

Chichester Organic Gardening Society

Newsletter 49
January 2009



NOTES FROM THE COMMITTEE

January 2009

So here we are at the end of another gardening year. We've all done our share of moaning about this year's depressing summer, but when you look back on it, this is probably the closest we've come to 12 months of traditional British weather for a long time. – a cool damp summer interspersed with short bursts of hot and sunny weather and now, at last, some proper frosty winter weather that should lay low some of the pests and lay the foundations for a good fruit crop next year.

There is no doubt that global warming is happening but it also seems that its short-term effects will be much more unpredictable than forecast. The advice to invest in drought-resistant plants and replace our runner beans with Mediterranean vegetables now seems a bit simplistic. Did anyone try growing aubergines even under glass this year?

As worrying as climate change, but receiving far less publicity, is the rapid decline in the insect population, particularly honey bees. It has been obvious over the past decade that when you leave windows open on a warm summer's evening (not a frequent event this year), the number of insects attracted to the lights indoors is far less than it used to be. This decline is now official, and the future of the honey bee is particularly precarious. Worryingly, government organisations like DEFRA that should be taking this seriously seem fairly indifferent, and funds for research into the reasons for the decline and how to halt it are stingy. Don't they realise how much of horticulture, the environment and our food supplies depend on bees! Silly question really! Most ministers and senior civil servants probably believe that food grows wrapped in plastic ready for the Occado van!

As organic gardeners we are doing our bit to keep the bio-diversity of the environment intact. But for things to really turn around, we need far more people to understand how important it is to look after our plot of land, large or small, in harmony with nature and how our lifestyle choices impact on the environment worldwide. The Transition Towns initiative is based on the belief that a more sustainable society can only be built from the bottom up, by the actions and lifestyles of millions of people. Organic gardening fits ideally into this outlook and this is why it is important that we work with Transition Towns – not to do anything different from what we do already but to work on how we can encourage and help more people to join us. With the recession and the scare about food security, as evidenced by the demand for allotments, there has never been a better time.

February's meeting will be a discussion on practical ways that Cogs can help to encourage growing in general and organic growing in particular. Among the suggestions we already have are the setting up of neighbour mentoring teams to help people who want to get growing but don't know how; and developing a Cogs demonstration plot. We are sure there are lots more. Please join us if you can and share your ideas.

A happy Christmas and New Year to you all. And good growing in 2009.

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
January 2009		Pat Alderton
February		
March		

New Membership Secretary

We have a new membership secretary, Nina Guilfoyle. Everything to do with membership should be sent to her from now onwards. Her contact details are on the back of this newsletter and will appear on all new membership renewal forms.

New Committee members

We welcome two new members on to the committee – Nina Guilfoyle, the new membership secretary, and Sally Petch.

RHS Concession Cards

We now have 3 RHS concession cards, each of which gives the holder and a guest one third off the price of entry to the RHS Gardens at Wisley (except Sundays), Rosemoor in Devon, Harlow Carr in Yorkshire, Hyde Hall in Essex and Trebah in Cornwall. And also entitles us to one free group visit of up to 55 people per year to an RHS Garden. Liz Campling currently holds 2 of these cards and the other is with Nina Guilfoyle, so if you would like to borrow one, please contact them.

We have to pay a small fee for these cards and they are only valid for a year, so if there is little interest from members, we will not renew next year.

Membership Subs and Entry Fees

At the request of a member, the subject of the £1 entrance fee to meetings was raised at the AGM. After lively discussion, the proposal was put to the floor that the £1 entrance fee for members be dropped (although retained for visitors) and the annual household subscription be raised to £5 from 1st October 2009. The vote went overwhelmingly in favour of this. Therefore:

- **The £1 entrance fee is dropped with immediate effect**
- **The household membership subscription will be £5 from 1st October 2009 (stays at £4 until then, so only pay £4 if you are renewing for this year.)**
- **Visitors pay £2 for entry to meetings.**

Charitable Donations

When Liz, the Treasurer, was tidying up the old finance records, she discovered that in years gone past, COGS sometimes gave a small donation to a charity with organic connections. Past beneficiaries included **Organics for Africa** and **Urban Organics**, which introduces young people in deprived urban areas to the benefits of organic food. The Committee thought it might be a good idea to think about doing this again – say £30-£50 a year. The idea will be put to the vote at the 2009 AGM. In the meantime, if any members have a suggestion for a suitable charity, perhaps they could let a Committee member know. If the vote goes in favour of a donation and we have more than one suggestion, we can put that to the vote as well.

