

Chichester Organic Gardening Society



Newsletter 56
April 2011



NOTES FROM THE COMMITTEE

April 2011

Spring has certainly sprung in West Sussex: in fact as I write the temperature is more like summer! So much in the garden has taken off, and although the early bulbs are almost over, there is blossom all around the gardens, streets and hedgerows. After such a tough winter, the sunshine and longer days help engender a real spirit of optimism. Beware of taking the fine weather for granted though: temperatures are still low at night, and we are not yet past the danger of frost. Don't forget to harden off plants before moving them outside.

Spring is a busy sowing and planting time. If you are looking to put more plants in the garden, spare a thought for the hard pressed bees. They like flowering plants, particularly those with single flowers (easier to get into!) and flowering herbs such as lavender and rosemary, angelica and fennel. Foxgloves, snapdragons and penstemons are also good bee plants. More bees in your garden means better pollination, so we are all better off. Butterflies like flowering herbs too, honesty and broom, as well as the inevitable buddleia.

There is plenty to look forward to in the COGS calendar, with Peter Birchall's talk on ponds on April 18th and the Spring Fling in May, followed by the wonderful programme of summer visits before we resume meetings in September. The Spring Fling is a wonderful social gathering: bring a dish to share, and your own plates, cutlery, glasses and drinks, and any plants you might like to pass on – with any luck someone else will have brought just the plant you were looking for.

The committee is still a member short, so please do step forward if you would like to join us. Just speak to one of us at a meeting, or phone, or email, if you might be interested.

We are always keen to have new members - please spread the word among like minded friends. And if you have an idea for a speaker, topic or visit, let us know and we'll do our best.

Here's wishing you all good gardening weather and a successful season!

The Committee

COGS NOTICES

COGS MEMBERSHIP

Speakers and Meetings

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

We also need volunteers to help at meetings. Please contact Pat Alderton if you can help.

RHS Concession Card

We now have just one RHS concession card, 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. It also entitles us to one free group visit of up to 55 people per year to an RHS Garden. Nina Guilfoyle holds this card, so if you would like to borrow it, please contact her.



Green Fair at Bishop Otter campus

For students and others, a Go Green Week will be held in the last week of April, with a Green Day on Tuesday 26th April. We are told 'The event will feature stalls promoting awareness of climate change, recycling, the impact of pollution, energy saving, green



transport etc as well as an opportunity to attract our 5,000 strong student population's interest ...' We feel it is worth supporting, and COGS will be attending with a small stall, as we did in October 2009. If anyone would like to help for a short while on Tuesday 26th April, do please get in touch with Penelope, tel: 771881. It is an easy shift, as we will just have our leaflets and some displays of vegetables etc. and present our society and its aims, with a chance to contact other stalls and groups.

Weald and Downland Open Air museum

The WDOAM are holding an Autumn Countryside Show on Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th October 2011, and within that a **Horticultural Show**. They have



asked horticultural and gardening societies to join in, and are not charging for space and table within a tent.

The Committee have decided that COGS should take part – it is quite local, we would like to support the WDOAM, and there is no charge for participation. It will give us the chance to display our work, distribute leaflets, show any of our produce. (We are sure to have plenty of this in October.)

So do put these dates in your diary – it should be interesting and enjoyable.

Also, we shall in due course be asking for volunteers to help with the stall.

If you have already helped at Stansted or Totally Tomato, you will know that it is not difficult; if you have not, this is a good opportunity to 'meet the public' and help COGS spread the message of Organic Gardening.

Seedy Sunday talk

What an interesting and absorbing March meeting we had. Fran Saunders told us the history of Seedy Sunday held annually in Hove since 2001. Unusual seeds were passed around for us to examine and keep eg Achocha, an edible crop that few of us had heard of. We learnt some fascinating facts, for example, that there are over 12000 varieties of tomatoes! One of the aims of Seedy Sunday is to protect the planet's biodiversity, since it now costs £2000 to register a seed variety, and therefore many varieties are being lost. The final part of the evening was fantastic - we were able to take away for free any seeds that we wanted from the several hundred that were on offer!



Pat Alderton

February Meeting - Jan Jenkins

February was another well-attended meeting. The speaker, Jan Jenkins has an allotment in Langstone and has been gardening for over 20 years. She has obviously spent a lot of time thinking about her gardening practices and uses the term Holistic Gardening to describe what she does. She started by telling us that she believes every bug/insect/slug etc has its place in the garden and if they become a pest then it is because the natural balance of the garden has been disrupted in some way. Her response to attacks of aphids or slugs would be to step back and think 'what needs to be done here, why am I doing this?'. Sometimes the answer would be that the planting is too close, not allowing the circulation of air. Another time it would be that there is too much food in the soil causing weak, sappy growth.

