

Chichester Organic Gardening Society

Newsletter 64
January 2014



Notes from the Committee

As we noted in September, a good year – a brilliant summer, followed by a mild autumn, and at the time of writing, the winter so far has not been too bad. We keep hoping for the best.

A reminder, to all – to keep the birds supplied with food and water, and to keep the sites clean. We have included a piece from ‘10 years ago’ with some reminders of things to do even in the chilly months of January and February. Bulbs start showing the first signs of spring, and the days are getting longer.

We have managed to plan meetings for the whole year, and further details of the May to November ones will be in the next Newsletter. Visits will be arranged later. Probably one will be to Petworth as a follow-up to Kate Brickell’s talk in April.

We are all concerned about the plight of bees and other pollinators, and in February James Norfolk, of Chichester Beekeepers, will be giving us interesting information, with hints on how we can help.

You will see that membership subscription has had to rise (only by £1 p.a.) and that we shall have to charge members £1 for meetings; this is to cover the costs which rise all the time, as you know.

Also, there is a real need to keep up numbers. If you still have not renewed, please do so as soon as possible! Would it be easier by Standing Order?

The Committee

Advance notice: dates: because of difficulties booking the Bassil Shippam Centre, the Plant Swap & Spring Fling has been moved forward to **Monday 9 June 2014**. There will again be Quiz and Supper so put the date in your diary now!

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

COGS has maintained a small subscription of £5 for a good few years now, which is I hope you'll agree, good value. As you will see below, from next year it will go up to £6 p.a. for all, with £6 for new members starting now.

Many thanks to those members who have already renewed their subscription. We would still like to welcome new members, so please do encourage friends to come to meetings, and if they are interested, to join.

Also, currently there are 30 plus members who have yet to renew. We really do hope that it is just an over-sight; hope to hear from you very soon.

Standing order details are as follows:

Lloyds TSB

No: 01914064

Sort Code: 30 91 97

Chichester Organic Gardening Society.

If you do set up a Standing Order, please email me:

nina@nrglearning.co.uk and let me know. Same email address applies if you would like to switch to receiving your newsletter via email or have changed your email address recently.

COGS FUNDING - IMPORTANT

Those of you who were at the AGM will know that we have had to make some small but vital adjustments to our funding.

In short: **Subscriptions** for new members, and for all from next year, will be **£6** per year.

Talks: Members will give £1 per meeting, **Visitors** (as at present) £2. These are probably the smallest charges of any local Society!

Why is this necessary? At the AGM Rachel explained that our assets as at the end of August were £543. This represented a significant fall since the previous year, and raised questions about the future health of the Society.

Our running costs for meetings alone are around £560 pa, plus newsletter costs of £200 and sundry costs including the website of £90. The Society in its current form therefore costs around £850 pa. This year the Society's total income was less than £650, a deficit of £200 on running costs. This year, for the first time, membership receipts of £519 did not even cover the cost of meetings.

In previous years, plant sales at shows etc, as well as higher membership receipts, have more than covered the costs of the Society, but with fewer members willing to help out at shows, not doing Stansted etc has left a hole which has not been filled. Costs for speakers, hall hire, etc. will rise. With an annual deficit of £200, the Society in its current form has 2.5 years to run.

There are options, and that favoured by the Committee, as being the most acceptable, was to charge members £1 for meetings, with the visitor charge remaining at £2. With 30 - 40 members attending each meeting, this would begin to address the imbalance. An increase in membership was also desirable. After some discussion, it was agreed to increase the annual subscription to £6 for new members this year, and existing members from September 2014, as well as adopting the Committee's suggestion to charge £1 to members for meetings. Some members do already give an extra donation with their subscription, and this is always welcome.

Speakers and Meetings

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

Raffles

A reminder that these are held at every meeting except May and October. Any good items, especially bottles, good plants, and 'gifts' are welcome.

Also at meetings:

Surplus, Gluts, whether plants or produce or no-longer-needed useful garden things, are also welcome. People can help themselves (for a small donation) – but please take yours home if no-one wants them!

A call for contributors

We would welcome interesting and relevant pieces by members, which we can print. Do you have some special ‘tips’ or advice gleaned from your own experience, which you would like to share? If so do send, in first instance to penelopejohnstone@yahoo.co.uk or you can discuss at one of the meetings.

