

# GROWING ON THE WEB

TO TEA  
OR NOT TO TEA  
THAT IS  
THE  
QUESTION

**Sean's Top Tip:**  
Make room for fragrant blooms on your plot

This month *Kitchen Garden* talks to experienced grower Sean Cameron, who over the years has established a massive presence on social media, sharing his enthusiasm for fruit, veg and life on the allotment

**You are well known in the world of gardening on social media. What first prompted you to start making videos to post online?**

I first started making videos back in 2008 when I took on my London allotment. Foxes loved to pull out my plant labels on a daily basis so in the end I stopped using them but had to find a way of remembering what I had planted where. Ever since I was 12 I've had a passion for making videos. This passion led me into a professional

career in TV and film production working on programmes such as *Coronation Street*, *A Question of Sport*, *The Wright Stuff*, *University Challenge* and *Good Morning Britain*, plus a few feature films. Back in the 1980s I would make VHS videos of myself gardening in the family garden in South Wales. So when I acquired my London allotment it felt natural to continue filming. Ultimately, I would love to present an allotment feature on *BBC Gardeners' World*.

**Your YouTube channel alone has more than 33,000 subscribers. To what would you attribute your success?**

When I started my YouTube channel there were only two other UK-based gardening channels. I produced weekly videos of my allotment gardening life and did this for around four years without missing a week. They started off as instructional videos but after a few years developed into more of a reality style series. I would not only follow my own gardening adventures but that of other people on my allotment site. I would also visit all the gardening shows throughout the country as well as special trips to places such as the spectacular tulip garden at Keukenhof in The Netherlands. I've been vlogging for over 12 years. My channel still includes my gardening adventures but I'm now including more videos of my life outside the garden such as rambling, seasonal cooking and a video diary of my weight loss journey.

**When did you first get into gardening? Are your family keen gardeners?**

I was brought up in a typical Welsh mining village in South Wales. Treherbert is at the head of the Rhondda Valleys and is surrounded

Sean busy on his plot



- WELCOME TO -  
Sean's Allotment  
Garden



“My gardening technique is a mixture of no-dig and traditional methods”



Always time for a nice cup of tea on the plot

on three sides by large mountains. Our home back garden was very sparse. It had around three pear trees ('Conference') and one large eating apple tree, plus two dessert apples – far too many for such a small garden and all growing to a height of 20ft. It was a task to harvest the apples every autumn and it was a well-oiled operation to pick, wrap in tissue paper and place into apple boxes. These were distributed to neighbours and the local chapel. We had many apple pies for the following few months from thankful neighbours. Although my parents could appreciate a beautiful flower or the flavour of a freshly home-grown carrot, they weren't gardeners.

Despite the fruit gardens our garden was very empty. A concrete path ran from top to bottom and cut the garden into two. One side the trees grew and on the other just one large fuchsia bush and maybe the odd row of peas, my father loved them. Towards the kitchen door there was a small rose garden which had been tended by my grandmother during the decade before I was born.



Sean adds collars to his leeks

#### What is it that draws you to allotment gardening in particular?

I love growing my own food but I could do that at home in the back garden. For me, having an allotment is all about the community. You meet a variety of people from all walks of life. I have to admit that not a lot of gardening is done when others are on site. We spend most of our time sat outside sheds, drinking tea, eating biscuits and putting the world to rights rather than gardening. During summer I tend to arrive on site from 5am and quickly get lost within the quiet of the early morning and the seasonal tasks. As soon as someone arrives a few hours later the kettle is put on the camp stove and all thoughts of gardening go out the window.

For summer solstice I get to my allotment at around 4am and just sit there listening and appreciating the sounds of nature. It truly is a magical time.

#### You garden organically using no-dig and permaculture techniques. Would you recommend these to other readers and why?

My gardening technique is a mixture of no-dig and traditional methods. In the first few years it can be expensive to go straight into no-dig, especially in London. The cost of importing soil in the early days can put people off until there is enough home-produced compost available. So I have no issue with people following traditional methods for the first few years until their compost pile allows them to switch over to

no-dig. But there is no disputing the results you get from it. On my previous allotment which was no-dig the crops were definitely bigger, cleaner, more flavoursome and more colourful. For the past year I've been gardening by the phases of the moon and look forward to passing on my experiences in a few years.

#### You have an urban allotment on the Kent-London border. Does your urban location present any particular challenges (or advantages)?

My first allotment in London was situated next to my house. Very handy you might think but it also, for me, had its drawbacks. Very quickly I became involved with the allotment committee and within two years of having my plot I was elected site secretary. In retrospect it was the wrong move. Being involved with site business took me away from tending to my own allotment. Now I believe that anyone looking to go on a site committee, or hold a position, must have an allotment which only requires an hour or two on the weekend to maintain. I learnt many life lessons during my time on committees both in London and Wales but for the time being I enjoy tending my allotment and not getting involved with that side of things. Living so close to the plot was too easy to put off the tasks for another day, "I'll do that tomorrow."

