



How To Get Rid Of Slugs Naturally

Composited off the Internet

By Gareth Richards

How to Get Rid of Slugs Naturally

Natural methods to control slugs in UK gardens without chemicals. Covers barriers, traps, biological controls, and slug-resistant plants.



UK gardens host over 30 slug species, with the grey field slug and garden slug causing the most crop damage. Slugs eat up to 40 times their body weight nightly and are most active between 5C and 25C in damp conditions. Effective natural controls include nematode biological treatments (Nemaslug, applied at soil temperatures above 5C), copper barriers, beer traps, and evening hand-picking. Slug-resistant plants like ferns, geraniums, and astilbes avoid the problem entirely.



Slugs cause more frustration to UK gardeners than any other pest. They shred hostas overnight, demolish newly planted seedlings, and hollow out strawberries the day before you planned to pick them. The UK's damp climate makes it one of the best countries in Europe for slug populations. Over 30 species live here, and the mild, wet conditions mean they are active from March through to November.

Understanding UK slugs

Knowing your enemy helps you fight it. Most garden damage comes from just three or four species out of the 30-plus found in the UK.

The main culprits

Grey field slug (*Deroceras reticulatum*) - the most destructive species. Small (4-5cm), grey-brown. Found in every UK garden. Feeds above and below ground, destroying roots, seedlings, and leaves.

Garden slug (*Arion hortensis*) - black with an orange underside. Lives mostly underground, feeding on roots and tubers. You rarely see this one, but the damage is severe.

Large black slug (*Arion ater*) - the biggest UK slug at 10-15cm. Despite its size, it prefers decaying matter over living plants. Less destructive than it looks.

Leopard slug (*Limax maximus*) - spotted pattern, up to 15cm. Actually beneficial. It eats other slugs and decaying matter. Leave it alone.

When slugs are active

Slugs are most active between 5C and 25C in damp conditions. In the UK, that means the main slug season runs from March to November, with peak activity in April-May and September-October when conditions are mild and wet.

They emerge at dusk and feed through the night, retreating to dark, damp hiding spots by dawn. A single slug eats up to 40 times its body weight per night. Multiply that by the hundreds of slugs in an average garden and the scale of the problem becomes clear.

Season	March-April
Slug activity	Rising
Why	Soil warms, eggs hatch, spring growth provides food

Season	May-June
Slug activity	High
Why	Warm, damp evenings. Peak damage to young plants

Season	July-August
Slug activity	Variable
Why	Dry spells reduce activity, wet periods cause surges

Season	September-October
Slug activity	High
Why	Autumn damp, dying vegetation, new egg laying

Season	November-February
Slug activity	Low
Why	Cold slows activity, but slugs do not fully hibernate



Biological controls

Nematodes (Nemaslug)

Nematode biological control is the most effective natural method. Nemaslug contains millions of microscopic nematodes (*Phasmarhabditis hermaphrodita*) that you water into the soil. The nematodes enter slugs through a body opening and release bacteria that kill the slug within 5-7 days.

How to apply:

Mix the nematode powder with water in a watering can
Apply to moist soil when the temperature is above 5C
Water the area well after application
Keep soil moist for two weeks after treatment
One application protects for 6 weeks. Apply in early spring (March-April) and again in late summer (August-September) for season-long control. Nematodes work underground, killing slugs where most of the population lives. Surface methods like traps only catch the 5% of slugs feeding above ground.

Available products:

Product	Nemaslug (BASF/Nemasys)
Coverage	40 sq m per pack
Application period	March-October, soil above 5C
Price range	twelve to fifteen pounds

Product	SlugClear Nematodes
Coverage	40 sq m per pack
Application period	March-October, soil above 5C
Price range	twelve to fourteen pounds

Product	Slug Nematodes (Envii)
Coverage	60 sq m per pack
Application period	March-October, soil above 5C
Price range	fifteen to eighteen pounds

All brands contain the same nematode species (*Phasmarhabditis hermaphrodita*). The difference is pack size and price. Buy from garden centres or online suppliers that store nematodes in a cold chain. Nematodes are living organisms and die if left in warm conditions before application. Check the use-by date on the pack.

Storage: Keep unopened packs in the fridge (not freezer) and use within the expiry date. Once mixed with water, apply immediately. Mixed solution cannot be stored.

