

# Chichester Organic Gardening Society



Newsletter 55  
January 2011



## **NOTES FROM THE COMMITTEE**

January 2011

So another year dawns and no doubt many of you are already planning what you will be growing this season, which we hope will include some seeds for plants for us to sell at Stansted!

Last year's unusual weather continued right up to the end, with the long period of cold and snow surprising us all. Although the bitter weather seems to be behind us for now, please don't stop feeding the birds: once they have identified a source of food, they will come to rely on it, just as we will be relying on them to control pests for us later in the year.

Rob Campling's Incomplete Gardener takes the long view, with a last backward look at 2010 in one of our articles this month.

We also have articles on making a bug house (let your imagination soar!) and forcing rhubarb.

As agreed at the AGM we have sent £50 each to the education centres at Tuppenny Barn and the Sustainability Centre at East Meon, in support of the great work they each do.

Our hardworking committee member Gina Carrington has stepped down from the committee – many thanks to her for all her hard work. She has kindly agreed to continue to organize the publicity for the society.

So that means that we are a committee member down so hope that we can appeal to you to come forward with offers of help – it is so much nicer to have people volunteer rather than feel we are twisting arms. The duties are not onerous – meetings are often 2 months apart. As a Society we always need people who are willing to spare some of their time because the simple fact is that 5 committee members cannot do everything. So if you value and enjoy COGS we would really like to hear from you if you will be happy to take on either a committee space or even a small job.

Renewals this year have been very promptly received (we only have about 5 members outstanding) – thank you to all of you for making our job so much easier!

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.



#### **Changes at West Dean**

As regular stallholders at Totally Tomato, we have been informed that West Dean are reducing the number of events each year to three: Chilli Fiesta and Apple Affair will continue, but the Herb and Tomato Shows and the Garden Event will be replaced by a new show called 'MedFest – A Taste of the Mediterranean'. This will celebrate the Mediterranean, its cuisines, cultures and musical traditions, and in July 2011 will concentrate on Spain, Algeria, and Lebanon. There will not therefore be a show specifically for Tomatoes, although they may feature in July. As the new MedFest is so near to the Stansted show, at which we regularly have a stall for the three days, we have decided not to request a stall for 2011, but would encourage everyone to attend, to enjoy the stalls and demonstrations, and it might be that in future years COGS could take part. Let us know what you think.

## Website

Tom Broughton, who designed and looks after our website, has kindly offered to manage a section for offers/requests. While members may still like to bring surplus produce to meetings, for exchange or donations, there are often items which are just not practical to bring, or are ready at a different time. In this case, do let Tom know, by email, keeping your message short and precise, including whether the items/produce need to be collected, and your own phone number. He can be contacted at: [tom@chicogs.org.uk](mailto:tom@chicogs.org.uk)

## STANSTED SHOW - Friday - Sunday 10 – 12 JUNE 2011



Its Stansted Show time and I hope you are ready to help on our stand or growing plants. This year we will be handing out some seeds for you to grow – see the article below. I hope we will have another successful year and do let me know if you would like to help.

To remind you the popular plants were tomatoes, lettuce, pepper, lettuces, aubergine, cucumbers, butternut and squashes, courgettes or any other vegetable plants. Herbs and flowers with their coloured petals sold well too. Unusual plants were also an attraction. I hope you'll be inspired to provide our stand with some more of the wonderful plants COGS members are so good at providing.

If anyone who could help or advise us on a new COGS sign and banner please contact Vee.

Vee Cowan 01243 780518 or email [varianneec@yahoo.com](mailto:varianneec@yahoo.com).

### Seeds for Stansted!

We are hoping to have an even better collection of plants for sale in 2011. We have some seeds ready, and would like some of you - yes, YOU - to take these, sow and grow them for sale in June. You can keep some of the plants for yourself. We shall be distributing the seeds at the January meeting (and February, as most seeds do not need to be planted until the air is warmer). If you can't come then, but would like to take part, please let Vee know.

We are also interested in cuttings: do let us know if you are able to do some of these yourselves.

Stansted Show Committee

## Manuka Wholefoods



A new wholefood shop has opened in Little London Walk (formerly Sadlers Walk).

Manuka Wholefoods is an independent, family-owned business with a real passion for providing everyday good, wholesome food for the community. Grant, Trea and Jenne have a genuine interest in supporting people to help themselves naturally. Manuka offers a range of organic fresh produce, and organic or natural-as-possible grocery items, and is committed to providing a great range of "free-from" for those on special diets. Manuka has an ever-growing range of natural body and skin care products, environmentally-friendly household and baby items, and top-of-the-range supplements and remedies.

