stir until everything is well coated. Cover and sweat gently for 15-20 minutes, stirring every so often to make sure that the vegetables don't catch on the bottom of the pan.

Pour in the stock and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the nettles in several batches, stirring, then add the wild garlic leaves and simmer for 2 minutes.

Remove from the heat and blend using a stick blender or tip into a blender. Return to the heat and stir through the milk, then taste for seasoning. Ladle into bowls and drizzle over a little extra oil, then top with a few wild garlic flowers, if you have them.

NETTLE CHAMP

Ingredients

Several handfuls of nettle tops
6 medium to large potatoes
200ml of milk
150g of butter
1 large spring onion
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Peel and chop the potatoes and boil with the spring onion. Place the nettle tops in the milk and boil until wilted. Once cooked drain the potatoes and mash well. Add all the nettles and mix and then add the milk a little at a time until it is a light and fluffy texture. You may not need all the milk.



Did you try any of the activities in this newsletter? Share your photos with us on our Facebook page: [The Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland](#). Have any tips, handy hints or recipes? Share these with us too. We would love to hear from you!

Focus on microgreens



In recent times, microgreens have grown in popularity, often adding a splash of colour to a variety of dishes.

Microgreens are young vegetable greens and should not be confused with sprouts which do not have leaves. They come in a variety of colours and textures and are rich in flavour. Depending on the variety of seed used, the flavour can range from neutral to spicy, slightly sour, or sometimes bitter but certainly a lot stronger.

Microgreens are considered to be more nutritious and beneficial than their more mature versions, packing a nutritional punch to any dish. Research shows that microgreens contain up to 9 times higher levels of vitamins and minerals in comparison to their mature counterparts. Most varieties are rich in potassium, iron, zinc, magnesium, and copper. They also contain a wider variety of polyphenols and plant-based antioxidants. All this means, that they may be greatly beneficial in helping to reduce the risk of certain diseases if eaten as part of a healthy and varied diet.

What's more, they can be easily grown at home on a warm, sunny windowsill.

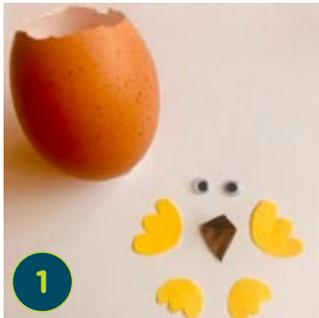
HOW TO USE YOUR MICROGREENS

- Use as a topping for a salad.
- Add extra zing to a salad with a topping of freshly cut microgreens. These will add pops of colour and taste and liven up a basic salad.
- Blitz into a pesto or salsa verde.
- Replace basil with microgreens in a pesto for a different taste with your pasta or if you're having Mexican food, make up salsa verde as a dip or topping for taco dishes.
- Blend into a smoothie.
- Add a handful of microgreens to a green smoothie for an added boost of vitamins and minerals.
- Perk up a sandwich.
- Snip a bunch of microgreens into a sandwich. An egg and cress sandwich is a classic for a reason!



See our step-by-step guide below to sow microgreens as a fun Easter themed activity.

TAKEN/PKXABAY



1 Rinse your egg shell. Cut out shapes for your animal on paper/card. You can use googly eyes or even draw on your eyes.



2 Glue on your shapes of paper/card. Forage for any natural materials, ie a leaf for a beak.



3 Fill your egg with some soil or compost. You only need a little bit, just a few teaspoons.



4 Get your cress seeds or other micro greens. Sprinkle a teaspoon of seeds on top of the soil.



5 Place your Cress Animals on a sunny windowsill and water. Keep moist and in around 7 days (or at 5cm tall) you will be able to cut and use your yummy cress!

SEND US PICTURES OF YOUR ANIMALS!

Let your imagination go wild, what natural materials can you use? Maybe pussywillow for a bunny tail or some yummy grass or pine needles for a lamb.



Early spring recipes

This time of year is called 'the hungry gap'. It is the time when most of the vegetables grown have been lifted and used and before the spring vegetables have matured. There are a few things left on the vegetable garden however and these recipes use them in a tasty way.

SPAGHETTI WITH PURPLE SPROUTING BROCCOLI AND ANCHOVIES



PHOTO: PIX/ABAY

Ingredients

350g dried spaghetti
350g purple sprouting broccoli
6 anchovies, chopped
2 fresh red chillies, seeded and finely chopped
100g white breadcrumbs, made with stale bread

Method

Cook the spaghetti in a large pan of boiling salted water, according to packet instructions. Cut the larger stalks in half lengthways and throw into the pan of pasta for the last 3 minutes of cooking time.