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 swopping

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 - Friday 5- Sunday 7 June 2009

After several years of successful plant sales at Stansted

I hope 2009 will be a triumph too. Can you grow some

plants for us to sell?. We need tomatoes, lettuce,

pepper, aubergine, cucumbers, courgettes or any other

vegetable plants. Last year we had many requests for

veg (many stands were selling tomatoes and we had

several plants left over) so its veg! veg! glorious veg this

year. However, we do need some unusual tomatoes to sell as well. Herbs

are also very popular and flowers with their coloured petals sell too. Please

let me know what you could go grow for the COGS stand.

Also if you are available to help on the stand please let me have your name and what time you are available. Many thanks

Vee Tel 01243 780518 or email varianne@yahoo.com



New for Meetings

We would like to begin having a small 'panel' available at the end of COGS meetings, so that anyone with queries can get help and advice.

Pat Adams has very generously agreed to lead this anyway for a start, but would like more people on the panel. Would anyone like to

volunteer please? For one meeting or more. You do not need to know

about everything but to have plenty of gardening experience. We can

see how this develops, as it could be very useful – so please think if

you would be able to contribute in this way!

If so, please contact Pat: 01243 602713 or

pat_adams@btopenworld.com

PESTICIDES IN COURT

In late November 2008 a local resident, Georgina Downs, was in the

headlines, and even interviewed on the World Service, for her long and

finally successful battle to have the government forced to consider its

support of pesticides and indiscriminate spraying. The judge granted her

application for a judicial review of the policy of Defra, and ruled that the

government is ‘failing in its responsibility to protect people from harmful exposure to toxic chemicals’.

He concluded that Miss Downs has moreover ‘produced solid evidence that residents have suffered harm to their health’. There are ‘defects’ in Defra’s approach to pesticide safety, and they ‘contravene the requirements’ of a 1991 EU directive. The secretary of Defra must therefore rethink the way spraying is controlled, and the risks to human health must be assessed.

Georgina Downs made the front page of both our local papers. She spoke of unregulated pesticide use as ‘one of the biggest public health scandals of our time’, and called on Gordon Brown to block any government appeal and ‘get on with protecting the health of citizens of this country’.

Will this cause a real change? Anyone who lives near fields which are regularly sprayed would consider these compounds are not benign (they are, after all, designed to be lethal to certain forms of life). To test one chemical and declare it ‘safe’ does not allow for the cumulative effects of repeated sprays with a mixture of chemicals. These methods only began with the second world war; before that, traditional farming was along organic lines.

Dangers to wildlife

Not only humans, but wildlife of many kinds suffer from pesticides. In its Winter 2008 issue of *Living Earth*, the Soil Association tells us that bees are endangered by the use of pesticides, and this is officially recognised: a point made in the Downs judgement was that under the 1986 Control of Pesticides Regulations, beekeepers must be given 48 hours notice of any spraying with chemicals likely to harm bees. The Soil Association has asked the Secretary of State for an immediate ban on neonicotinoides, already banned in four EU countries. A hundred different crops and plants are pollinated by bees, so their decline would pose a real danger to crops and to our food supply.



Have you found The Organic Kitchen?

We were surprised that this little café has been in Chichester for over 18 months and we had not discovered it. Walk down South Street from the Cross, take the first left, Cooper Street, and The Organic Kitchen is just on the left. Pop in downstairs for a quick Fairtrade coffee, tea or chocolate, or a refreshing organic fruit juice or water. If you want something more substantial, go up to the light and airy dining room – perhaps full English breakfast (meaty or vegetarian £7.95), seasonal soup £4.50, warm organic salad (£6.45 or burgher (ultimate veggie or Goodwood beef £7.95). Hardworking proprietor, Christian Barrington doesn’t come from a catering background but has always been interested in food and cooking. All main

ingredients are locally sourced except for chicken as the right supplier hasn't yet been found locally. Other meat comes from Goodwood and vegetables from Wayside Organics and Tuppenny Barn. All the bread is made on the premises and everything is "cooked from scratch". Very good it is too. The café is a friendly place and you can browse the cookery book shelf while you are waiting for your order to be cooked!