She is very keen on observation and told us that the weeds that grow on your plot can indicate what is happening in the soil. She suggested that the Soil Association booklet 'Weeds' is a useful reference, although she warned against out of date information in old books. Other books that she recommended were: Joy Larkcom – 'Grow your own Vegetables' and Mel Bartholemew – 'Square Foot Gardening'. Continuing the theme of observation and knowing your plants, Jan told us that she rarely waters – much preferring to mulch but if she has to, she buries a plastic bottle to supply water to the correct depth of root –which is yet another thing she pays attention too – knowing whether the plant has shallow or deep roots.

One tip she gave us, that earned a ripple of 'brilliant, why have I never thought of that' from some in the audience was to turn toilet roll centres into squares so that they stand up more easily and of course fit together in a seed tray without spaces. The benefits of doing this are twofold – they are easy to store when folded and when the plants are potted on into a larger square pot, the compost is easier to get into the bottom because the square is rotated into a diamond shape as it is fitted into the next pot.

Jan grows many of her plants on, be as large as possible

before planting them out as she assured us this helps to reduce the impact of slug and pigeon damage. It even prevents carrot root fly since they are attracted to the smell released when the carrots are thinned.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening in which Jan presented some familiar ideas in a thoughtful, interesting and definitely holistic way.

Plant a Potato Day

400 seed potatoes! That is what we gave away one bright Saturday in March.

Members of the 'Grow Your Own' group from Transition Chichester stood by the Cross in Chichester and spent a morning handing out potatoes, which had kindly been donated by three garden centres.

We were accompanied by two delightful scarecrows, Potato Pete and Alice, as well as Bill the Fiddler.



At first, some members of the public were puzzled and suspicious when we approached them, but when they realised we weren't trying to sell anything, they mostly became interested and pleased. The children especially, went off clutching their newspaper potato bags like precious trophies. A few days later a photo and an informative article appeared in the Chichester Observer. Our aim had been to introduce people to the fascination and joy of beginning to grow your own vegetables, and we hope we achieved this. In addition, as well as containing instructions on what to do with the potatoes, the potato bags contained information on Transition Chichester. We hope that in a small way this will have introduced more people to the idea and the importance of building sustainable communities.

Jenny Webb

On behalf of the Grow Your Own Group, from Transition Chichester

Recipe: Yotam Ottolenghi's Cauliflower cake (from the Guardian)

medium cauliflower, 650g-700g

1 large red onion, peeled

100g olive oil

½ tsp finely chopped rosemary

10 medium free-range eggs

20g chopped basil

180g plain flour

2½ tsp baking powder

½ tsp ground turmeric

220g grated parmesan, or other mature cheese

Salt and black pepper

Melted butter, for greasing

2 tbsp black sesame seeds (or black onion seeds or plain sesame seeds)



Heat the oven to 180C/350F/gas mark 4. Break the cauliflower into medium florets, put them in a pot with a teaspoon of salt, cover with water and simmer for 15 minutes, until quite soft. Strain, and leave in the colander for a few minutes to get rid of all the water.

While the cauliflower's cooking, prepare the batter. Cut a few 0.5cm rings off one end of the onion and set aside (these will go on top of the cake); coarsely chop the rest. Heat the oil in a pan and on a low heat sauté the chopped onion and rosemary for eight minutes. Remove from the heat, leave to cool down, add the eggs and basil, and whisk. Sift the flour, baking powder and turmeric into a large bowl, and add the parmesan, one and a half teaspoons of salt and plenty of black pepper. Add the egg mix and whisk to eliminate lumps. Add the cauliflower and stir gently, trying to keep some florets whole.

Use baking parchment to line the bottom of a 24cm round cake tin with a loose base. Brush the sides with butter, put in the sesame seeds and toss them around so they stick to the sides. Tip in the cauliflower mix and arrange the onion rings on top.

Bake the cake in the centre of the oven for 45 minutes, until golden brown and set. Serve just warm or at room temperature.

