

Chichester Organic Gardening Society

Newsletter 49
September 2008



NOTES FROM THE COMMITTEE

September 2008

Another year, another summer – and a rather mixed summer for weather, again. It seems clear that Climate Change is with us to stay – if that is not a contradiction in terms – but there are advantages too. Some of us may find that tender plants survive the winter, or that flowers and vegetables can be unseasonally early. The smaller amount of plants given for the stall at Stansted, however, perhaps reflects poor germination or growth earlier this year.

Even the recent price rises and the ‘credit crunch’ have their silver lining. There is already a greater emphasis on ‘eating local’ – less eating out, more concentration on quality, a recognition that fertilisers and pesticides are expensive and energy-wasteful, that food miles add to the cost but take away freshness and quality. More people are turning to allotments and their own gardens, and many want advice and help. Here COGS can be of use in particular, by example, and by encouraging others. Can each of us perhaps bring one new member this year?

Shortly after publication of the Newsletter, we will have a talk about Transition Towns, and how Chichester, and in particular COGS, can play a part in facing a future of uncertain climate and ever-decreasing oil.

At the AGM, we elect the admin team for COGS. Liz Campling has now served three years as Treasurer and Membership Secretary. While she is willing to continue, if someone else would like to take this on (or half of the joint task) please let one of the Committee know as soon as possible.

So we start the new gardening year on a note of optimism. We hope to see record numbers of you at the meetings, and meanwhile, ‘Good Gardening’ as GQT has it.

The committee

COGS NOTICES

Speakers and Meetings

We are always looking for suggestions for speakers. If you have any idea for speakers or visits, please let Vi Cowan, our Speakers' Secretary, know.

We also need volunteers to help at meetings. Please contact Liz Campling if you can help.

MONTH	Set up Hall	Run the Meeting
September	Liz Campling Pat Alderton	Gina Carrington
October (AGM)	Committee	Liz Campling
November		
January 2009		

Membership

The ballot over the proposal to charge a small entrance fee for meetings was passed by 39 votes to 7. The new system was implemented at the March meeting for the first time. Members were asked to sign in as usual and drop the money into a pot at the same time. Change will be available. (**NO Charge for the AGM)

Recipe Book

Disappointingly, Rae has not received many entries for the proposed recipe booklet and the idea has been put on ice for the time being. However, members do produce wonderful dishes for the Harvest Supper, and perhaps we could bring the recipes with us at that time? We would like to print a new recipe in each issue of the Newsletter. In particular we would be interested in 'how best to use up your surplus organic produce'.

Seed Swop

Following the suggestion of a member, Derek Henderson, we are thinking of using the newsletter as a clearing house for seed swops. Members who have spare seeds or who are looking for seeds can send the details and their phone number for publication in the newsletter. It will then be up to interested members to arrange the actual swapping among themselves. Within the month before publication, please let Penelope know **your name and phone number and the seeds you have spare or want.**



(Garden Organic's Heritage Seed Library has a similar scheme).

Note You are welcome to bring plants to meetings – but they go home with you if no-one else wants them.

Stansted Show

Many thanks to all the helpers and plant growers for making a successful COGS stand this year. Takings were less than last year (many stallholders finding visitors not buying so freely), but we made a profit of £85 (£220 less stand rental of £135) with a lot of interest from visitors about organic gardening. All the membership forms were taken resulting in 4 new members and we are expecting more to join before too long.

A specially big thanks to Penelope Johnstone for all her help in coordinating the plants.

Varianne

Lordington Lavender

On the evening of 10th June a small group of us went in 3 cars to Lordington, where on a remote slope Andrew Elms grows his 5 acres of Maillette plants. A colleague of his described their cultivation and harvesting and then we wandered among the rows of deep purple lavender, where the recent rain had accentuated the wonderful scent. Lavender oil and other products were on sale. These are also available at the Farmers Market in Chichester, as well as others.

COGS Visit to Tuppenny Barn Organics

On a beautiful summer's evening in June, a group of us gathered for a tour of Tuppenny Barn Organic Smallholding just off the A259 in Southbourne, hosted by founder, proprietor, Maggie Haynes and her Manager, Bekka Theed – both COGS members. When we asked Maggie if she would give a talk to COGS members on the project, she said that she would prefer to show us round. When we saw for ourselves all that had been achieved and what was being planned on the 2-acre site, we realised why. Only by seeing at first hand could we do it full justice.

