



Soil Association

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Southendfoodgrowersandproducers>
https://www.facebook.com/?ref=tn_tnmn#!/groups/43705483846/

SEEEOG was formed in 1994, to promote the principles of organic gardening by:

- Composting organic waste
- Protecting wildlife
- Reducing pollution
- Encouraging species diversity

Membership is currently £8.00 per annum, £12.00 family.

Is your local school a member of SEEEOG? If not, we offer free membership on receipt of application form!

Venue, etc.

Cheryl Centre, Growing Together Community Gardens, 47 Fairfax Drive, Southend-on-Sea SS0 9AG (corner of Fairfax Drive and Prittlewell Chase) – see Trust Links below.

Please let us know if you have difficulty with transport and we will try to help.

Unless stated otherwise, our speakers start at 8.00pm, but Growing Together will be open from 7.00pm to allow members to browse our Library, etc.

The next committee meeting is on Wednesday 16 January at Graham's.

Please notify Graham Oster-Ritter on grahamoster@aol.com if you wish to receive your newsletter by post/email, or to change your email address.

December meeting

Bob provided a comprehensive guide to container-grown spuds; method and varieties in terms of planting - earlies/main/lates - then took us into the realms of taste. This can be a very personal thing, as our palettes are, but they can also be conditioned, so need liberating to the different and unknown-explore diversity/varieties. Blind tasting was a great intro we could develop to other fruit and veg; we have been trying with apples and potatoes, so what else? We had lots of tangible guidance, so thanks for the talk and setting off a good extra social evening with purpose, so thanks to food-bringers, too.

There is a view that it's not organic unless it is grown in the living earth, but our urban predominance makes container growing easy access for any sized space and the inputs controlled - tasty, clean spuds, with potential for extended seasons and close-by for easy attention.

If we move to cultivation in the living earth – least-dig, mulched to ensure moisture retention and moderation of rainfall with nutrient sourcing inbuilt via compost, comfrey and foliar feed: make a hole, consider spacing, plant after rain, mulch to conserve moisture.

Check out varieties with Alan Romans' "Guide to Seed Potato Varieties" and purchase the unusual and organic sorts on Saturday 23rd February, POTATO DAY; we will also have eight varieties of onion sets for sale at Growing Together.

Within a Permaculture design, growing works with techniques that close the loop upon inputs: Bob's containers are filled with sieved compost and manure (from a known safe source); if not home-produced compost, then brought-in. Within an allotment context - green manuring in the autumn prior to planting potatoes, the use of plot-grown compost (comfrey, tares, rye, clovers), or by the product of cultivation (the usual composting of the plot) - this closes the loop in sustainable growing terms.

Potatoes are brought in and bought in (keeping last year's greened ones gives a 2-week advantage and

are fairly safe). Potatoes keep best in the earth unless waterlogged or deeply frosted and, though feeding destructors (slugs, snails, etc) persist, the other side of the balance is their predators as individuals and micro ecosystems of the garden and plot.

As one orchardist said: "Even fungi need rights" - how does immunity develop or the probiotic potential from living soils to provide healthy plants?

With a new season, take a bigger, deeper picture thinking inside and outside the container

SE Essex Seed Potato Day

If this is not in your new diary, now is the time to make a note: **Saturday 23 February**, 10am-2pm, Admission £1

SE Essex Seed Potato Day is now an annual event that has been running since 2011. It is organised and run entirely by volunteers from SEEOG and Leigh-on-Sea Allotment & Leisure Garden Association, in partnership with Trust Links and East Anglia Potato Day (Julian Turner).

We try to make available over 40 varieties of potato (some organic), which are sold as individual tubers, so that you can buy as many or as few as you require.

A variety list for 2013 is below and on our website at <http://seeog.org.uk/2012/09/se-essex-seed-potato-day-saturday-23-february/>. It has been on view a little while but it is worth another look, especially for updates. According to Julian, one of our suppliers was still harvesting his tubers at the end of November and has advised him of some crop failures. However bad your summer weather may have been, Scottish potato fields have seen worse!