Serves 4-6

The Incomplete Organic Gardener January to April 2011



Well, the snows of December did not lead to a bitter New Year. In fact from January weather has been quite good and I'm much further ahead with my work on the allotment than I have been in the past. The major task I set myself was to make a start on rebuilding the fruit cage, a victim of previous snowfall. I will admit I haven't yet erected the netting, but the fruit area is now surrounded by boards thus starting the process of making it a raised bed fruit area. The

favoured method of boarding raised beds is by making use of old floorboards but have found that old decking boards are much more available and invariably free. I remember some years ago listening to a Gardeners' Question Time when the team were asked to predict what gardeners would be doing in five or six years time. One of the answers given was that many gardeners will be visiting the local dump getting rid of their once fashionable decking! Luckily this turned out to be quite an accurate prediction and I have managed to divert many of these old decking boards onto my allotment – cheap and at least as hard wearing as old floorboards. In fact I ended up with some spare decking boards, and am able to use them on a number of my existing no-walk beds. I can begin to envisage a time when all of my beds will be genuinely raised ones, with all the consequent advantages of easy maintenance. Such beds also provide a good home for spent tomato compost which helps to provide a good tilth.

Last year I said that I was going to buy my seed potatoes from a local seed merchant rather than by mail order or from a garden centre. The great advantage of doing it this way is that I

can choose the exact number of potatoes I need and make sure that each one is the optimum size – about the size of a hen's egg. I have also discovered that each of my beds will accommodate 24 early potatoes or 20 main crops, so that I no longer run the risk of too many or too few potatoes. Whether this new exactitude on my part will pay dividends I'll discover by July. One of my raised beds has been protected by a cloche and in this have planted early peas, hopefully thereby avoiding infestation by the pea moth. In another my early carrots have been planted, using the sand mix technique, and will soon be surrounded by a low barrier which might protect them from the carrot fly. My bought-in brassica plug plants stood the winter well, and I now have early cauliflowers and broccoli which I have never managed before. I have become a real enthusiast for plug plants although I know I should grow them all from seed. However, idleness sometimes prevails even in the best run allotment.



Over the years I have run my allotment I have increasingly appreciated how lucky I am to have good allotment neighbours. For many years the allotment on my northern side was run by Dave, one of the old guard who had been working his allotment since the 1960s. He was never convinced by my newfangled ideas, especially the raised beds, but

was endlessly good-humoured and a constant source of leek seedlings and good advice. Unfortunately arthritic hands meant he had to give up last year and I miss our chats. One of his last kind acts was to offer me one of his old hoes, which I accepted with enthusiasm. It wasn't quite what I expected, as it was a wheeled hoe with a double handle about 6 foot tall. I doubt I will use it on my raised beds, but it is a wonderful artefact of the 1950s. Mind you, it does take up a lot of space in the shed! His old 10 Rod allotment has now been divided into two parts so I have two new neighbours, both of whom are enthusiastic

gardeners as well as pleasant companions when I feel like taking a break and having a chat. My southern neighbour of some years, Eddie, tends to be a traditional gardener and is also very successful. I often look at his rows of onions and parsnips with a good deal of envy. As with Dave however, Eddie is tolerant of my approach and a good allotment friend. My New Year resolutions for the allotment are to take regular photographs and keep an allotment diary, showing its progress through the seasons. I have kept it so far, but it is only April! If it works, this should make it much easier to judge which crops do well and how they respond to treatment. Crop rotation might be easier as well. Time will tell. It is good to be self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables, but good companionship and the pleasure of a well organised allotment are rewards in themselves. At least that's what I tell myself as I stand in the greenhouse bracing myself to step out into a strong westerly and get on with the work.

Rob Campling

April 2011

Events

SOUTH DOWNS GREEN FAIR

Sunday 8th May 2011.

The Sustainability Centre,

East Meon. Adults £5.00,

Children £2.00. This is announced as 'A great day out for the

whole family', with 'Live music, activities for children,

demonstrations of traditional rural skills, Permaculture Question Time with Maddy Harland, Ben Law and John-Paul Flintoff.'

They will also have 'Green shopping', and 'Seed swap. Please bring your plants and seeds'.

The Sustainability Centre, Droxford Road, East Meon, Hampshire, GU32 1HR.

Further details from the centre, 01730 823166 or

polly@sustainability-centre.org

Public transport available: check with the Centre.



A Local Gardeners Question Time

In aid of Chestnut Tree House.

A panel of horticulturists, chaired by Jean Griffin, a regular reporter on BBC Southern Counties Radio Gardening Programme and a judge for Britain in Bloom, will be answering gardening questions.