Likewise, there is no better way to summarise what Tuppenny Barn stands for than its own statement of principles:

From Fork to Fork – all produce is sold locally through Farmers' Markets and the box scheme, minimising carbon emissions and maximising freshness and nutritional content.

Keeping the balance – everything at Tuppenny barn is done in harmony with nature, from the wildflower meadow and pond habitat (currently under construction) to the companion planting. Having seen our broad bean crop devastated by blackfly this year, we are certainly going to try the Tuppenny Barn technique of growing nasturtiums among the bean plants in future.

Reduce, reuse, recycle – we saw lots of examples of this from the rainwater harvesting system to the yoghurt pots as planters and extensive composting of all green waste.

Growing Ideas – Maggie and Bekka work hard to spread the word about the benefits of organic growing especially to schoolchildren. They have developed close links with local schools and encourage visits as part of the curriculum.

Most important of all, though, all this effort results in wonderful crops of fresh, nutritious and local fruits and vegetables. We were able to sample some of this for ourselves at the end of the

evening when bowls of strawberries and raspberries were offered, alongside glasses of organic and Fairtrade wine.

The most surprising part of the evening, though, was to learn that when Maggie bought the smallholding four years ago she had absolutely no background in horticulture and had learned everything from scratch since then - sometimes the hard way! In addition, she and Bekka manage the business almost entirely on their own, with only limited help from the man who comes to mow and trim.

It was a truly inspirational example of what can be achieved by vision, dedication and hard work.

To find out more about Tuppenny Barn Organics, contact Maggie and Bekka on 07977 536684 or Maggie@tuppennybarn.com or visit the website at www.tuppennybarn.com.

LizCampling

Ed: This summer Tuppenny Barn were Highly Commended by the Chichester District Council Green Business Award. Congratulations!

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Continuing from the April Newsletter *from an article in Which*, the interview with Patrick Holden, *Director of the Soil Association*



### **Why does organic food cost more?**

Organic farmers have to conform with organic standards, which means they avoid the use of nitrogen fertiliser, which artificially stimulates growth and can produce a rapid yield increase. We have some higher costs - particularly labour - and the result of that is that those costs are passed on. The big issue for all of us is whether we are prepared to pay more for ecological sustainability.

### **Why are you considering stopping air-freighted food being labelled organic?**

There was a feeling that we were part of the problem by allowing air-freight. We need to take action on that. I think that even air travel will

become an occasional luxury within our lifetime, so I can't really see a future for the air-freighting of organic food. But that is my opinion. We are currently in a public consultation looking at a range of options.

**Are the big supermarkets investing enough in organic produce?**

The supermarkets' core business is to give the public what they want, which has been, and still is to a degree, cheap, anonymous food. We want the public to shift from wanting this to wanting local, sustainably produced food. Have supermarkets gone far enough? I think they've gone as far as the public. If the public change, they will change because they will go out of business if they don't.

**Is organic food growing in popularity in all sectors of society?**

The profile of people who are buying organic is changing. People are buying more organic food more often and there's also a shift towards lower income groups. People on relatively low incomes are spending more on organic food because they think it's better for their children and the environment.

**If you were on a tight budget and could choose only one type of organic food to buy, what would it be?**

I think I'd start with fresh food such as fruit and vegetables. That will tell you more because your palate can tell you quite a lot about the quality of food. Try buying one or two products and buy direct. You'll find if you get on an organic box scheme or buy from a farmers' market or a farm shop, often the price is lower because you cut out a link in the chain.

**What about the issue of locally produced food?**

Over the next 20 years, we must relocalise. It's one of the great challenges of our time. What we've got at the moment is a distribution system that is incredibly vulnerable. During the lorry strike a few years ago, I was told that London was within days of the supermarket shelves being empty. Twenty million people living in Greater London, no food. I don't want to worry people but I think we've got a lot of big issues and food security is a real concern.