For an event of this size, we obviously need some volunteers to help with the preparation early Saturday morning and helping to 'stack and store' after the event. Please do get in touch sooner rather than later, when we're all lamenting the usual lack of help, etc. etc..... There is a lot of physical work preparing for the day.

POTATO ORDER FORM

If anybody has mislaid their Potato Order Form, you can download a copy from the SEEOG website at <http://seeog.org.uk/2012/11/potato-day-order-form/>
Or, if you ask Carole, she can take one to January Group Night.

We are expecting ANYA and ROOSTER to be packed in nets of five tubers.

o) After a variety name = organically grown

First Earlies

Bonnie Dundee, Colleen (o), Epicure, Foremost, Home Guard, Lady Christl, Red Duke of York (o), Rocket, Sharpe's Express (o), Swift, Ulster Classic, Vanessa, Winston

Second Earlies

Anya, Bonnie, Carlingford, Charlotte (o), Gladstone, Kestrel, Marfona, Shetland Black, Stroma, Wilja

Early Maincrop

Amour (NVS), Blue Belle, Desiree (o), Highland Burgundy Red, International Kidney, King Edward, Majestic, Maris Piper, Nicola, Orla (o), Pentland Dell, Picasso, Rooster, Salad Blue (o), Stemster

Late Maincrop

Arran Victory (o), Cara (o), Golden Wonder (o), Kerr's Pink, Pink Fir Apple (o), Ryecroft Purple, Sarpo Mira (o), Valor (o)

Potato lovers - help save the Sarpo

This information arrived from several sources re a staple of the organic vegetable patch, the Sarpo potato, which may become a thing of the past if we don't come together to support the Sarvari Trust to save our spuds. The Trust breeds non-GM, blight-resistant potatoes that don't need constant spraying. These are known as Sarpo varieties.

They have a promising new seedling (let's call it Crow, short for Crowdfunded for now) to extend their

Sarpo range. They need to test Crow's performance against standard varieties in the field/garden and in the kitchen. Then they can send seed of Crow for government testing (very expensive) over two growing seasons. If the regulators agree that Crow would make a useful new variety, they will award it National List status. Then the variety can make a big contribution to really sustainable food production in UK and abroad. They need £5000 to help them do this.

The Trust can't get grant funding for this kind of work because it is thought to be near market research and therefore a private matter. Breeders of GM resistant potatoes do get grant support! So, if you join them by donating funds, time or skills, it can make all the difference.

As a backer, you can participate in their research by testing Crow and sending the Trust your results. <https://www.buzzbnk.org/ProjectDetails.aspx?projectId=84>

And a postscript from Julian Turner, East Anglia Potato Day
'The Sarvari Trust has been squeezed for funds from the outset. Its origins are the cultivars that were developed in Bulgaria to feed its population when the Stalinist era was still in full swing. The operation in Bangor has been inspirational in producing so much with so little support. Its director, David Shaw, was our speaker one year back in the Giffords Hall days. I will just remind folks that, in addition to the Sarpo prefixed varieties, there are also Blue Danube and Kifli. <http://sarvari-trust.org/in-the-pipeline.html> is worth a look.'

What happens at our meetings?

As 'regulars' know, much more happens than the talk! Please, a big THANK YOU to Jane for putting out the chairs beforehand – can anyone please help her? If you manage to arrive early, you'll see that we have an Organic Chitchat with John and Maureen – bring your gardening updates, questions and comments for discussion – even better, if you give us a little advance warning, we can 'mug up' even more! We also have a stall selling a range of books and leaflets which we think are interesting to organic gardeners. Would someone like to start a seed swap table – bring any surplus seeds you have saved and swap them for something else? Finally, there's our Library, which has a selection of books and magazines that members can borrow, including lots of information on 'The Living Soil' and Lady Balfour, briefly discussed in December.