Date: Friday, 13th May 2011 - 7.00pm for a 7.30pm start

Location: St Mary's Hall, Grassmere Lane, Felpham

Tickets: £8.00 including refreshments from Joan Sheppard (01243 584386) & Paula Puleston (01243 584843)

Chestnut Tree House



This is the only children's hospice in the whole of Sussex and cares for life-limited youngsters and their families in a caring, homely environment.

The House offers wonderful facilities including a hydrotherapy pool, a multi-sensory room and several play areas. The House aims to give families the opportunity to spend time together in

a relaxed, friendly environment. The aim at Chestnut Tree House is to provide the care and support these families so desperately need, whether practical, physical or emotional.

To enable us to provide these services, we need to raise £2 million every year with very little government funding which is why we are so dependent on the local Sussex community to help us ensure that the services and facilities are available as and when families need them.

BOSHAM GARDENS OPEN DAY

5th June 2011, 11 am to 5 pm.

In aid of Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research

This biennial event, held here since 1993, offers a rare opportunity to visit many private gardens in and around Bosham Village. The Chichester & District Branch have been fundraising for Leukaemia & Lymphoma research since 1983 and have raised an amazing £800,000 to help beat blood cancers.

This year there is a great variety including:

Gardens on the harbour's edge, with coastal and wind-tolerant plants;

Beautiful harbour views; more sheltered gardens in the village;

Rose gardens; Herbaceous borders; Organic vegetable gardens;
Bee Keeping; Water features; Art work for sale or plant sales in various gardens.

Tickets are available on the day at participating gardens, and from the beginning of May from: Bosham Co-op Farm Shop, Hillier Garden Centre, The Millstream Hotel, and other places. For full details see :
www.bosham.org/gardensopenday/index.htm

COGS DIARY DATES

Monday May 28

Spring Fling and Plant Exchange - A social evening.

Bring some food to share (with a label including the ingredients and where they came from + a serving spoon). Please remember: to bring your own plates, cutlery and glasses. Any plant you have to swap can be put on the plant table but you will need to take it home afterwards if it doesn't find a new owner!

Monday July 4th

Visit to Little Breach allotments

A chance to see the various growing techniques of different allotments in Chichester.

Rob Campling (COGS own special allotment gardener exceptional) who has kept us informed and entertained of what we should be doing throughout the year will be on hand to show us his results and answer questions. We may try to organise a small party if the weather is good.

Meet at allotment gates at 7.00 pm

Monday July 25 (to be confirmed)

Visit to Sustainability Centre, Droxford Road, East Meon, Petersfield, GU32 1HR

An opportunity to visit the Sustainability Centre. We will be shown round their projects eg Solar electricity project, Solar water heating. Compost toilet, The biomass boiler, Forest gardening, Straw bale solar powered showers, Chalk grassland,

The Woodland Classroom, Permaculture, Yurts. We will also visit their bookshop.[.

Cost £3 - £5 depending on numbers

Meet at Sustainability Centre 6.45 for 7.00

day Aug 2 (to be confirmed)

Visit to Climping

With Andrew Lawrence, National Trust coastal warden for West Sussex

Andrew will lead us on a walk round Climping.

Visit details will be put on COGS website next month or you can ring Vee Cowan for further information about the visits. Tel 07789013472

Monday September 26

John Negus

Borders of Distinction: Displaying herbaceous perennials to best effect.

Trained at Wisley Gardens and Merrist Wood Horticultural colleges, photo-journalist John Negus (Dip. Hort. Wisley) enjoys sharing his passion for gardening and other outdoor pursuits. He will tell us how to choose plants and varieties to extend the season from early spring to late autumn +tips on planting, cultivating and associating colours and sculptural forms. There will be a fun quiz with give away seeds

All COGS Indoor Events are held at:

Bassil Shippam Centre, Tozer Way, St Pancras, Chichester PO19 4LG

Start at 7.30pm, doors open at 7.15pm

Free to COGS members. £2 for non-members.

INFINITY FOODS

Next orders to Pat by Wednesday 1 June please.

(Delivery Tuesday 7 June, collect ASAP please)

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

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 – Rachel Ritchie. rcritchie@hotmail.com

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

Organisers:

Publicity - Gina Carrington (01243 778689) ginacarrington@btinternet.com

Speaker Secretary – Vee Cowan (01243 780518) varianneec@yahoo.com

Bookshop/Librarian - Barbara MacGregor (01243 781849)

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

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www.chicogs.org.uk

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