Well worth the effort to walk along East Street!

### Review of talk by Peter Johnson

Peter Johnson, head teacher of Birdham Primary School gave an inspirational talk to COGS on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010. In the 13 years since he has been head, the school has made marvellous use of its spacious site to create:

1. a Saxon Round House made by the children using traditional wattle and daub
2. a community orchard growing varieties of apples, pears, plums, and four olive trees
3. an organic garden
4. an oxbow lake and a pond, with a hide nearby and
5. a poly tunnel – the latest acquisition, partly funded by a lottery grant

In addition, they have an eco-centre. The centre has solar panels for energy, toilets flushed with rain water, and an interactive learning centre involving our body, our world, our weather, our energy, and our waste.

Peter's talk inspired many questions, and what became so apparent was that the children (157 of them) and staff were totally involved in every aspect of this 'outdoor classroom'. For

example, composting – a smelly business, as the heaps have to be turned regularly – but the children love doing it. All the fruit waste from the healthy snacks eaten every day by every child is used for composting as well as the waste paper towels. The school won a national competition in 2009 for its eco approach. Children and staff were delighted when Gethin Jones from *Blue Peter* presented the award. I like the following eco-code used by the school:

### OUR ECO-CODE

**B**e healthy by eating sensibly



**I**deally walk, cycle or car-share to get to school every day.



**R**ecycle and reuse as much as possible



**D**on't drop litter and it will help to keep our school clean and tidy



**H**elp to look after our wildlife and garden areas



**A**lways turn off lights and taps when they are not being used



**M**ake compost out of your fruit and vegetable waste



## **The Incomplete Organic Gardener's Review of 2010**

It was good to see cold and snowy periods at each end of 2010. Such weather is an excellent natural controller of pests, and many temperate zone plants (such as fruit trees and bushes) really benefit from low temperatures in the winter. Combined with crop rotations and companion plantings the return of cold winters has been a real bonus to the organic gardener. Of course, that wasn't my initial reaction when I returned to Chichester in January after being snowed in in north Oxfordshire to find that my allotment fruit cage had collapsed under the weight of snow! My own fault, as I knew perfectly well that it is good practice to remove the roof netting at the end of the season, but when do we ever get heavy snow on the Chichester plain? Perhaps a blessing in disguise, as the cage was in need of a little refurbishment, though a complete rebuild wasn't part of my original plan. An early spring followed that soon turned cold culminating in few weeks of hot dry weather. On balance not the best weather for allotment gardening.

However, one definite benefit of my deep bed system is that cultivation is rarely affected by the weather. On a 10 rod allotment I have a dozen separate beds, mostly 22ft by 4ft (in addition to the fruit cage and greenhouse). Since I need never walk on most of the beds, and can cultivate them from the in between grass walk ways with a fork, I don't have to worry about wet weather or even medium frosts. In addition the weeds (mostly) lift out easily and planting is straightforward. On top of that the beds are easy to protect from pigeons with a 2ft high chicken wire enclosure. A final benefit is that cultivation of a single bed at most takes a couple of hours (depending on the neglect level) and that is a much less daunting prospect than contemplating the distant horizon of a conventional 10 rodder in late autumn and early spring.

Looking back to what I wrote in December 2009 about my plans for 2010, I'm rather surprised that most things worked out well. My decision to go for a late planting of carrots was a success, as was using a sharp sand and seed mixture for the drills. This provided reasonable spacing, and I didn't need to do any thinning (which annoyed any late carrot flies!). They are still providing an excellent crop (in the following January) though I did help them with an enviromesh covering. Unfortunately the same approach didn't work for the parsnips and, as ever, they were mostly a failure.

Although not organic seed potatoes my choice of the waxy first early

Maris Bard, all-purpose second early Sunrise and early main Picasso proved to be a sound one. The resulting crop was reasonably heavy, and to my surprise blemish free and without any slug or wire worm damage. This was quite a bonus, and seems to prove that an organic approach to cultivation, using the no-walk deep bed system and chicken manure pellets really does work. We've still got a bag of the Picasso which seems to store well. These potatoes were bought from a national seed merchant, but I'm toying with the idea of buying this year's seed potatoes from a local supplier, and choosing the exact number I need and a new range of varieties.