The Aldingbourne Trust

On September 30 Nicki Clarke from the Aldingbourne Trust came to talk to the society about their work. The Trust had celebrated its 35th Anniversary in August 2013. In 1978 a group of parents had formed the Trust in order to provide meaningful valued opportunities for people with learning disabilities. They started with a small patch of land and a tin shed where they grew vegetables but have since developed to provide housing, employment, leisure, education and training facilities.

The Trust is now a well respected and leading local charity supporting over 550 adults with learning disabilities, employing 223 staff and 102 volunteers. Their enterprises provide training within real life settings such as Wood Recycling, Horse Rug Washing, Work Aid, Open Farm, Organic Vegetables, Digital Media and a visitor attraction. Their working principle is to keep pushing boundaries, expectations, and beliefs forward by offering opportunities within serious social enterprises. This provides learning for their clients, support for local communities and reduces reliance on state funding. They also run fundraising events throughout the year to supplement income from their commercial enterprises.

The Aldingbourne Country Centre is well worth a visit. It is 4 miles east of Chichester near Fontwell Race Course. Here you will enjoy tranquil woodland walks, plant nurseries, a furniture restoration showroom, vegetable shop and a gift shop. There are also amusements for children, the most recent addition being the guinea pig village based on famous West Sussex landmarks.

On the outskirts of Bognor Regis the Trust runs an outreach centre to support adults with learning difficulties to live independent lives within the community. They have a drop in centre to provide information and guidance, plus a facility to provide help with cooking skills. The Trust also provides qualified staff as carers for those needing more support at home. This is Support Workers Direct which is run as a separate trading arm.

More information can be found at www.aldingbournetrust.co.uk.

Weald and Downland Countryside Show, 12-13 October

COGS again had a stall at this very popular local show, and despite torrential rain the numbers coming to the show, and into the Horticultural tent, were good. In addition, stallholders and others were entertained by Morris dancers on the Sunday, since it was too wet for them to perform outside.

We attracted a good deal of interest, had some useful talks with visitors, sold some of our leaflets, ‘sold’ some plants, and in general felt it was well worth while. Fewer of us entered for the competitions, but Kathy Baker won Thirds for her vegetables and a picture, and Penelope Johnstone a First for marmalade.

Many thanks indeed to those who helped set up and collect our goods, provided plants, and served on the stall.

COGS Question Time

Our November meeting was something of an innovation: with Vee as chairman ably ‘standing in’ for Eric Robson or Peter Gibbs, a panel of three local experts answered questions which we wrote down or brought up in response to the panel. The experts were Susan Maguire, well known to us all as founder member of COGS, Tim Lawrance-Owen from Graylingwell Community garden, who works with local nurseries, and David Donovan, a retired horticulturalist with long and varied experience.

Questions included planting and pruning times, fruit trees, soft fruit, and – in the true GQT tradition – a sample celeriac with prolific

leafage but very little stem, the part we eat. Answers in general stressed the need to care for the soil, the value of leaf mould, sometimes to be fierce with our treasured plants or trees, but above all to keep on gardening. Perhaps we expect too much, said Susan, and fruit trees and bushes sometimes need a rest. Never give up, go on trying and learning, from our own experience and others'. Although there were fewer people than usual, there was a lively exchange of views and experience, and we all learnt a great deal from the panel – and end our year with plenty of encouragement.

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR THE GARDEN

- To turn a clay pot into a hose guide, just stab a roughly one-foot length of steel reinforcing bar into the ground at the corner of a bed and slip two clay pots over it: one facing down, the other facing up. The guides will prevent damage to your plants as you drag the hose along the bed.
- Got aphids? You can control them with a strong blast of water from the hose or with insecticidal soap. But here's another suggestion, one that's a lot more fun; get some tape! Wrap a wide strip of tape around your hand, sticky side out, and pat the leaves of plants infested with aphids. Concentrate on the undersides of leaves.
- The quickest way in the world to dry herbs in summer is to just lay a sheet of newspaper on the seat of your car, arrange the herbs in a single layer, then roll up the windows and close the doors. Your herbs will be quickly dried to perfection. What's more, your car will smell great.
- Use an inexpensive photo album to organise and store seed packets

- **Testing Old Seeds:** Seeds saved from the past may be worth sowing - but only if they pass this test: Fold 10 seeds in moist paper towel, place in re-sealable bag, mark with date and type. Watch to see how many germinate. Multiply that number by 10 to calculate the percent of germinations. More than 70 percent is passing. If between 40 and 60 percent, sow thickly. Below 40 percent, it's best to buy fresh seed.
- **Three sisters:** Plant sweetcorn, beans and squash together. Corn takes nitrogen, beans replace it and grow up the corn stalks, squash is a natural "mulch" moisture barrier. (Native American method).
- **For the birds:** take a toilet paper tube, peanut butter, roll it in birdseed and slip it over a branch.