Gardener's tip:

Apply nematodes in the evening when soil is damp. UV light kills them, so avoid application in direct sunshine. Water the area before and after treatment for the best results. For container vegetable gardens, apply nematodes directly to each pot rather than broadcasting across open ground.

Wildlife allies

Several garden creatures eat slugs. Encouraging them provides free, permanent control:



Physical barriers

Barriers work by creating a surface or substance that slugs cannot or will not cross.

Copper

Copper tape and copper mesh are the most reliable physical barriers. When a slug's slime contacts copper, it makes a mild electrical charge that repels the slug. Apply 4cm copper tape around the rim of pots, raised beds, and cold frames.

Effectiveness: high for containers and raised beds. Less practical for open ground borders where slugs can access from underneath.

Key point: keep copper clean. Oxidised copper (green patina) is less effective. Wipe with vinegar every few months to maintain the surface.

Wool pellets

Compressed wool pellets expand when wet, creating a scratchy mat around plants. Slugs dislike crawling over the dry, fibrous texture. Apply a 5cm ring around each plant.

Effectiveness: moderate. Works well in dry weather. Heavy rain flattens the pellets and reduces their effect. Reapply after sustained rainfall.

Grit and sharp materials

Horticultural grit, crushed shells, and diatomaceous earth create rough surfaces. The theory is that slugs avoid crossing sharp materials.

Effectiveness: poor in practice. Studies show slugs cross these barriers readily in damp conditions. The materials settle into soil quickly and need constant replenishment. Not recommended as a primary defence.

Cloches and netting

Physical covers protect vulnerable seedlings during their most susceptible stage. Cut-off plastic bottles placed over newly planted seedlings create individual cloches. Remove once plants are established and less attractive to slugs.

Traps and hand-picking

Beer traps

Sink a yoghurt pot or jam jar into the soil so the rim sits level with the surface. Fill with cheap beer or a mix of water, sugar, and yeast. Slugs are attracted by the yeast smell, fall in, and drown.

Effectiveness: moderate. Beer traps work within a 1-metre radius. You need multiple traps across a border. Empty and refill every 2-3 days. They catch plenty of slugs but make little dent in large populations when used alone.

Grapefruit and melon traps

Place upturned grapefruit halves or melon skins in the garden at dusk. Slugs shelter underneath overnight. Collect and dispose of them each morning. A simple, free method that works well alongside other controls.

Evening hand-picking

Hand-picking is the most immediately effective slug control method. Go out after dark with a torch and a bucket. Pick slugs off plants and the surrounding soil. A 20-minute session removes dozens. Focus on hostas, lettuce, and young seedlings.

Warning:

Do not use salt to kill slugs. It causes a slow, painful death and damages soil by increasing sodium levels. Salt also kills beneficial soil organisms and earthworms. Use a bucket of salty water for collected slugs if you cannot relocate them.

Best conditions for hand-picking: mild, damp evenings after rain, from dusk until around 11pm. This is when slug activity peaks. Two or three sessions per week during spring and autumn controls the worst damage.



Garden design for slug control

How you design and maintain your garden affects slug populations more than any single control method.

Reduce hiding places

Slugs shelter during the day in dark, damp spots: under stones, in dense ground cover, beneath pots, and in piled-up debris. Keeping borders tidy, raising pots on feet, and clearing dead foliage reduces daytime shelter. Regularly identifying and controlling lawn weeds also removes damp ground-level cover that slugs favour.

This does not mean a sterile garden. Log piles for wildlife, compost heaps, and leaf litter all support beneficial slug predators too. Balance tidiness with habitat provision.

Improve drainage

Slugs thrive in waterlogged soil. Improving drainage with organic matter, raised beds, and proper grading reduces the damp conditions slugs prefer. Well-drained soil also produces stronger, healthier plants that resist slug damage better.

Create open spaces

Slugs avoid crossing open, dry ground. A gravel path or bare soil strip between a border and a lawn makes a natural barrier that slugs are reluctant to cross during dry weather. Position vulnerable plants away from dense hedges and walls where slugs shelter.

Timing

Plant out seedlings when they are large enough to withstand some slug damage, not as tiny transplants. If you are starting a vegetable garden, slug protection should be part of your plan from day one. Harden off and grow on in pots until plants have 4-6 true leaves before planting out. Larger plants survive partial slug feeding. Tiny seedlings do not.