Last year saw me buying some brassica plug plants rather than planting seed. I knew it would be more expensive, but it seemed an interesting experiment – plus there would be a lot less work! In the event it was highly successful. There were no losses, and the plants (brussels *Millennium*, cabbage *Red Jewel* and *Tundra*, and *Boris* cauliflower) all grew well and cropped satisfactorily. The only care they got was to be well protected from pigeons, chicken pellet manuring before planting, and reasonably regular removal of yellowing leaves plus hoeing. I suspect that on a plant for plant cost comparison between seeds and plug plants there wasn't much in it, and I got exactly the number of plants I needed. The *red tundra* has stood the winter well (with a name like that it should!).

As usual, both my onions and garlic were disappointing despite a good start, but leeks, (plug) beetroot, sweet corn and french and borlotti beans all did well – perhaps because I gave up on the companion planting approach to sweet corn, squash and beans. It occurs to me that where this system worked – for Native Americans in North America – the climate and soil were all rather different to my southern English allotment.

As usual I've grown insect attractant flowers (evening primrose, poppies, climbing nasturtiums, pot marigold, sunflowers, teasels, hollyhocks, foxgloves and so on) both in a separate wildflower bed south of the greenhouse and at the end of some of my vegetable beds. How useful these have been in encouraging insect predators I can't really say, but they have certainly been good to look at. Within the wild flower bed and backing the rhubarb I've also grown Jerusalem artichokes. As is well known, they aren't artichokes, have nothing to do with Jerusalem and are alleged to produce flatulence. In my experience they are delicious, have no deleterious side effects, are easy to grow, harvest over a long period and if left produce blooms on long stems very like sunflowers. Perhaps they can become

weed like and less tasty if not continuously re-planted in fertile soil, but we'll see.

And the final bonus of allotment gardening? Well looking south in early September towards the Cathedral over the allotments of St Paul's. A good thought on which to finish this article and wish a good gardening year to you all!

Rob Campling  
January 2011



## **FORCING RHUBARB**

Forcing rhubarb is such an easy thing to do and allows us to enjoy sweet succulent stems of rhubarb from our gardens or plots when there is little else about.

By far the easiest method of forcing rhubarb is to cover the crowns which will encourage the plants to make early growth. These forced stalks can be harvested for use in cooking when they are 20cm - 30cm long.

How to do it

Clear around the base of a rhubarb crown, removing old leaves and weeds.

Use a large pot, dustbin or decorative rhubarb forcer to cover the crown. Plug any holes to exclude light.

In cold regions or to speed forcing, insulate the outside of the pot with a thick layer of straw. Most years, forced rhubarb will be ready to harvest eight weeks after covering. It's best to avoid forcing a single crown of rhubarb for two years in a row, as this can weaken it. Leave it to crop naturally instead, and always have more than one crown so you can force in alternate years. A more elaborate method involves lifting the crowns and bring them indoors: Dig up the roots of plants that are to be forced (three-year-old plants are best) keeping excess soil on the roots

to prevent damage from subzero freezing. Pot them in large pots and leave them outside exposed to several hard freezes. After the roots are thoroughly chilled, take them indoors to a warm (with a temperature of 50 to 65 F), dark place (a cellar, hot bed, etc.) and cover them with peat, soil, or sawdust. Keep them moist. Harvest the stalks when they are 20 – 30 cm high. The leaves will be small and the stems will be tender and uniformly bright pink. The harvest period for forced roots is about one month. After the harvest set the plants outside and protect them with mulch. They can be replanted in the spring. For longer harvests bring a few roots in at one time. To get enough to use in most recipes you will need to force 3-4 plants. Enjoy your crumble!

## **BUG HOTELS**

There are 10 million insect species in the world and they all need somewhere to live. You can create an insect home called a Bug Hotel so easily and very soon after opening its doors, you will find it a place where many insects will come to stay!

### **Why do bugs need hotels?**

In natural habitats there are endless nooks and crannies where mini-beasts, properly known as invertebrates, can shelter. Crevices in bark, holes in dead wood, piles of fallen leaves, gaps between rocks, hollow plant stems, spaces in dead logs – all these can provide a home for the myriad small creatures that need somewhere to nest or to escape from predators or bad weather. Established gardens can also provide lots of hiding places, but gardeners often like to tidy away the debris where invertebrates might live. Schools may feel pressure to keep their plots tidy and in a new garden, or one that consists of containers surrounded by hard surfaces, the amount of natural cover will be limited. We can help provide more homes by creating bug hotels, which are often interesting and attractive creations in their own right.

What makes a good bug hotel?