## Visit to the Brighton Earthship

On Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> August a group of COGS members visited the Brighton Earthship at Stanmer Park. Interest had been generated following a talk during our winter programme by Mischa Hewitt of the Low Carbon Trust. Our guide didn't show up, but we found that we could walk up via the Stanmer Park nurseries and through the organic allotments to the site of the Earthship. Terry, a post-graduate student from Brighton University, was present, and agreed to lead our tour; and a very competent and enthusiastic guide he proved.

The concept of Earthships was generated in New Mexico, USA, to provide sustainable dwellings for communities living in the desert there, and a general comment from our group on first sight was 'it looks Mexican'! The Brighton example was the first in Europe, but now, we were told, they are being constructed in several countries on the continent, and in Scotland. Permission was granted to construct the Brighton Earthship, provided it was not used as a dwelling. In fact it serves as the Community Centre for Stanmer Organics, part of Brighton Permaculture Association's initiatives. It is constructed largely of recycled materials, and is totally self-sufficient in terms of power, water and sewage disposal; its carbon footprint is minimal, and it was constructed almost completely using voluntary labour, which proved a valuable training facility for future Earthships! The walls, built into the hillside, are made of recycled tyres filled with rammed earth (it takes 3 people to move a rammed earth tyre!)

The front outer wall is constructed from a recycled wooden frame and glass, set at an angle to project the winter sun's rays onto the back wall to store heat. An inner glass wall forms a corridor along the front in which some tomato and chilli plants were thriving. The inner part of the building felt pleasantly cool, and 'grey' water was fed into an inner bed in which grew air-purifying plants like peace lilies and spider plants. Outside at the back of the building four very large tanks were buried and rain water collecting on the specially constructed roof was channelled into these tanks.



Power was gathered from a wind turbine and from a row of photovoltaic and solar panels along the back of the roof, and stored in a bank of large industrial batteries situated underneath them. In the kitchen we were shown the complex electricity converting equipment and the equally complex system containing four graded filters to bring the water up to drinking standard. Water could be channelled out at any stage of filtration. In the front of the building a reed bed system was in the process of being set up to filter the black water from the inside toilet, and nearby was a block of composting toilets.

For those who missed this visit the Low Carbon Trust runs tours of the Earthship on the first and third Sundays of each month. Details, including directions, travel information and times, can be found on their website <http://www.lowcarbon.co.uk/home>.

*Gina Carrington*

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## **Chocolate Courgette Cake**

Preparation Time: 10 mins, Cooking Time: 45 mins, serves 6

|                         |                                            |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 120 g butter (softened) | 125 ml sunflower oil                       |
| 100 g caster sugar      | 200 g soft brown sugar                     |
| 3 eggs, beaten          | 130 ml milk                                |
| 350 g plain flour       | 2 tsp baking powder                        |
| 24 tbsp cocoa           | 450 g courgettes, peeled and grated finely |
| 1 tsp vanilla           |                                            |

1. Line a 20 x 35 cm baking tray with baking paper and set the oven to 190C/350F.
2. Mix the butter, oil and both sugars together until light and fluffy. Gradually add the eggs, one at a time and then the milk until mixed thoroughly.
3. Sift the dry ingredients together and fold into the mixture. Stir in grated and peeled courgettes, vanilla, and spoon into tin. Bake for 35-45 mins.
4. Cut into squares while still warm.

Jane Baxter – Riverford Organic Vegetables.

‘This recipe is a great way of getting children to eat more vegetables and has been a regular feature on the lunch menu at Landscope Primary School and the children seem to love it.’



### *Transition Chichester*

How does Climate Change affect us? And what can we do to lessen its impact?

Around the world it seems that prospective Governments give up their green promises when

elected. None more so than the current UK Government. It is unlikely that any Governments will develop adequate policies to remedy climate change.

This is not the only issue regarding energy. There is Peak Oil.

The world is running out of the fuel that is driving its economy and its Governments are probably not going to be able to negotiate a soft landing. So, what can we do about it? Before answering that, it may help to understand where we are.