We now have about 30 members and guests attending our meetings – and here let's welcome our new members! It's a great way to meet and chat with like-minded people, especially during the tea break! The price for non-members is currently £2.00, so feel free to bring guests with you. Here, your first 'port of call' is Graham, who also organizes the raffle.

And we couldn't resist this snippet that came our way: 'If I lived 40.6 miles closer (Holloway to Southend) I'd definitely regularly attend the great series of talks you organise. Hope this talk goes well. Chris A.'

Monday 21 January

'Sue Cushion, The Accidental Farmer at Boxes Farm, Battlesbridge'

At Boxes Farm, Sue and Ann raise animals what they describe as the 'Old Fashioned' way. Most of their animals are rare breeds – recognised as producing a better flavour of meat and well-suited to living outdoors where they are able to pursue the natural behaviour which is their birthright. None of their pigs have rings in their noses. Although this is supposed to make the handling of them easier, it would prevent them from rooting through the soil as they would naturally do. They are fed a diet free of genetically modified food, which is supplemented by the fruits of the land they forage and numerous natural 'treats' Sue and Ann add.

Boxes Farm is not registered 'Organic' due to the costs of registration but Sue and Ann only use chemicals or drugs when the welfare of their animals dictates.

<http://www.boxesfarm.co.uk/>

Monday 18 March

Dr Francis Rayns (Horticulture Research Manager at Garden Organic) will give a talk on green manures. These remain under-utilised by organic growers even though they can bring many benefits - helping to reduce the leaching of nutrients, adding nitrogen from the air by fixation, raising levels of soil organic matter and assisting with the management of weeds, pests and diseases. Francis will discuss the particular attributes of some of the wide range of species that can be used and how green manures can best be managed in a garden situation.

Monday 20 May

Dr. Keith Tyrell, Director of [Pesticide Action Network UK](http://www.pan-uk.org/), presents 'Bee Declines and the Link with Pesticides' - the link to PAN's factsheet is here at http://bees.pan-uk.org/assets/downloads/Bee_leaflet.pdf

The following link will take you to a series of fact sheets provided by PAN UK on all aspects of bees and pesticides. This is a great resource to get you started looking at the issues. And below that are other suggestions of what you can do to help save our bees and pollinators, which you can access yourself at <http://bees.pan-uk.org/what-can-you-do>

Different routes of pesticide exposure
Sub-lethal and chronic effects of neonicotinoids on bees and other pollinators
Serious shortcomings in assessing risks to pollinators
Different regulatory positions on neonicotinoids across Europe
Can restrictions on systemic insecticides help restore bee health?
What could farmers do to rely less on neonicotinoids?
Opportunities to expand and improve pollinator habitats
Action on neonicotinoid and other bee-toxic pesticides
Bee Declines and the Link with Pesticides

Monday 15 July

'Foraging with Jim Bishop' – Jim is a member of the South Essex Natural History Society.

Monday 16 September

A welcome return by Andrew Tann, from Crapes Fruit Farm

Crapes Fruit Farm is located just five miles west of Colchester, Essex, and only one mile north of Marks Tey Railway Station, within easy reach of the A12. From Stansted (M11) – just 30 miles. Their address is Rectory Road, Aldham, Colchester, Essex CO6 3RR. Telephone: 01206 212375.

Their peaceful, family orchard of fifteen acres is rich with a range of birds (skylark, wren and woodpecker, for example), insects (including dragonflies), and plant life. They also see deer, stoats and many rabbits living in the orchards. Some of the insects and bats that inhabit the premises are predators of aphids and other fruit pests, helping to keep down the population of unwanted, fruit-harming wildlife!

Andrew, the eldest of the third generation of Tanns at the farm, is dedicated to the production of apples – which taste like apples should. Crapes Fruit Farm has a collection of many varieties of apple which was compiled by Andrew's father, John Tann. These include very traditional and lesser-known varieties such as Blenheim Orange and D'arcy Spice. <http://crapes.wordpress.com/>

Monday 18 November

Jacqui Apostolides presents an update to Broad Oak Herbs, an organic, biodynamic herb farm in the beautiful Essex countryside. They specialise in bespoke artisan Traditional English Herbal Medicines for professional Herbalists and Practitioners.