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FOOD AND FARMING AWARDS

"As far as I'm concerned these are the Oscars of the food world and it doesn't get much better than this." Jamie Oliver

Towards the end of what Sheila Dillon, presenter of the Radio 4 Food and Farming Awards, described as an 'extraordinary year', she introduced the winners for 2008, chosen from people and organisations nominated by listeners.



So to cheer ourselves up, for those of you who missed the programme, here are some of those winners.

Farmer of the year is Mary Mead, of Yeo Valley, who took on the running of the company after her husband's death, and has brought excellent organic dairy produce to supermarkets around the country. **Producers of the year:** Calon Wen, a Welsh co-operative who felt strongly that their milk should be processed locally. They pioneered in this country the use of plastic 'bag' litres of milk, which fit nicely into their plastic jugs. (Available at Waitrose; Sainsburys have since copied them; the method was being used in Israel some 30 years ago).

Best market: Bury, Lancs, a very ancient traditional market of some 300 traders.

Local food retailer award went jointly to Unicorn Grocery Manchester, an independent outlet, and Conrad Davies Spar shop, North Wales, with local produce in season.

Takeaway: Adam's Fish and Chips, in the Scilly Isles: potatoes and fish both sourced within sight of his shop.

The **Derek Cooper** Award, named after the original presenter of the programme, went to Geoff Tansy, author of *The Local Control of Food*.

Food Personality: Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, named in particular for his Chicken Out! campaign.

Some of these are familiar to us, from their work or their produce, and they can all give us optimism as we start the new growing year.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



Transition Chichester feasts on local produce

On October 28 2008 one hundred people tucked into a three-course banquet at the Vicar's Hall, South Street, organised by Transition Chichester. What was special about this dining experience was that the ingredients for all three courses were sourced wholly from local producers.

"A sumptuous meal – and really fresh!" remarked Peter Albon. "It felt really great to be eating the food that we are *meant* to be eating – I had the beef, which came from cattle that graze on Pagham saltmarshes. It was delicious!" Lily Susser (10) reported that the ice cream (from Sidlesham) was scrumptious. The venue was perfect: the Vicar's Hall is an astonishingly beautiful upstairs room in a fifteenth century building belonging to Chichester Cathedral.

The guests were informed and inspired by a fascinating talk on food issues delivered by Clare Devereux of 'Food Matters.' Clare talked about the dependence of our current food system on oil for fertiliser production, transportation and packaging. It has been calculated that 18% of UK CO₂ emissions are attributable to the food chain – a figure that would be greatly reduced if more of us bought local organic produce.

"One thing we could all aim to do right now is to try and eat at least one meal a week knowing where all the ingredients came from," Clare suggested.

Clare also looked at the dilemmas that so often face the conscientious shopper: do we buy the organic pear from the US or the non-organic one from the UK? Do we choose the organic baked beans at 60p a can when the non-organic ones are just 17p?

"I don't have the answers to these questions," Clare admitted.

"Our confusion over such choices shows that there is a real need for more facts and figures." She mentioned carbon pricing applied to food among possible future solutions.

There is some good news to shout about regarding food: the rise of farmers' markets throughout the UK (there are now 650)

means the public can access local produce much more easily. The demand for local fruit and vegetable delivery schemes is growing too. And community and grassroots grow-your-own projects are springing up in many towns and cities, where skills in growing food can be shared and community spirit is nurtured along the way

It is clear that in future a lot more of us will have to be involved in food production as peak oil does away with our reliance on large-scale conventional agriculture. Learning how to grow food could become a significant part of our children's education. One of the dining tables was peopled by primary school teachers and social workers. They spoke out during the question and answer session that followed the meal. "Get kitchens back into primary schools!" was the cry. Everyone agreed that real food and proper food preparation isn't being adequately prioritised at the moment.

Rosemary Moon, who planned the meal, told the guests about a little book called 'The Sussex Food Finder.' This is a guide to the farms and food businesses in Sussex.

Howard Smith, a local organic farmer said, "It's beholden on people to make contact with those who actually produce food... They should search out those who are passionate about what they produce."

Kate Sabin



Back to our roots

Sustainable food and medicine from mother Earth!

Presentation by Steve Taylor at the COGS January meeting.