Slug-resistant plants

The simplest slug control is growing plants that slugs avoid. These have tough, hairy, aromatic, or toxic leaves that slugs dislike.

Perennials slugs avoid

Vegetables that resist slugs

Garlic and onions - strong smell deters slugs

Tomatoes - aromatic foliage. Slugs eat the fruit but avoid the plant
 Chard and perpetual spinach - tough, waxy leaves
 Broad beans - rarely damaged once established
 Herbs - rosemary, thyme, sage, oregano
 Plants slugs love (protect these)
 Hostas (especially thin-leaved varieties)
 Lettuce and salad leaves
 Dahlias (young shoots in spring)
 Delphiniums (a cottage garden favourite that needs protection)
 Marigolds
 Strawberries (fruit, not foliage)
 Young seedlings of almost anything

Plant	Slug resistance	Notes
Ferns	Excellent	Never damaged
Hardy geraniums	Excellent	Aromatic leaves
Hostas (thick-leaved)	Moderate	Better than thin-leaved types
Hostas (thin-leaved)	Poor	Need protection
Lettuce	Very poor	Always protect
Lavender	Excellent	Too aromatic for slugs
Strawberries	Poor (fruit)	Raise on straw, use copper
Dahlias	Poor (spring shoots)	Protect emerging growth

Month-by-month slug control calendar

Month	Action
January	Order nematodes for spring application. Plan slug-resistant planting.
February	Check for slug eggs (small white clusters in soil). Destroy on sight.
March	First nematode application when soil above 5C. Set beer traps.
April	Peak slug season begins. Evening hand-picking twice weekly.
May	Protect newly planted seedlings with cloches. Apply copper tape to pots.
June	Maintain beer traps. Refresh copper tape if oxidised.
July	Dry weather reduces activity. Water nematodes in if dry spell breaks.
August	Second nematode application. Protect strawberry fruit.
September	Autumn slug surge. Resume evening hand-picking.
October	Clear fallen leaves and debris around vulnerable plants.
November	Activity slows. Leave log piles and shelter for slug predators.
December	Plan next year's slug strategy. Order nematodes for March delivery.



Common mistakes with slug control

Relying on a single method

No single method controls slugs completely. Combine biological controls (nematodes), physical barriers (copper), cultural practices (tidying, drainage), and wildlife encouragement for the best results. A combined approach reduces damage by 80-90%.

Using salt

Salt kills slugs but also kills earthworms, beneficial insects, and soil microorganisms. It raises soil sodium levels, damaging plant roots. Never use salt in a garden.

Applying nematodes to dry soil

Nematodes need moist soil to move through. Applying them during a dry spell wastes money. Water the area well before and after application. Keep soil moist for two weeks following treatment.

Giving up too early

Slug control is ongoing, not a one-off fix. The UK climate constantly produces new slugs. Consistent effort through the season maintains control. Two years of combined methods dramatically reduces slug populations compared to the first year.

Killing beneficial species

The leopard slug and large black slug eat decaying matter and other slugs. Killing them removes allies. Learn to identify the four main species. Focus control on the grey field slug and garden slug, which cause 90% of the damage.

What actually works: every method rated

After years of testing, some methods clearly outperform others. This table rates every common slug control method so you can invest your time and money where it counts. Scores are based on real-world UK garden performance, not laboratory conditions.

Method	Nematodes (Nemaslug etc.)
Effectiveness (out of 5)	5
Cost per season	twenty to thirty pounds
Effort	Low (mix and water in)
Coverage area	40-60 sq m per pack
Best for	Whole garden, underground slugs

Method	Evening hand-picking
Effectiveness (out of 5)	4
Cost per season	Free
Effort	High (20 min, 3x weekly)
Coverage area	Immediate area
Best for	Targeted beds, fast results

