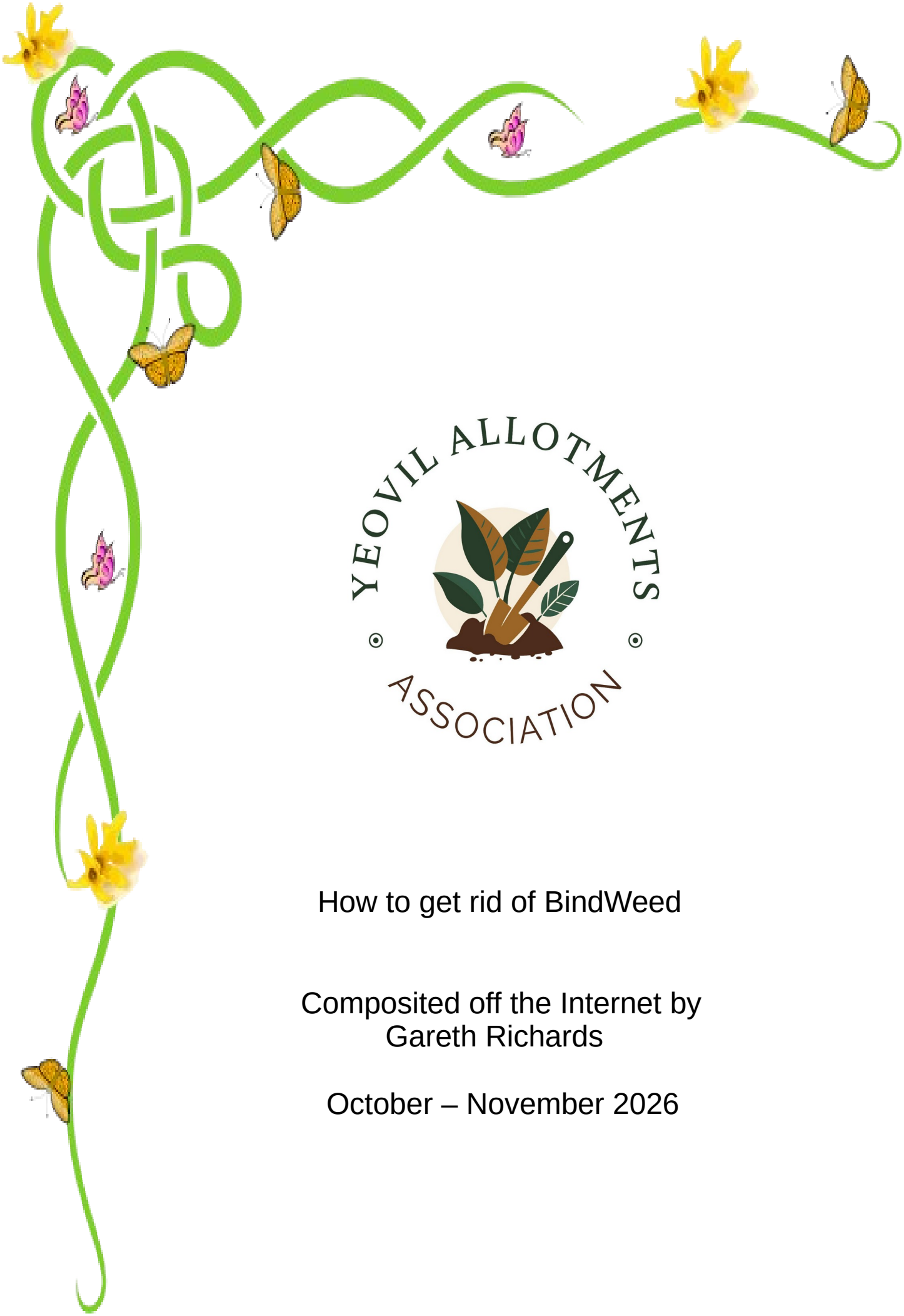

YEOVIL ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

How to get rid of BindWeed

Composited off the Internet by
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How to Get Rid of Bindweed

How to tell field and hedge bindweed apart and get rid of them, with the cane trick, weedkiller timing, cutting, covering and root barriers.