YACON – A new plant to try

I've grown a Yacon plant this year and at the time of writing I've yet to harvest it but I am looking forward to doing so as it seems to be an interesting and exciting addition to the vegetable garden.

I first heard about the Yacon plant from a television programme hosted by the ethnobotanist, James Wong. I tracked it down and bought it from the Real Seed Company – a wonderful company by the way, full of interesting seeds. They do not supply any F1 Hybrids as they promote saving your own seed. This is what they say about the Yacon:

The Yacon is a large plant from South America, distantly related to sunflowers, and it has huge, attractive fuzzy green leaves. It has very pretty little yellow flowers at the top of each stalk.

The plants are very easy to grow and seem to thrive in almost any soil or climate. Underground, it grows a bit like a dahlia - with a small clump of knobbly growing tips, and large storage tubers radiating out in a circle.

At the end of the season you dig it all up and the storage tubers are the bit you eat - they are really sweet and crunchy. The knobbly growing tips you divide and replant, so you don't need to keep buying it. The sweet storage tubers are peeled before use - and nice two ways: raw in salads, and stir fried as a substitute for water-chestnut. The tubers store very well and it's a very welcome addition to our winter salads.

A final interesting point about Yacon is that the type of sugar in the tubers is inulin - the same as in Jerusalem Artichokes - and for which most people don't have a digestive enzyme - so it has almost no calorific value whatsoever, despite its sweetness.

I'll let you know what I think about its taste and keeping properties in the next newsletter.

Nina Guilfoyle

Ten Years Ago

COGS has of course been in existence for 21 years now, but my collection of old Newsletters goes back only to 2001. So for interest, I have had a look at January 2004 to see what was concerning us most then ...

Notes from the Chair told us that Pat Adams (Evans) had been elected to take over as Chairlady from Susan Maguire "who retired after 10 inspiring and successful years leading the society." And there were 130 households forming the membership. "...as ever we are in need of committee members" she says.

A main article comes from Friends of the Earth magazine, on Supermarkets; there is a summary on Waste, from a talk the previous November; some points are:

"Landfill space runs out in six years; Too much use of finite resources; the household total is 430,000 tonnes a year – 500 kg per person, 15-20% of it food."

There are some gardening tips from Susan:

“Peppers take so long to germinate that you need to get them going really early, either indoors or in a heated greenhouse.” On lettuce “when they are well germinated by end of January/beginning of February prick them out into modules or very small pots before hardening off so that they gradually get used to a cold climate. Prepare a piece of ground and warm it up by covering with a cloche for a few days before planting out the seedlings. Don’t turn your compost and do keep it covered ... “

There are “Ways to support organic farming in the UK”, taken from *Living Earth*, and some of these are worth repeating here:

- * Let your supermarket know you want UK-produced food.
- * Make links with your village shop or independent shop. Ask them to stock local organic food ...
- * Check for community supported agriculture (CSA) schemes in which local people support their local farm in various practical ways and receive fresh food grown in return [check via the Soil Association].
- * Shop in farmers’ markets
- * Ask for more local organic food in local schools and hospitals.

The article on **supermarkets** is particularly interesting and here is the whole extract. How much has changed in 10 years?

Supermarkets – Some Hidden Costs

There’s nothing cheap about supermarket produce. Packaging alone costs the average household £470 a year – almost a sixth of their food expenditure. Supermarkets use “loss leaders”, kept at an artificially low price to entice customers, yet other products can often be found more cheaply in local, independent shops. Friends of the Earth found that organic food in markers’ markets is 33-37 per cent cheaper than the supermarket equivalent.