My current allotment is four miles away from home and when I visit it's because something needs to be done. I know most would love to be closer to their allotment but for me, it works. ▶

**Is there a good community spirit on your plots?**

Last year I left my allotment of 12 years due to a bad atmosphere. Too many members poking their noses into the business of others. Creating issues where none existed, especially during the winter months, probably due to boredom I would imagine. The enjoyment of being on that allotment had faded for me during the last few years.

Seeing how unhappy I was and that my depression had returned, a viewer to my YouTube channel emailed and invited me to visit his allotment site for a cuppa and a site tour. As soon as I walked through the gate the welcome was warm and inviting. At the end of the tour we stood on an overgrown plot and he told me that the current owner was giving up the following year. The waiting list was single figures so there was a good possibility I could get a plot on this site. I followed his advice and waited 18 months to be offered a plot. On the day of signing the new tenancy there were three plots available, including the one I had viewed a few years earlier. I took it and paid my rent money of £45 and I've never looked back. I love my site; it has a friendly atmosphere of mostly retired people. I've found retired plot holders are more relaxed, they've seen it all, heard it all and want to enjoy the quiet life free from petty arguments and disagreements – until the biscuit tin is empty, that is!

**What crops do you really love to grow?**

There are some crops which I've never taken home from the allotment. Peas, runner beans, French climbing beans and all the fruits are the type of crops I tend to eat straight off the plant. I'm also a fan of cooking on the allotment. In my shed I've set up a kitchen with a camping stove and love to make meals with whatever is available to harvest. I've just been given a 1960s gas cooker so next spring I'll be able to pop a rhubarb pie in the oven and have it after all the gardening tasks are complete. As a child I remember eating seasonally – it's an aspect of life which all non-gardening friends look down on. Society is too used to supermarket shopping



Sean busy planting lavender – he encourages allotmenters to grow scented flowers

**“In my shed I've set up a kitchen with a camping stove and love to make meals with whatever is available to harvest”**

and having everything at their disposal. With the current social awareness of plastics I've started using terracotta pots and I make my own plant labels. For me it's all part of the 'Make Do and Mend'

mentality from the 1940s. I'm convinced I was born in the wrong decade. I tend to love using root crops in cooking such as swede, potatoes, carrots, parsnips, celeriac. I've often remarked that I prefer being on the allotment during winter rather than summer: the cosy feeling of a kettle boiling in the shed while I'm busy getting warm out on the plot, then cupping a hot soup in a warm shed lit by candlelight before heading home in the dark – beautiful.

**Are you planning to grow any new or unusual crops this season?**

October 2019 marked 80 years since the launch of the Dig for Victory campaign. I've taken on a new allotment with the sole purpose of running it using the plans and leaflets distributed during the 1940s. I don't know why but I've always held a fascination with the Home Front elements of wartime. Government information at the time encouraged people to grow as much food as possible and to cram it into any gardening space you could find. Today I see so much land wasted on allotments so it will be interesting to see how much food can be grown on a traditional plot.

**Any top tips for growing a favourite crop?**

Even though I love growing food I like to encourage gardeners to grow scented flowers. I would love to see council authorities adopt this when planning public spaces. Coming off a busy commuter train to a heavenly scent would surely be the perfect way to unwind from the stresses of the day. My go-to plant is night scented stock. Very easy to grow, just scatter the seed and cover with a dusting of compost and you'll be rewarded with a scent that fills the evening air. Perfect for outside the back door.

**Future hopes and dreams?**

My ultimate dream would be to own my own garden and cottage with the aim to film the entire process of taking the house and garden from scratch through to a lovely home and bountiful harvest. But with house prices being what they are, I think I'd better keep dreaming to my allotment shed. ■



A bumper harvest of carrots



**SEAN ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

- Social media stats (August 2019) and links..... Total 78.5k +
- Website [www.seanamescameron.com](http://www.seanamescameron.com)
- YouTube channel [www.youtube.com/thehortchanneltv](http://www.youtube.com/thehortchanneltv) 33,023
- Twitter [twitter.com/growyourownscj](https://twitter.com/growyourownscj) 4880
- Instagram [www.instagram.com/growyourownscj/](https://www.instagram.com/growyourownscj/) 3672
- Facebook Page search 'Grow Your Own with Sean James Cameron' 7035 likes; 7334 followers
- Facebook Group [www.facebook.com/groups/gardeninghintsandtipsuk](https://www.facebook.com/groups/gardeninghintsandtipsuk) 22,564