One way is to evaluate the ecological footprint of Chichester's residents: the amount of land required per capita to supply our current lifestyle and then to extrapolate that to how many planets would be required if all the world's population had a similar impact. Recently, a study by the Stockholm Environment Institute on behalf of WWF on 60 cities in the UK showed Chichester was the 58<sup>th</sup> worst requiring 3.5 planets. The UK average is 3.1 and as a comparison, India requires 0.4 planets, Germany 2.5 and USA 5.6!

Chichester's ecological impact comprises the following: Housing 28%, Transport 17%, Food 19%, Consumer Items 17%, Private Services (e.g. banking, hotels, pubs and restaurants) 9%, Public Services (e.g. National and Local Government) 6%, Capital Investment (i.e. capital depreciation of the infrastructure) 4%.

### **So, what can we do about it?**

During the 1997 General Election campaign local groups and organisations in Chichester came together under the Real World coalition to push the issue of the environment up the agenda. So, there is an ability and desire in Chichester to do something when galvanised into action.

Recently I've learned of a new initiative, **Transition Towns**. It started in response to the twin challenges of Peak Oil and

Climate Change. A Transition Initiative is a community that is unleashing its own latent collective genius to discover and implement ways to address this BIG question: "...how do we significantly increase resilience (to mitigate the effects of Peak Oil) and drastically reduce carbon emissions (to mitigate the effects of Climate Change)?"

Hence, **Transition Chichester**. It is still very early days. It is following a programme established after the successful development of other Transition Towns. Its first, very successful, awareness raising meeting on June 10 in the Assembly Rooms was very well attended. Through the Autumn there are going to be more film shows and presentations to raise awareness, inform ourselves and see what skills exist in our community, before a grand unleashing event next spring, when the real work will start.

A website has been established, [www.transitionchichester.org](http://www.transitionchichester.org), together with a Forum and an emailing list. Provision will be made for those who don't have easy access to the Internet.

COGS, of course, could have a significant impact on Transition Chichester. The knowledge it has gained of how to grow food in Chichester is a valuable resource. One attendee of the awareness raising event on June 10 asked if there was anyone who could teach him how to grow food.

*Tom Broughton*

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### **Contaminated manure**

A member has queried reports of commercial contaminated manure and the following should help to clarify the matter.

Commercial manure from a reportedly American-based company called Dowagro has been found to contain traces of hormone-type weedkillers such as aminopyralid, used on grassland on which animals graze and the chemicals are passed on into their manure. There have been several reports of distorted growth and low or negative yield of crops where this has been used. The Pesticide Safety Directorate advises that the produce is safe to eat, but aminopyralid has now been withdrawn. The product is not organic, so it is unlikely that any of our members will have used it, but it can get into allotment manure and compost sites.

For further information visit [www.rhs.org.uk/advice](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice); [www.pesticides.gov.uk](http://www.pesticides.gov.uk); [www.dowagro.com](http://www.dowagro.com).

## The Green Kitchen

### Dynamic Duo

You can clean everything in your Green Kitchen using only distilled white vinegar and bicarbonate of soda. I don't use anything else, apart from water and washing-up liquid.

Vinegar and bicarbonate do different things. Vinegar is used mainly for its impressive disinfectant properties (read [www.hi-tm.com/Documents/Cutboard.html](http://www.hi-tm.com/Documents/Cutboard.html) to see what I mean), but it also removes spots from stainless steel and combats limescale. Boil a cup in your kettle with water and then boil again with only plain water. Will your stainless steel smell like salad dressing? Nope. The smell goes after a minute or two.

Bicarbonate is more of a scrubber and, with hot water, is good for cleaning countertops and hobs. A thick paste smeared in the oven and left overnight makes that loathsome task easier without the need for chemical cleaners.

Used together, they work even better - scrubbing and disinfecting in one go. Sprinkle bicarbonate on limescale and then spray with vinegar: the mixture foams up and takes the hard work out of scrubbing. To clear up or prevent blockages, pour in a cupful of powder, then a cupful of vinegar. Listen to the foam. Leave for 30 minutes. Flush with hot water.

