



Newsletter

## April 2020 - Extra Issue



*Midmar allotments - picture by Murdo MacLean, for The Guardian*

---

# Message From FEDAGA President

*FEDAGA President Stuart McKenzie writes:*

It has been said many times recently – what strange times we live in. Fortunately, they will pass but with the lock-down expected to be further extended it's difficult to see when 'normality' can return. Then, what does normality look like?

We are in a fortunate position being able to visit our plots for our daily exercise. The Guardian newspaper has published some photos from the Craigentiny Telferton and Midmar sites along with some familiar quotes from plotters explaining how allotments help to keep our sanity and also feed us. Click [here](#) to see the photo essay.

Food growing this year may be more important than usual depending on what 'normal' looks like.

We've all heard the guidance regarding Covid-19 and by now you'll have a gate-in and gate-out procedure established. I know that allotment holders tend to be of 'advancing years' and are therefore most at risk, I also realise they are most vigilant. There's no point in me restating the importance of hand washing and social distancing, the important thing is to keep doing them. But if you need a reminder, please click [here](#).

Edinburgh Council, in line with other local authorities, has closed many facilities to minimise risk of the virus spreading. They have considered allotments but currently take the stance that the benefits to our physical and mental health outweigh any risks, and of course, we're producing food.

Unfortunately this could still change. We must continue to behave responsibly, don't do anything that could be interpreted by anyone as us taking advantage of the access to our sites. Please remember we are exercising and not spending the day sitting sunbathing, reading the paper, picnicking etc.

I hope by now you've noted that fires are banned. Again, we're trying not to attract attention to ourselves. What could be worse being isolated at home with smoke from a nearby allotment blowing into your window - your only source of fresh air. Please: no bonfires and certainly



no barbeques. Instead, build a compost heap, there's plenty of good advice online, just Google 'compost heap' or check out the link below. Someone dumped a flat screen TV on an allotment site. There are other similar instances. If you do have household waste to get rid of then don't simply make it someone else's problem. Act responsibly - this situation won't last for ever. Get rid of your rubbish properly or keep it until the Council's uplifts resume.

FEDAGA has had to stop our regular face-to-face monthly meetings but has started using online video-conferencing. Our first was held most successfully this week with fifteen site representatives able to discuss issues at sites and to keep our Federation going. You may wish to try out the same 'Zoom' conferencing facilities for site meetings. If so, please contact [Dave Roberts](#) or [myself](#) for an introduction on how to do it.

There was a bit of concern that with Garden Centres closed we might not be able to buy compost and grow bags. You may like to try making your own, it's likely to be much superior too. Try this [link](#) for a start. Please let's all continue to be sensible at our sites. We would all miss being able to exercise on our plots. Most importantly, stay safe, look out for one another and help protect the NHS and all the other key workers.



*Stuart at home with his seedling incubator*

---

# Allotment Show 2020 Cancelled

We have reluctantly but inevitably decided to cancel this year's Edinburgh Allotment Show. We really hope that in 2021 we will return. Since last year we have been making plans for a bigger, more relevant and inclusive allotment show, looking at fresh venues and drawing in other partners. These plans are on hold and we hope to reactivate them when the situation permits. Cup holders will get to keep their trophies (and keep polishing them) for a further year. Maybe, if the situation permits, there could just be a possibility of a small-scale celebration/mini-show on sites at the end of the growing season. If that is possible and sites are interested in doing this we can help with advice and materials. But we are in no position to continue laying plans for the Edinburgh Show at the moment.



# Leeks In May: A Possibility

It's not just the Edinburgh Show that's gone west. No Dundee Show, no local shows - and no [Gardening Scotland](#). Sadly, the latter has gone out of business, so maybe no Gardening Scotland ever again.

FEDAGA has contacted the supplier of leek seedling plants who was contracted to sell to Gardening Scotland visitors and we hope, if it proves possible, to offer these to site associations toward the end of May. Quantities and prices to be arranged. Watch this space.



---

# Supplies Advice: Kings And Caley

The coronavirus emergency has played havoc with plans to get the allotment stocked up this spring. One of the few pieces of good news we have is that FEDAGA members can still benefit from discounts that we have negotiated for seeds and compost.

[Kings Seeds](#) are inundated with orders and they have periodically had to close their online shop to allow them to catch up with themselves. (*Stop Press: Currently closed, reopening Monday 20th.*) If you haven't registered for this click [here](#) for instructions on how to go about this. Please note this is FOR MEMBERS ONLY and you will need to give your site name and plot number to qualify.

For a discount on already competitively priced bulk bags of compost go to [Caledonian Horticulture](#). They take a fiver off the price of each bag for allotment customers. Minimum order: 2 bags. Price per bag: £30. Phone 0131 339 5554 and ask for John.



---



# The Well Gardened Mind

We are now more aware than ever that getting outdoors helps us to look after our mental health. It's not just for the prime function of the allotment - the growing of food - that it is vital that allotments remain open during the lockdown.

The writer Sue Stuart-Smith was recently on [Start The Week](#) (BBC Radio 4) talking about her new book, *The Well Gardened Mind*, which may be of interest to members.