Steve Taylor is a practicing Herbalist who has a passion for our local native flora. He is attempting to reinvigorate the traditions of our ancestors by once again celebrating and using the healing potential of the foods and herbs that share our environment and gardens. This is a way of life familiar to our grand-parents but generally lost to us. The sustainable vision of the future must include making use of all that nature freely provides. If we can learn how to benefit from the harvest that comes from our own environment, we can relinquish our over dependence on unsustainable systems of nutrition and medicine that have grown up out of a need for profit rather than a desire for harmony with our fellow creatures and plants. Join him in exploring this vision of healing for the 21st Century.

The Incomplete Organic Gardener (apologies to Isaac Walton!)

This short piece is designed for those who are new to organic gardening, and are planning on growing a few vegetables in the coming year. It's based on my own experiences of running an organic allotment for several years, and my working plans for it over the next few months. I shan't talk about fruit, rhubarb and so on, but concentrate on planting the first crop of vegetables. For background I should say that my allotment is run on a "deep bed" system (each bed about 4ft wide and 20ft long) with grass walkways. The beds are never walked on, so there is no compacting of the soil (that's probably why my brussels are usually a disaster!). It isn't a "no-dig" system, but in practice I rarely use a spade except for edging. I practice crop rotation (which is never as neat and tidy to organise as the books so often imply!) and avoid all pesticides (sometimes through gritted teeth)

By the time you read this we will be well into January – which at the moment is pretty cold, and should be giving pests a hard time – the best organic control! If we are on top of our soil preparation, January is the time to browse the seed catalogues. The one for COGS readers is probably the Organic Gardening Catalogue (www.organicCatalogue.com) followed by WigglyWigglers (www.wiggleywigglers.co.uk). However, if you need to prepare the soil, January and much of February will give you opportunities to do this, as well as allowing a general tidying up of garden debris. Look for the clusters of pearly white slugs' eggs and destroy them. No room for sentiment here! Less aggressively, in my spare bedroom, I'll start the chitting process for my potatoes.

By mid February the packets of seeds will have arrived and some planting can start. The **broad bean** is the classics at this time (I know you can plant in November, but last year most of my beans were eaten (from two sowings!) by December – I suspect birds since the only disturbance was a hole drilled straight down (no spoil of earth). I'll also try some **parsnips**, though I've never had much success with early sowings

March is the time for frantic activity. I'll probably start sowing peas in early March. **Summer cabbage** also will go in, along with **brussels sprouts** (surely this year the sprouts will be bigger than 5p pieces!). **Spinach** will go in as well (with maybe a second sowing in August/September). A first sowing of **carrots** can be made (and in my case, a second and third before some actually germinate!). For the first time I am going to try some **pak choy**, which apparently will provide succession crops if I repeat sow every 3 weeks through until July. Some **chives** will be sown, attractive as well as edible, and a good companion plant. By now I will probably be putting in

some more **land cress**, starting the **radishes** and (another experiment) **borlotto** and **spagna beans** (though under glass rather than direct sowing). The big activity will be the **potato planting** (about six weeks after the chitting started in late January/early February but not before the last frost!). By mid-March to early April it will be time for **celery**, **basil** (probably in the greenhouse). **Onion**, **cauliflower** (under glass) and some mint (in a very enclosed area). March is also the time to start off, under some protection and heat, tomato and cucumber plants (outdoor varieties if you don't have a green house).

By April it should be an absolute pleasure to be outdoors (ever the optimist) which is just as well because now the really heavy sowing work begins.

Beetroot, more **peas**, **squash**, **rocket**, **savoy cabbage**, **parsnip** (the ones that will germinate!), **parsley**, **sweet corn**, **swede**, **courgette**, **pumpkin** and **runner beans** (the latter three all under glass) can all go in.

In addition I will also start off selections of insect attracting flowers (for the pollinators) and insect repelling flowers (for the carrot and onion flies) – and because wild flowers look lovely. Good luck, and write in and let us know what happened.

Rob Campling

The luscious logic of local

Local food makes sense to me - delicious, varied and seasonal sense. Whether living in the City or surrounding villages we are never far from some beautiful and productive countryside in the Chichester district. Not that all the countryside boasts particularly good soil - much of it is only grade 3 out of 5 - and growing conditions are very different north and south of the Downs.