But the greatest cost that supermarkets don’t tell us about is the cost to the community. Eight local independent stores closed each day between 1986 and 1996. More than 600 local chemists will close over

the next five years as supermarkets undermine their business. By incorporating newsagent, pharmacies and dry-cleaners as well as music, clothes and petrol retailers, £14.5 billion was spent on non-food items in supermarkets in 2000.

In 2001 Tesco and Sainsbury's profits were greater than the income of every farmer in the UK ... Fortunately consumers are waking up to the ugly truth about supermarkets and there is the beginning of a return to a local food economy. The UK went from having no farmers' markets at all in the mid-1990s to more than 270 at the end of the decade. Local shops in Winchester reported 30 per cent greater takings on days when the market was open for business.

For half a century farming and food policy has put quantity above quality and environmental protection. Farmers were encouraged to use pesticides, and paid by Europe to rip up hedges and keep more livestock than the land could sustainably support. Things are changing, with the UK and EU recognising that farmers should be rewarded for protecting the environment rather than over-producing food. Meanwhile, the more the big supermarkets drive down prices, the less farmers will invest in more sustainable farming and animal welfare.

Friends of the Earth magazine – printed here in 2004.

GM – The threat continues

We are often warned that the GM companies are all too persistent, and recently the Soil Association (to which we are affiliated) sent members a small booklet by Peter Melchett, Policy Director, in which he lists and describes the dangers.

We give a few points from his

CONCLUSION in which he summarises the worst failings of the pro-GM lobby. It has conflated opposition to particular commercial products with opposition to science; it has ignored new developments in science regarding the complexity of gene expression; it has deliberately prevented independent research into the safety of GM food...and has then claimed that there is evidence that GM foods are safe to eat; the long-term consequences are not known; and regulatory

regimes in America and the EU rely on limited company information, not science; the claims of future benefits are totally unfounded. He ends:

When the history of the changes in the public understanding of science and public confidence in science over the last fifteen years comes to be written, I believe that the pro-GM lobby's misuse and abuse of science will be seen to have had a chilling impact. These people, organisations and companies have been responsible for part at least of the sad decline in both public understanding and confidence in science and scientific evidence.

(The complete article is available from the Soil Association, and was first published in

Mother Earth, vol 7, winter 2012. A fully footnoted version is available online at www.soilassociation.org/motherearth

INFINITY FOODS

Next orders to Pat by Mon **27 January** please.

(cheques to be with Pat by that date)

Delivery on Tuesday **4 February** please collect asap

Any member is welcome to order and there is no minimum order

If anyone new is interested please contact

pat_adams@btopenworld.com or 01243 602713

The catalogue can be downloaded at

<http://infinityfoodswholesale.co.uk/catalogue/>

COGS MEETINGS 2014

January 27 DVD on an organic theme followed by discussion

February 24 James Norfolk of Chichester Beekeepers
"Bees in Your Garden". On bumble bees and solitary bees, encouraging them, flowers useful to bees, and honey bees and in particular swarms and what to do if you encounter one.

March 31 Steve Millam: The Potato: Past, Present and Future!
A seasonal look at our favourite earlies and lates!

April 28 Kate Brickell of Petworth Community Garden

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We are giving you here the dates and subjects for the rest of 2013.
There will be more details in the next Newsletter.

June 9 (note change of date) Plant Swap, Quiz, Spring Fling

September 29 Wildwood – Jo and Alan Waters from Halnaker will talk about their work with coppicing, with examples of their products.

October 27 AGM and Harvest Supper

November 24 Prof Gerald Blunden Emeritus Professor
Portsmouth University
“The search for new drugs and other useful products from plants”

Unless otherwise stated, Monday meetings take place at
Bassil Shippam Centre, Tozer Way, St Pancras, Chichester PO19 7LG
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 , Transition, and Weald and Downland Open Air Museum
- 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 £6.00 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 – David Scott (01243 778689) d4davidscott@btinternet.com

Membership Secretary – Nina Guilfoyle (01243 776063) nina@nrlearning.co.uk

Organisers:

Speaker Secretary – vacant; temporarily filled by Committee

Bookshop/Librarian - Barbara MacGregor (01243 781849)

Infinity Orders – Pat (01243 602713) pat_adams@btopenworld.com

Publicity - Susan Sinnett-Jones (02392 341813) a3ssj@mac.com

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