The best bug hotels have lots of small spaces in different shapes and sizes and made from different materials. Ideally

some should be nice and dry inside, and others a bit dampish. Bug hotels are generally made from reclaimed materials, or natural objects, which reduces cost, helps them blend in with their surroundings and is probably more attractive to the mini-beast guests

### **How do you make a bug hotel?**

A simple bug hotel can be made from a collection of hollow stems packed into a plastic bottle with the end cut off. Several hotels could be placed in different positions such as on the ground amongst vegetation, fixed on top of a post, next to a wall, half way up a hedge, in a tree, under a bird table. These are likely to attract different mini- beasts to live in them.

Grander bug hotels can be made by piling up a variety of materials into a tower, or making a wooden frame with a series of compartments and packing these with different fillings.

- Tip: If you use bamboo with different sized holes you will attract different insects in each one.

Of course there is always the option to go all the way with design – just like this Bug Hotel (or should that be Palace?) found at Bignor...

### **What might check in to your bug hotel?**

A surprisingly wide variety of invertebrates including nesting mason bees and leaf cutter bees, woodlice hiding from the sun – and woodlice spiders hunting woodlice, earwigs hiding their babies from predators, ladybirds and lacewings hibernating over winter, beetle larvae feeding on the dead wood, funnel web spiders spinning their traps and centipedes hunting down their prey.

HAPPY BUG WATCHING.



## Events

### ***Feb 6th Seedy Sunday, Hove Town Hall, Norton Road***

10 - 4.30 Admission is £2 - children free.

Many gardening related stalls and of course the seed swap. Bring seeds to swap if you have them. Organic seed potatoes will also be on offer.

Talks from Econexus, The Heritage Seed Library and the Millenium Seed Bank, Plan Bee and our own Gardeners Question Time.

Please see our website for lists of stall holders and talks

[www.seedysunday.org](http://www.seedysunday.org)

contact Fran Saunders on 01273 381686 or Vicki Williams 01273 550430

### ***February 13, 2pm-5pm Seed Swapping, Sowing & Growing By Transition Town Worthing***

Claire Hunt, The Old Palace, Glebe Road, Tarring, Worthing  
clahunt@gmail.com

### **Saturday 6th May**

**Birdham Primary School's Plant Sale** 9.00 to 12.00 noon.

Peter Johnson, who talked to us about his sustainable vision for his school in November, hopes to see some COGS members at the sale and will take us on a tour of the school grounds.

## **COGS DIARY DATES**

### **January 31 - SATISH KUMAR "Earth Pilgrim" DVD**

Satish Kumar takes us on a journey through the seasons of Dartmoor and explores our deep and profound relationship with the natural world. It is an Eastern view of the West, seen through the eyes of Satish Kumar who is a world-renowned conservationist. It portrays an engrossing account of Satish Kumar's philosophy and reverence for the living Earth. There will be time for discussion afterwards.

### **February 28 - JAN JENKINS**

Holistic Gardening – achieving a sustainable balance with nature using organic gardening techniques.

Jan Jenkins organic gardener, allotmenteer and novice bee

guardian will discuss how to successfully achieve a balance between the gardener and garden with wild life to include insects, reptiles, mammals and birds.

Broad principles, strategies, practical cultural advice and specific plants will be recommended to encourage a sustainable balance.

### **March 28 - FRAN SAUNDERS**

Seedy Sunday - Why we should save seeds.

Fran will talk on The History of Seedy Sunday and explain the importance of saving seeds and how our choices are being taken away. She will show some very simple seed saving techniques, and will bring some tomato seeds and possibly some heritage tomato plants.

NB Seedy Sunday in Hove on Feb 6th

### **April 18 (NB Date) - PETER BIRCHALL – Pete the Pond**

The importance of a wildlife pond

In 2000 Peter Birchall became the official Pond Warden of his local area, Willingdon and Jevington in East Sussex when he joined the Pond Warden scheme - set up by BTCV and Southern Water to help save Britain's ponds. This started him on the road to building ponds and small lakes and also to develop and grow native aquatic plants, which he now supplies as part of his pond service.

He will tell us about: history of ponds, why we should have one and how to make and maintain it. He will talk about insect life, amphibians and the many plants grown in a pond including edible ones.

All COGS 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 23 February please.

(Delivery Tuesday 1 March, collect no later than the afternoon of 3<sup>rd</sup> March please)

Any member is welcome to order and there is no minimum order. If anyone new is interested please contact:

[pat\\_adams@btopenworld.com](mailto: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](mailto:rcritchie@hotmail.com)

Membership Secretary - Nina Guilfoyle (01243 776063) [nina@nrglearning.co.uk](mailto:nina@nrglearning.co.uk)

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

Bookshop/Librarian - Barbara MacGregor (01243 781849)

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

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