Bindweed comes back because its brittle white roots go very deep and every broken bit regrows. To beat it, starve the roots. Either pull or cut every shoot every week or so through the growing season, or let it climb a cane and treat the leaves with a glyphosate weedkiller from June to September. Covering ground with black polythene for a year also works. Expect it to take a few years.

Bindweed roots go deep and snap easily, and every broken piece can grow into a new plant
Never rotavate bindweed ground, as it chops the roots up and spreads them
Treat with glyphosate from June to September, once stems are long and leafy
Without weedkiller, remove every shoot every week or so for two or three seasons
Black polythene left down for a year or more starves it of light
Don't put bindweed roots on the home compost heap.

Bindweed is the weed that drives even seasoned gardeners up the wall. It twines around everything, smothers shrubs, pulls down bean poles and threads through hedges. Two kinds cause trouble in UK gardens: field bindweed (Convolvulus arvensis) and hedge bindweed (Calystegia sepium).

The tricky part is underground. The roots go very deep and spread a long way, and broken bits grow into new plants. You won’t beat it in one season, but with a steady plan you will win. Here’s how.

Hedge bindweed smothering a fence with its big white trumpets.

How to identify bindweed

Bindweed is a twining climber with arrow-shaped leaves and white or pink trumpet flowers. Here’s how to tell the two kinds apart.

Field bindweed (Convolvulus arvensis)
Field bindweed is the smaller of the two and the more common in gardens. It has small arrow-shaped leaves and small white or pale pink trumpet flowers, often with pink stripes. It loves dry, sunny, open ground, so you’ll find it on allotments, veg plots and fence lines.

Field bindweed has small arrow-shaped leaves and dainty pink-striped trumpets. Pretty, but snip the flowers off before they set seed.

Hedge bindweed (Calystegia sepium)

Hedge bindweed is the big one. It scrambles high through hedges, shrubs and trees. The leaves are bigger, and the flowers are the giveaway: large, pure white trumpets. It likes damp, rich soil, so it’s common in hedges and moist borders.

Field or hedge bindweed?

Feature	Field bindweed	Hedge bindweed
Size	Smaller, about 2m	Bigger, 3m or more
Leaves	Small arrow shapes	Larger arrow shapes
Flowers	Small, white or pink with stripes	Large, pure white
Likes	Dry, sunny, open ground	Damp, rich soil and hedges

Why bindweed is so hard to kill

Bindweed stores its energy in deep, brittle roots that regrow from tiny pieces. Field bindweed seeds can also lie in the soil for many years.

The roots

The roots are thick, white and fleshy. They go far deeper than any spade and snap at the slightest tug. Each broken piece can grow into a new plant, so rotavating a bindweed patch doesn’t kill it. It multiplies it.

Cut off all the top growth and new shoots pop up again within a week or two. The roots hold enough food to keep doing this for a long time.

Bindweed roots are white, brittle and snap easily, so bits get left behind.

How fast it grows back
New shoots appear within a week or two of cutting and grow quickly. Miss a few weeks of cutting and the plant gets its leaves back and tops up its roots.

Seeds
Field bindweed seeds can wait in the soil for many years. So even after you've beaten the roots, the odd seedling may appear. Pull these while they're small.

Where does bindweed come from?
It usually arrives as bits of root in soil, manure or the rootballs of new plants. It also creeps in underground from next door, hedges and railway banks.

Check the roots of gifted or bought plants for white, brittle roots before you plant them. Be wary of topsoil and manure from unknown sources. If it's coming in along a fence, a root barrier is the long-term fix.

Bindweed treatment calendar
Use weedkiller from June to September, when stems are long and leafy. Cut, cover and put in barriers the rest of the year.

Month	What bindweed is doing	What to do
January March	Resting underground	Plan. Get mulch to ready. Put in root barriers.
April	First shoots appear	Note where they are. Too early for weedkiller.

Month	What bindweed is doing	What to do
May	Shoots growing fast	Start pulling or cutting every week or so
June	Stems getting long	First chance for weedkiller. Keep cutting elsewhere.
July	Full growth and flowering	Best month for weedkiller. Keep cutting.
August	Still flowering	Second weedkiller treatment. Keep cutting.
September	Slowing down	Last chance for weedkiller this year.
October	Dying back	Lay or top up mulch. Clear dead stems.
November to December	Resting	Cover cleared ground with black polythene or thick mulch.