Meanwhile, heat 3 tablespoons of olive oil in a frying pan, add the anchovies and chillies and fry briefly. Add the breadcrumbs and cook, stirring, for about 5 minutes until the crumbs are crunchy and golden.

Drain the spaghetti and return to the pan. Toss with three quarters of the crumb mixture, some salt and pepper and another 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Serve each portion sprinkled with the remaining crumbs.

With a bit of tweaking this recipe can be used with another vegetable still growing.

SPAGHETTI WITH KALE AND ANCHOVIES

Ingredients

3 tbsp olive oil
6 anchovy fillets, finely chopped
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 lemon, zested and half juiced
180g kale, Cavolo Nero or similar
300g pasta



ANANDSANDRA/PIX/ABAY

Method

In a large frying pan, gently heat the olive oil with the anchovies and garlic. To avoid burning the garlic, cook it over a very low heat and push it all to the side of the pan. After about 5 minutes, add the lemon zest and kale. Give it all a stir and cover with a lid. Cook for another 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, cook the pasta in a pan of salted boiling water, following the packet instructions.

Drain the pasta and add it to the pan with the kale. Stir and serve with a little grating of Parmesan.

SPRING GREENS RISOTTO



PHOTO: PIX/ABAY

Ingredients

1 bunch spring greens, tough stems removed, leaves shredded into 1cm ribbons
1 tbsp olive oil
30g butter
1 onion, finely diced
1/2 red chilli, finely sliced
600-700ml chicken or veg stock
200g risotto rice
2 garlic cloves, chopped
1 glass dry sherry or vermouth or white wine
50g Parmesan, grated, and extra to serve
salt and pepper

Method

Blanch spring greens in salted boiling water for 2 minutes, then drain.

Heat the oil and butter together in a solid saucepan. Gently sweat the onion and chilli for 5-10 minutes, without colouring.

In another saucepan, heat up the stock until simmering.

Add the rice, garlic, greens, and some seasoning to the onion. Stir to coat with the butter and oil. Turn up the heat a little, add the wine, and cook until most of it has evaporated.

Add a ladleful of the hot stock to the rice. Stir until most of the liquid has been absorbed, then add another ladleful. Repeat for about 20 minutes, or until the rice is just cooked (it should retain a little bit of bite).

Season, then take off the heat and add the Parmesan and a little more butter. Serve with some extra Parmesan.

For other healthy recipes and tips, check out www.choosetolivebetter.com

As we enter growing season and with better weather on the horizon we invited TCV colleagues to share their experiences of working in the green spaces they oversee. If you would like to join us in growing your own, contact us to see where your nearest community garden is: www.tcv.org.uk/northernireland

The Green Gym Allotment Group at Knockbracken

TCV has just celebrated 20 years of ongoing activities in green spaces that have continuously changed with the people and groups' needs throughout the years. The early years clients, groups and volunteers worked with TCV staff to create a wildflower gene bank, sowing seeds to grow on and plant onto many locations throughout Belfast.

Times have changed since those days and our beautiful green space is as important now as it was then and more so due to challenging times and COVID.

The Green Gym Allotment Group of growers has, over the last number of years, grown to full capacity. Green Gym continues to develop safe space for the enjoyment of all. Groups and visitors are always welcome, when safe to do so again. Check out our Facebook page for seasonal workshops.

I would like you to read the story of one of our members, David, and his wonderful experiences and hopefully encourage many more people to get outdoors, take care, look after & enjoy our environment.

Mary Hamilton, Green Gym, Senior Project Officer

The Plot Thickens

I work in Knockbracken Healthcare Park and have had a TCV plot on site for some years now. I have always valued it immensely. The benefits, however, have developed and changed over time. Initially the advantages were almost entirely personal. There was the peace and relative solitude of the site as respite from the daily office-based routine. There was the company of buzzards overhead and the wood mouse family that took up residence in my raised bed. This was alongside the physical exercise and stimulation of turning sods and fighting weeds.

Things progressed. The plot matured. I felt obliged to share the experience with staff and colleagues. On occasional hot summer days, we brought picnic lunches down to the allotment. I was able to showcase my endeavours (and those of fellow plot-holders) while watching my pea harvest and strawberry crop disappear in one sitting. Effortless and enjoyable team building. By this stage, the benefits had become social as well as individual.

TCV workdays and BBQs punctuated the seasons, and the sense of community grew faster than the weeds.

Coronavirus restrictions largely ended such activity, but a strange thing happened in lockdown. A new cohort,

and next generation, of growers emerged. My family suddenly discovered a more practical interest in the plot. My long-suffering wife is no longer my sole assistant. There are three daughters, their respective husbands and three grandsons 'on the books.'