Method	Copper tape/mesh
Effectiveness (out of 5)	4
Cost per season	ten to twenty pounds
Effort	Low (one-off install)
Coverage area	Individual pots/beds
Best for	Containers, raised beds
Method	Wildlife encouragement
Effectiveness (out of 5)	4
Cost per season	Free to low
Effort	Low (habitat creation)
Coverage area	Whole garden
Best for	Long-term, permanent control
Method	Beer traps
Effectiveness (out of 5)	3
Cost per season	Under five pounds
Effort	Medium (refill every 2-3 days)
Coverage area	1-metre radius per trap
Best for	Small beds, monitoring numbers
Method	Wool pellets
Effectiveness (out of 5)	3
Cost per season	ten to fifteen pounds
Effort	Medium (reapply after rain)
Coverage area	Individual plants
Best for	Dry-weather protection
Method	Grapefruit/melon traps
Effectiveness (out of 5)	3
Cost per season	Under two pounds
Effort	Medium (refill every 2-3 days)
Coverage area	Medium (check daily) 2-metre radius
Best for	Collecting slugs for removal

Method	Cloches/bottle covers
Effectiveness (out of 5)	3
Cost per season	Free to five pounds
Effort	Low (place and remove)
Coverage area	Individual seedlings
Best for	Transplant protection
Method	Companion planting
Effectiveness (out of 5)	2
Cost per season	Free to low
Effort	Low surrounding plants
Coverage area	Individual seedlings
Best for	Reducing attraction to beds
Method	Coffee grounds
Effectiveness (out of 5)	1
Cost per season	Free
Effort	Medium (reapply often)
Coverage area	Individual plants
Best for	Not recommended as primary defence
Method	Garlic spray
Effectiveness (out of 5)	1
Cost per season	Under two pounds
Effort	High (reapply after rain)
Coverage area	Sprayed area only
Best for	Temporary deterrent only
Method	Eggshells
Effectiveness (out of 5)	1
Cost per season	Free
Effort	Low
Coverage area	Individual plants
Best for	Ineffective, see myth section below

Method	Sharp grit/gravel
Effectiveness (out of 5)	1
Cost per season	five to ten pounds
Effort	Medium
Coverage area	Borders and beds
Best for	Better used for drainage

The most effective strategy combines nematodes (underground control) with copper barriers (containers) and evening hand-picking (surface slugs). That three-pronged approach addresses slugs at every life stage and in every part of the garden.

Methods that don't work: slug control myths

The internet is full of slug control advice. Much of it does not stand up to testing. Here are the methods that waste your time.

Eggshells

Crushed eggshells are the most commonly recommended slug barrier. The theory is that sharp edges cut the slug's soft body. In reality, slugs glide over eggshells without difficulty. Their mucus protects them from rough surfaces. RHS trials confirmed eggshells have no measurable deterrent effect. Save your eggshells for the compost heap instead.

Salt

Salt kills slugs through dehydration, but it is a terrible garden practice. Salt raises sodium levels in soil, damages plant roots, kills earthworms, and destroys beneficial microorganisms. A handful of salt can make a patch of soil inhospitable for months. Never use salt on garden soil.

WD-40 and petroleum products

Spraying WD-40 around pots appears online as a slug hack. It does repel slugs temporarily, but it is a petroleum-based product that contaminates soil, harms insects, and leaves residues on edible crops. It is not registered for garden pest use. Avoid it completely.

Vaseline on pot rims

A band of Vaseline around a pot rim does make the surface too slippery for slugs to climb. However, it collects dirt within days, loses effectiveness, and needs constant reapplication. Copper tape is a permanent alternative that actually works without maintenance beyond occasional cleaning.

Garlic spray

Homemade garlic spray (crushed garlic steeped in water) has a mild repellent effect, but it washes off in the first rain and needs reapplying every 2-3 days. In the UK's wet climate, that means near-daily reapplication during slug season. The effort-to-result ratio makes it impractical for anything larger than a few pots.

Seaweed mulch

Dried seaweed around plants is sometimes recommended because of its salt content. Once rain washes the surface salt away (which happens within one or two showers), seaweed actually provides an ideal damp hiding spot for slugs. It can make the problem worse.

Slug-proof garden design

Prevention through garden design reduces slug problems before they start. These structural changes last for years and reduce your ongoing effort.

Raised beds with copper

Raised beds are one of the best structural defences against slugs. Elevating the growing surface means slugs must climb vertical sides to reach your plants. Add a band of copper tape or copper mesh around the outside of each bed, 5cm from the top edge. This makes a permanent barrier that stops the majority of slugs reaching your crops.