Using glyphosate on bindweed
Glyphosate weedkiller is the most effective chemical treatment. It’s soaked up by the leaves and carried down into the roots. It kills any green plant it touches, so keep it off plants you want.

How to apply it
Wait until the stems are long and leafy, usually from June. Small shoots don’t take up enough.
Unwind the bindweed from plants you want to keep. Lay the stems on the ground or on a sheet of cardboard.
Paint or carefully spray the leaves. A gel or a paint-on product lets you treat just the bindweed. Follow the label.
Leave treated stems alone for at least a week. The weedkiller needs time to travel down to the roots.
Wait a few weeks for regrowth, then treat the new shoots again.

The cane trick

Bindweed climbing canes, away from the plants around it.

This is a brilliant way to treat bindweed growing among plants you want to keep.

Push a bamboo cane in next to each bindweed shoot.
Let the bindweed climb the cane for a few weeks until it’s long and leafy.
Carefully paint weedkiller onto the leaves while they’re on the cane.
The cane keeps the treated stems away from your other plants.
Only use weedkiller on calm days, and never near ponds, streams or ditches. Keep children and pets off treated areas until they’re dry.

What to expect
One treatment won’t kill established bindweed. Plan on two or three treatments a season for two or three years. Each one weakens the roots, so the regrowth gets thinner and weaker each year

Getting rid of bindweed without chemicals
You can beat bindweed without weedkiller. It just takes more time and persistence.

Keep cutting it
The idea is simple: keep removing the leaves until the roots run out of food.

Pull or cut every new shoot as soon as you see it, ideally every week or so. Each new shoot uses up some of the root’s stores. Take it off before it can top them up, and the roots slowly weaken.

Keep going for two or three full seasons, from April to October. Missing a month in summer can undo a lot of good work.

Ease the shoots out gently rather than yanking them. Yanking snaps the roots into more pieces.

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Cover it up
No light, no bindweed, but the cover must have no gaps.

Black polythene or heavy ground cover fabric will do it if you leave it in place for at least a year:

Cut all bindweed down to the ground.
Lay thick black polythene or heavy fabric over the whole area.
Overlap the sheets well and weigh the edges down with bricks or soil.
Leave it for at least 12 months, ideally 18.
Check the edges every month for sneaky shoots.

Bindweed can push through rotting cardboard, so polythene works better. If you use a loose mulch instead, make it at least 15cm deep and keep topping it up. Our guide to what mulch is and how to use it covers the options

Leave the cover down for at least a year with no gaps. Check the edges every month, as bindweed is quick to find any way out..

Crowd it out

Once you've weakened bindweed by cutting or covering, thick planting helps keep it down. Ground-covering plants like hardy geraniums shade the soil. Think of this as a follow-up, not a cure.

On allotments, potatoes are handy in bindweed ground. Their leafy tops shade it out and earthing up buries new shoots. When you lift the crop, dig out any roots you can reach.

Does vinegar or boiling water kill bindweed?

No. They kill the leaves and stems, but not the roots, so it's back in a couple of weeks. Boiling water is fine in paving cracks but scalds anything nearby. Household vinegar isn't an authorised weedkiller in the UK. Shop-bought contact weedkillers such as pelargonic acid also only burn off the tops, so repeat them as often as you'd cut. Our guide to organic weedkillers has more ideas.

Flame weeding

A flame weeder burns off the top growth in seconds. Like cutting, it makes the roots use up their stores to regrow. Do it every week or so in the growing season, on paths, drives and open ground where nothing else can get scorched.

Bindweed in tricky spots

In hedges

You can't spray or cover a hedge, so the cane trick is the best chemical option. Without chemicals, follow each stem back to the ground and cut it there every week or so. A thick, healthy hedge will shade out weakened bindweed in time. For another tricky invader, see our guide to Japanese knotweed identification.