We live in a world that forces a state of high anxiety upon us and it is our job to try to manage that as best we can. This book discusses how and why an awareness of nature will sustain us through it. Birdsong, available on all allotments, is deeply calming. (*Don't forget the April wildlife survey in our allotments - see the previous [Newsletter](#). Send your observations to Chris McKinnell at [c.mckinnell@outlook.com](mailto:c.mckinnell@outlook.com).)*

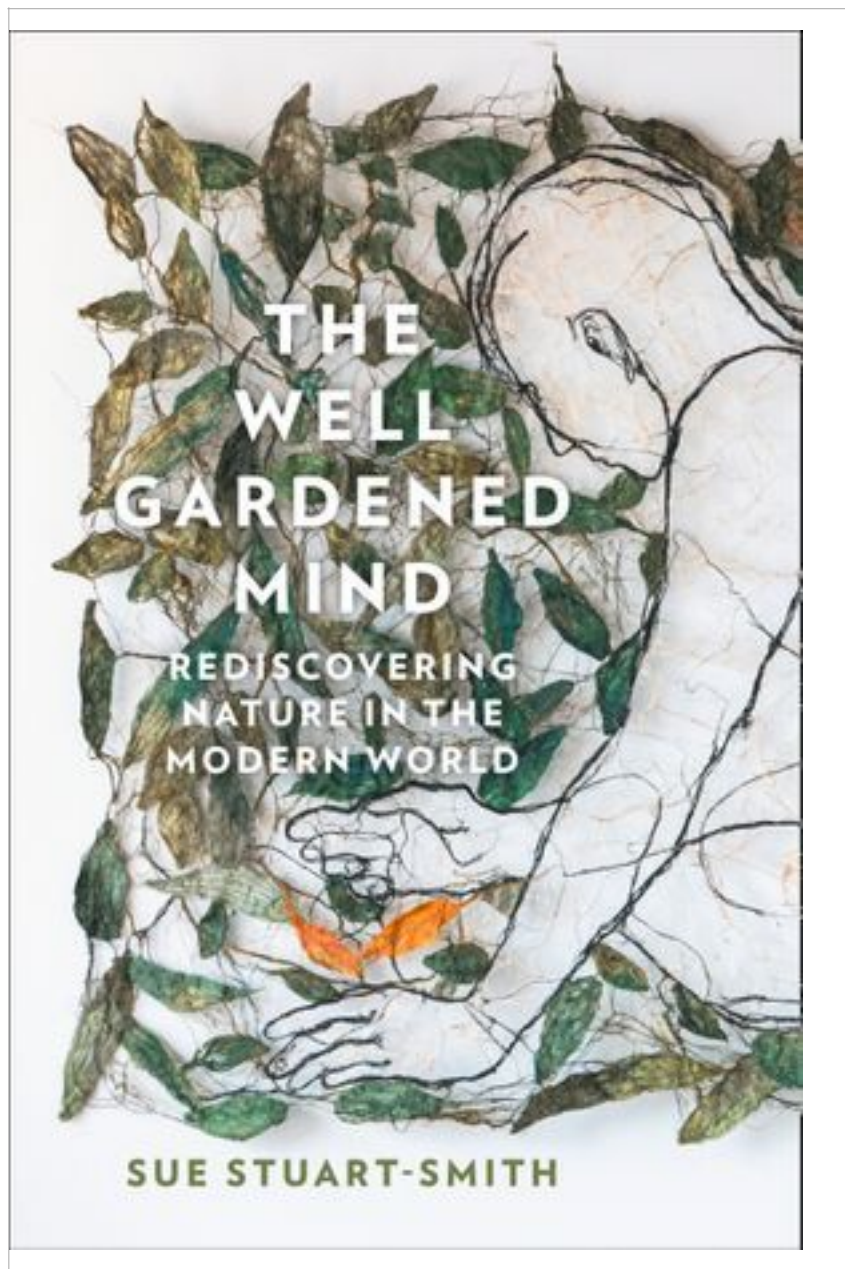
At times of crisis we turn to the earth to sustain ourselves. This is a positive and life-affirming action. Sue Stuart-Smith describes the gardening process: I do a bit, Nature does her bit, I add to it, and so it goes on, a conversation.

Whether we think much about it, we design and shape our allotment plot to be a good environment for us to be in. If we do this well we soon come to value and love our piece of the earth.

She describes how by getting our hands dirty our mental health is enhanced by the chemicals and smells of the damp earth. They have names: [geosmin](#) and [petrichor](#). Our attraction to these smells is a product of evolution. Damp earth will sustain life, and we share this awareness with other animals.

Of great relevance now is the knowledge that the bacteria associated with a healthy soil is crucial to our immune system. We inevitably inhale and ingest these organisms when we are on our plot. Gardeners have a wider variation in their digestive flora, so garden soil can be described as "good dirt". Maybe that's another reason allotment holders tend to live longer.

Find out more about this interesting book [here](#).



©2020 Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotment and Gardens  
Associations | FEDAGA