Eating with the seasons gives a chance to enjoy a wide variety of foods and, whilst we might all be bored to tears with swedes and cabbages by the end of March, we will welcome them again in the autumn. I am happy to eat apples only when the local fruits are available and to gorge on rhubarb and berries for the rest of the year. Eating local keeps our money in the local economy too - we tend to buy from local shops or directly from producers, and it stops the homogenisation of the High Street. As we face a time of reduced finances it is up to us all to decide how we spend what money we have and I, for one, would like to plough my pennies into Local. Of course we must trade and have always done so, but when we want to buy bananas, citrus, spices, tea, coffee and cocoa and sugar, we should strive to buy fairly traded produce - Chichester is, after all, a Fairtrade City.

I now have to make a major confession. Until I became involved in Transition Chichester I was utterly On The Fence about organics. Having consulted to Waitrose for 11 years I am a great fan of LEAF, a scheme they champion. It is a marque promoting integrated farm management with minimum interventions into crops, i.e. restricted use of inputs, fertilisers and pesticides. It is the best way of producing fruits and vegetables for the mass market - i.e. the supermarkets. Producing for the mass market inevitably leads to waste, as does the perceived need to offer imported exotics. Until people stop buying out of season fare we will continue to be offered it by multiple retailers, keen to improve their results year on year. Food waste and the environmental costs of bringing produce to Chichester from depots up and down the country, let alone from half way around the world, will continue to mount.

In terms of spreading the Organic Word, many shoppers are put off by the premium that organic food commands because of lower yields and higher labour costs owing to hand weeding, etc. We will fail to see the real value of local, organic food until the true cost of the indiscriminate use of oil-derived interventions for mass production is appreciated.



I have become convinced that the ultimate goal of a responsible food society is to produce local food by organic methods. I think it would also be possible for communities to succeed in producing a fair proportion of the food that they need in this way. It will require a huge change of culinary expectation but local, seasonal food is far from boring and offers an ever-changing menu (except when those swedes and cabbages seem to endlessly be the only veg available!).

It will take many years for us to reach such a goal and the biggest challenge will be to start to change the mindset of those who regularly jump into their cars to shop at a one-stop supermarket. Until the majority start to think about buying local - and the costs of not doing so - we will make little significant change. Local will be the first step for most, and organic local food may be many years hence for the majority of consumers. COGS, as organic gardeners, have the upper hand here and are at the cutting edge of this 'Back to the Future' way of life. But incremental changes will start to mount up and, who knows, perhaps the speed of change will amaze us all?

Rosemary Moon

COGS DIARY DATES

Monday 26 January

Back to our roots

Sustainable food and medicine from mother Earth! Steve Taylor

(See article on page 9)

Monday 23 February

Discussion Evening – Transition towns

Discussion Groups on Transition Towns - Following on from Tom Broughton's talk in September, we decided at the AGM to discuss ways we can bring about better community living. COGS can play a role in helping people discover about organic gardening and new members will have an opportunity to express their needs as well as other people pooling ideas they have come up with.

Monday 30 March

Ganesh – Organic Gardening

Ganesh runs willow making workshops for adults and children and he is involved with ecological and environmental projects both in schools and the private sector. He runs a wide range of activities including teaching Organic Veggie Growing in Schools and will talk tonight on organic gardening.

Monday 27 April

Nick Robinson - Diversity in the

Organic Garden

Nick Robinson worked at Yalding Gardens in Kent for 10 years, starting as a student and ending up as head gardener. He now works in conservation in the High Weald.

Nick will talk about natural pest and disease control, propagation and seed saving plus pass on some valuable tips.

Monday May 18 Spring Fling

Including a quiz and plant swapping.

INFINITY FOODS

Next orders to Pat by Wednesday 25 February please.

(Collect 3 March)

pat_adams@btopenworld.com or 01243 602713

Other Events of note

READY FOR ANYTHING: Resilience and the art of coping with surprise.

Lecture Dr David Fleming, Vicars' Hall, Friday January 23, 7:30pm

Dr David Fleming, one of the thinkers who have contributed to the Transition Towns movement, will discuss the principles of surviving the unexpected and what that means in practice for us now and in the future.

<http://www.theleanconomyconnection.net/>

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 £5.00 per household. The membership year runs from October to September. To join contact Nina Guilfoyle on 01243 776063.

Your COGS organisers are:

Officers:

Secretary – Penelope Johnstone (01243 771881)

Treasurer – Liz Campling (01243 532910) lizcamplinguk@hotmail.com

Membership Secretary - Nina Guilfoyle (01243 776063) nina@nrglearning.co.uk

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