Most supermarkets and hardware stores sell both, usually in 350g boxes of bicarbonate of soda and 500ml spray bottles of vinegar, and the prices are lower than those of commercial cleaners. The spray bottles are useful, but it's wasteful to have to buy a new one every time. A big jug for refilling is better: try [www.summernaturals.co.uk](http://www.summernaturals.co.uk), which sells 5-litre jugs for £3.79 and 2kg bags of bicarbonate of soda from £3.89. You'll have to pay £6.99 p&p, but shipping charges do not rise for large orders.

The dynamic duo is all you'll need to get your kitchen clean. Apart from a little elbow grease, of course. Which is easier than going to the gym.

Richard Ehrlich

*From the Times Saturday Supplement*

## **COGS DIARY DATES**

### **Monday 29 September      Transition Chichester**

"Transition Chichester - where do we go from here?"

Tom Broughton, a member of Transition Chichester steering group, will update us on what is currently happening and encourage us to unleash the talent that is in our community to deal with climate change and peak oil + give us ideas and information relating to gardening.

### **Monday 27 October      AGM and Harvest Supper**

Bring a seasonal dish to share plus your own plates, glasses, etc. No charge for the evening, but bring your subscription for next year!

### **Monday 24 November      Caring for houseplants**

Richard Read, who was the manager at Manor Nursery, will talk on ways to care for our house plants including azaleas, poinsettias, orchids and architectural plants, etc. He will also briefly tell us about his work on plant breeding and current trends in modern horticultural development.

## **INFINITY FOODS**

Next orders to Pat by Tuesday 4 November please.

(Collect 11 November)

pat\_adams@btoopenworld.com or 01243 602713

### **The spring 2009 dates for the COGS evenings are:**

January 26, February 23, March 30

### **OPEN DAY    Tangmere Recycling Centre (Green Waste)**

**Sunday 28 September, 10 am – 4 pm.**

Free admission.

Access via City Fields Business Park, off A27 Tangmere Roundabout

Attractions: tractor and trailer rides: refreshments and site tours during the day.

Talks in the marquee:

11.00 am and 2.00 pm. **‘What Plants Wear? – the soil they need’**, John Negus; Gardeners Question Time and Quiz.

12:00 **‘What we do with your Waste?’** Philip Russell, Head of Waste Management for West Sussex County Council.

12.30 **‘Home Composting’**, Peter Hill, WRAP (Waste Research Action Programme)

Further information: Anita Telmond, 01243 781730

Unless otherwise stated, Monday meetings take place at Bassil Shippam Centre, Tozer Way, St Pancras, Chichester PO19 4LG Meetings start at 7.30pm, doors open at 7.15pm

**Chichester Organic Gardening Society** was formed in 1992 as a local group of both the Henry Doubleday Research Association and the Soil Association.

### **Aims of the Society**

To encourage the growing of healthy produce and beautiful gardens by sustainable and environmentally kind gardening methods.

To provide a focus for local gardeners and growers to meet those sharing their interest in gardening *with* nature, both for social activities and to discuss gardening and related issues.

### **COGS activities in support of our Aims**

- A programme of regular meetings (indoors September to April, outdoors May to August) with speakers on gardening and related topics.
- Occasional visits to places of gardening interest.
- Promotion of organic methods at COGS special events and appropriate local shows such as those at West Dean (Totally Tomato Show) and Stansted Show.
- Shared purchase and bulk purchase scheme for whole food cooking supplies to obtain discounts.
- Books available for purchase or on loan from our small library.

Membership costs £4.00 per household. The membership year runs from October to September. To join contact Liz Campling on 01243 532910

### **Your COGS organisers are:**

Officers:

Secretary – Penelope Johnstone (01243 771881)

Treasurer & Membership Secretary –

Liz Campling (01243 532910) [lizcamplinguk@hotmail.com](mailto:lizcamplinguk@hotmail.com)

Organisers:

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Speaker Secretary – Vi Cowan (01243 780518) [varianec@yahoo.com](mailto:varianec@yahoo.com)

Bookshop/Librarian - Barbara MacGregor (01243 781849)

Infinity Orders – Pat (01243 602713) [pat\\_adams@btopenworld.com](mailto:pat_adams@btopenworld.com)

Stansted Show Co-ordinator - Vi Cowan (01243 780518) [varianec@yahoo.com](mailto:varianec@yahoo.com)

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