For the best protection, line the inside base of new raised beds with fine mesh to prevent soil-dwelling slugs emerging from below. Fill with bought compost rather than garden soil, which carries slug eggs.

Gravel mulch and open ground

Slugs prefer crossing damp, soft surfaces. Gravel paths and gravel mulch around beds create dry, open areas that slugs avoid in all but the wettest weather. A 30cm gravel strip around a raised bed or border acts as a natural deterrent zone.

Use 10-20mm washed gravel, not fine grit which compacts and retains moisture. Pale-coloured gravel reflects light and stays drier than dark stone.

Plant spacing and airflow

Crowded plants create damp, shaded conditions at ground level where slugs thrive. Space plants according to their full mature size. Good airflow between plants keeps the soil surface drier and makes the area less attractive to slugs.

This is particularly important for lettuce, hostas, and other slug-prone plants. Give them room to breathe rather than packing them tightly.

Vertical growing

Growing slug-prone crops vertically puts them out of reach. Strawberries in hanging baskets, lettuce in wall planters, and herbs in vertical pocket gardens avoid slug contact almost entirely. Container gardening on tables, shelves, or wall-mounted planters adds another layer of protection.

Climbing beans, peas trained on supports, and tomatoes on stakes all keep the main crop above slug height. The stems are rarely attacked once plants are established.

Now you've mastered slug control, read our guide on companion planting for UK gardens for the next step in building a naturally pest-resistant growing space.

Frequently asked questions

What is the most effective natural slug control?

Nematode biological control works best overall. Apply Nemaslug when soil temperature is above 5C, usually from March onward. The microscopic nematodes seek out slugs underground and kill them within 5-7 days. One application lasts 6 weeks. Combine with evening hand-picking for the most thorough control.

Do coffee grounds deter slugs?

Coffee grounds have limited and unreliable effect. Fresh grounds contain caffeine that slugs dislike, but the deterrent fades quickly as the grounds dry out and break down. They are not a reliable sole defence. Use copper barriers or nematodes for proven, consistent results instead.

What plants do slugs hate?

Slugs avoid plants with tough, hairy, or aromatic foliage. Ferns are never damaged. Hardy geraniums, astilbes, foxgloves, lavender, rosemary, and euphorbia are all reliably slug-resistant. Thick-leaved hostas like Sum and Substance resist damage better than thin-leaved varieties.

Do beer traps work for slugs?

Beer traps catch slugs but only within about a 1-metre radius. Sink a container level with the soil surface and fill with cheap beer or a yeast-sugar-water mix. Empty and refill every 2-3 days. They work as part of a combined approach but cannot protect an entire garden alone.

How do I protect hostas from slugs?

Grow hostas in raised pots with 4cm copper tape around the rim. Slugs rarely cross clean copper. Choose thick-leaved varieties like Sum and Substance and Halcyon that resist damage naturally. Apply nematodes to surrounding soil in March and August for underground slug control.

When are slugs most active in the UK?

Slugs are most active on mild, damp evenings between April and October. Peak feeding occurs between dusk and midnight when humidity rises above 80%. They are less active in cold weather below 5C, during dry spells, and in temperatures above 25C. Rain after a dry spell triggers intense activity.

Do slugs come back to the same garden?

Slugs have a home range of about 5 metres. Relocating them fewer than 20 metres away is ineffective as they navigate back. Moving them 100+ metres away works, but most gardeners find ongoing control methods more practical than regular relocation.

Do eggshells stop slugs?

Eggshells do not deter slugs in any measurable way. RHS trials found that slugs crawl over crushed eggshells without hesitation. The mucus that slugs produce protects their underside from sharp surfaces. This is one of the most persistent gardening myths. Copper tape and nematodes are the proven alternatives.

How do I slug-proof a raised bed?



Fit a 4cm band of copper tape or copper mesh around the outside of the raised bed, positioned 5cm from the top edge. Line the inside base with fine mesh to prevent soil-dwelling slugs emerging from below. Surround the bed with a 30cm gravel strip to create a dry buffer zone. Fill with bought compost rather than garden soil, which carries slug eggs.

How to Contact the Editor

If you have comments or you know I have given wrong advice then please contact me by email at

gareth.richards@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

If you have something to contribute or have a say on allotment life, then please use my email to send your contributions.