In borders and beds

In autumn or spring, lift plants that have bindweed tangled in their roots. Wash the soil off and pick out every white, brittle bindweed root. Replant them in clean soil once you've treated or covered the cleared ground.

Where you can't lift plants, use the cane trick or paint the bindweed leaves with a small brush. Hold a piece of cardboard in front of nearby plants while you work.

Wash the soil off a lifted plant and the white bindweed roots are easy to spot. Get every bit out before you replant it in clean ground.

On allotments

Many allotments come with years of bindweed. Cover the worst areas with black polythene for a year and grow crops elsewhere, then swap round. Potatoes and squash are good at shading it out. Our vegetable planting calendar helps you plan crops around the clearing.

In lawns
Regular mowing acts like repeated cutting, so bindweed rarely takes over lawns. Field bindweed can creep along low enough to dodge the mower, though. Dab the bindweed leaves only with a weedkiller gel, and the grass will soon fill any small gaps.

Common bindweed mistakes
Rotavating the ground
Rotavating chops the roots into lots of little pieces, and each one can become a new plant. Never rotavate ground with bindweed in it.

Using weedkiller too early
Weedkiller on short spring shoots barely works. There isn’t enough leaf to take it in. Wait until the stems are long and leafy, usually from June.

Giving up after one year
Lots of people treat for a season, see it back next spring, and decide it hasn’t worked. It has. Thinner, weaker regrowth means you’re winning. Keep going.

Yanking it out
Pulling hard snaps the roots. Ease the stem out gently, or snip it at ground level.

Composting it at home
The RHS advises against putting bindweed roots, stems or seeds on a home compost heap, as most don’t get hot enough to kill them. Use your council green waste bin instead.

Letting it set seed
Bees like the flowers, but every seed can sit in the soil for years. Snip off the flowers before they set seed. For another weed with tough roots, see our guide on how to get rid of brambles.

Putting in a root barrier
A root barrier buried upright along the boundary stops bindweed creeping in from next door.

You'll need:

Tough root barrier membrane, about 60cm wide
A narrow trench along the boundary, about 60cm deep
How to do it:

Dig the trench along the boundary.
Stand the barrier upright in it, with a few centimetres sticking out above the soil.
Overlap any joins well and tape them.
Fill the trench back in and firm the soil on both sides.
Deal with any shoots that still pop up on your side.
It's a job worth doing once if your neighbour's bindweed keeps coming through.

Now you've got a plan for bindweed, read our guide on how to get rid of brambles for the next stubborn weed on the list.

Related reading: for another weed that regrows from underground, see our guide to controlling lesser celandine.

Frequently asked questions
How deep do bindweed roots go?
Very deep, often several metres in loose soil. They also spread sideways a long way. Digging rarely gets it all, and any bits left behind grow into new plants.

Will glyphosate kill bindweed permanently?
Not in one go, but repeated treatments wear it out. The weedkiller travels down into the roots, but some always survive. Expect to treat it two or three times a season for a couple of years. Wait for the regrowth to get long and leafy each time.

Can I dig out bindweed?
Not really, once it’s settled in. The roots snap easily and every bit left behind can regrow, so digging can make things worse. It only works on very young plants.

How long does it take to get rid of bindweed?
Usually a few years of steady work. With weedkiller, most people see a big drop after two seasons. Without it, cutting and covering take longer. Missing a month in summer lets the roots build back up.

Is bindweed the same as Japanese knotweed?
No, they’re very different plants. Bindweed is a thin climbing vine with trumpet flowers. Japanese knotweed is a tall, upright plant with thick, bamboo-like stems. Only Japanese knotweed comes with legal rules on spreading and disposal, and you must declare it when selling a house.

Does salt kill bindweed?
Don’t use salt, as it poisons the soil. It might kill the top growth for a while, but it stops anything else growing for years. It also harms soil life and can wash into drains and streams.

How do I stop bindweed spreading from my neighbour’s garden?
Put a root barrier along the boundary. Bury a sheet of tough root barrier membrane upright, about 60cm deep. Or keep a narrow strip along the fence clear and cut any shoots the moment they appear on your side.

How to Contact the Editor

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

info@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

If you have something to contibute 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 Allotmenteering and best wishes,

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