The allotment is now a focal point in family discussions and gatherings. Admittedly, the eldest grandson is still under four and may not yet know the difference between Swiss chard and Swiss cheese but that illustrates another point. The educational benefits of having children introduced to nature and the great outdoors at an early age. He now has his own 'bug hotel' well established at home.

On reflection, there are benefits across the full range of human experience, individual, family and community. The plot also has a positive impact on our health (physical and mental) exercise, education, and skills.

This pandemic has accelerated environmental and social change. Plans to reboot will undoubtedly focus on the global and digital economies. They will aspire to new ways of working smarter, more flexibly, virtually, and remotely. If this is to succeed, all the evidence suggests that their plans will need to be offset with real time, physical assets as a societal antidote. For the sake of the physical, mental and community health of the next generation, planners should consider schemes such as those that TCV operate. The return on investment on one 8X4 metre plot is more than a few potatoes - it is inestimable.

David McCabe, allotmenteer



Natural explorers

Springtime is when plants begin to grow, birds begin to nest, and lambs are playing in the fields. Temperatures begin to rise and the countryside bursts into life after winter. A wonderful time of year!



JILL WELLINGTON/PIKABAY

EASTER TRADITIONS: EASTER BUNNY EGG

There are a variety of traditions revolving around eggs at Easter. On Easter Monday people traditionally roll dyed eggs down a hill (see our how to below for some ideas). Eggs represent new life and the regeneration that comes with spring and are a symbol of rebirth.

Rabbits are also associated with Easter. Rabbits usually give birth to a big litter of babies called kittens in the springtime and also symbolise new life. These symbols come after a sleepy winter and celebrate the arrival of spring and bring new hope for the rest of the year.

Dyeing and decorating eggs – the tradition of decorating eggs is said to go away back to ancient times when people would have celebrated the new season by colouring eggs and giving them to friends and family. Many would have dyed the eggs by gathering beautifully coloured flowers, especially Gorse (Whins) from the hedgerows and boiling the flowers in with the eggs.

HOW TO DYE YOUR EGGS NATURALLY

Per cup of water try boiling the following with your eggs:

1 cup chopped purple cabbage = blue on white eggs, green on brown eggs

1 cup red onion skins = lavender or red eggs

1 cup yellow onion skins = orange on white eggs, rusty red on brown eggs

1 cup shredded beetroot = pink on white eggs, maroon on brown eggs

2 tablespoons of ground turmeric = yellow eggs



COULEUR/PIKABAY

SPRING NATURE HUNT

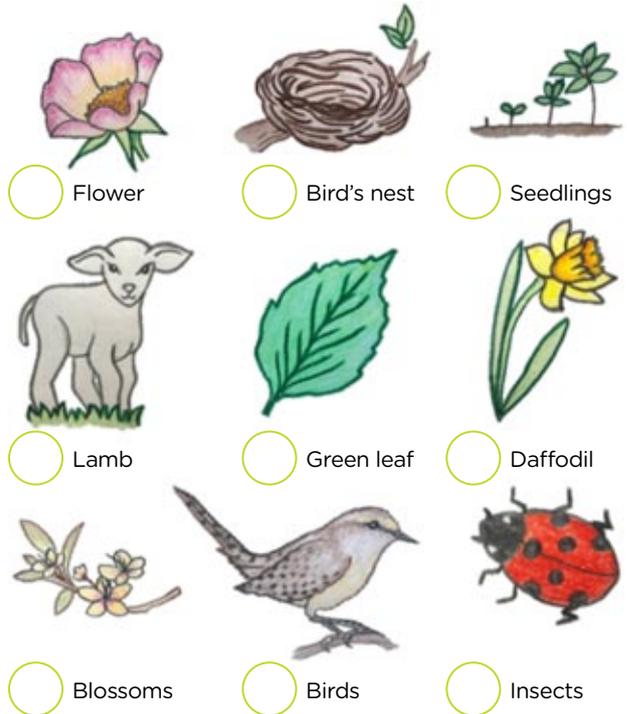
Have your very own spring scavenger hunt!

Look in your own garden, local parks, forest, or countryside. It's a great way to learn how our seasons change and notice the new life of spring.

You may even find some more things!

Why not take pictures of your findings and make a collage or art piece with all the signs of spring?

Send us a picture of your nature hunt or something you make, message Facebook TCVNI or email tcvni@tcv.org.uk.



SPRING ANAGRAM

Can you guess what these jumbled up words are? Some are easier than others!



ELISE BEE/DESIGNS/PIKABAY

1. XFO _____
2. FADIFLDO _____
3. MBAL _____
4. EULELBLB _____
5. BTIABR _____
6. ECSNIT _____
7. DUSB _____
8. CKHIC _____
9. DRSIB _____
10. MSOLOBS _____