I am going to process the magazine issue once a month, so if there are comments you would like to make they can be answered in future editions.

I would like to add that most of the articles are taken off the web and some well known gardening and allotments magazines have been read in the making of our magazine content.

We also have our own website at :

www.yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

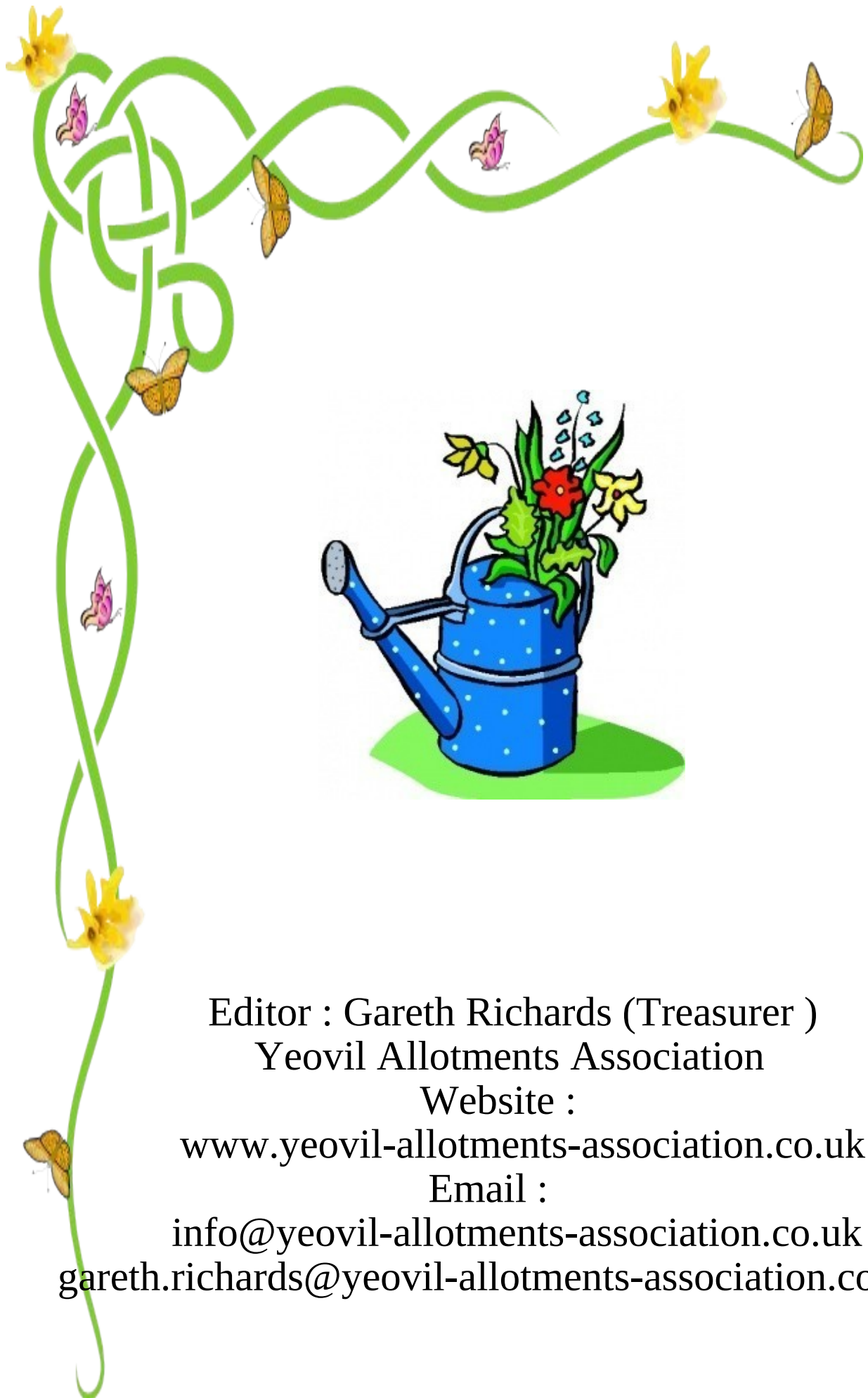
where you can find this magazine as well as a catalogue

Happy Allotmenting and best wishes,

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