All production and quality control at Broad Oak Herbs is carried out, or very closely supervised, by a medical herbalist with much expertise and passion in the art of preparing herbal remedies.

Broad Oak Herbs are committed to quality and environmentally friendly growing and production methods. They constantly strive to increase the range of herbs that they grow in their flourishing herb field in Essex.

<http://www.broadoakherbs.co.uk/>

Monday 16 December

Either Audley End's Walled Kitchen Garden - the walled garden is run on strictly organic lines and, with its glasshouses, bothy and potting shed, is a fascinating example of the workings of a Victorian kitchen garden.....

Or a showing of 'A Farm for the Future' - wildlife film maker, Rebecca Hosking, investigates how to transform her family's farm in Devon into a low energy farm for the future, and discovers that nature holds the key.

Bhutan aims to be first 100% organic nation

The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, famed for seeking 'happiness' for its citizens, is aiming to become the first nation in the world to turn its home-grown food and farmers 100 per cent organic. Peter Melchett, policy director at the Soil Association, commented that Bhutan's organic policy would 'start to give the country a reputation of high quality organic food which in the long-run would give them a market advantage and the possibility of price premiums.'

(Agence France-Presse, 3 Oct 2012) From: The Soil Association's Today's News, 3 Oct 2012

Crapes Fruit Farm, a December update

Field fares have made only short-lived stops as there are virtually no apples on the ground this winter. Pigeons have stripped the hollies of berries already. Cold within reason is all right but anything extreme or blankets of snow will impede their progress with pruning, which has begun. Fruit bud quality could again be of concern this winter. The buds on the younger wood did not benefit from much good light during last summer and the effects of last winter's drought may well have weakened the buds on older spurs. Fruit buds should be fat, not wizen.

There are just a few small, odd apples left, sharpish and /or russetty. The real rejects are available for horses etc (eaters only, to avoid colic!). The sharp rejects will make wine or cider should you want to try out your new kit!

And we must not forget to mention Dreadben's Diploma. Ben has worked at Crapes Fruit Farm from the age of thirteen – do have a look at <http://dreadbensdiploma.weebly.com/>

Andrew and Benn andrew.tann1@virgin.net <http://crapes.wordpress.com/>

Farmers' Markets 2013

These are the two markets where we have a stall and always appreciate help, produce and plants where available!

- **Leigh-on-Sea** at Leigh Community Centre, Elm Road: Friday 15 February, Friday 15 March, Friday 19 April, Friday 17 May, Friday 21 June, Friday 19 July, Friday 16 August, Friday 20 September, Friday 18 October, Friday 15 November and Saturday 21 December, 09:00 – 12:00
- **Rochford** in the WI Hall, Market Square on (Saturday) 2 February, 2 March, 6 April, 4 May, 1 June, 6 July, 3 August, 7 September, 5 October, 2 November and 7 December, 09:30 – 12:30.

Garden Organic news

Garden Organic's **Fighting Fund** was set up to tackle issues that threaten our nation's biodiversity.

Since 1958, Garden Organic has worked to protect the rich, interdependent, diverse life that makes up our gardens. They set up practical projects that make a difference, they educate and inspire growers, they conserve endangered varieties and they lobby for change. And they will continue to do so.

But they need to be able to act fast on important issues that threaten our biodiversity, our gardens and our environment. That's why they've set up the Fighting Fund, in early 2012, supported by their members. The Fighting Fund gives them the flexibility to act fast on important issues.

Right now, through their Fighting Fund, they are campaigning to save one of our nation's most important species: the bee.

PS: The Bees have reminded us of the following New Year's resolution: to contact your MP and ask her or him to go to Room W2 in the Houses of Parliament anytime between 11am to 3pm on Tuesday 15 January to pledge their support for a National Bee Action Plan.

http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/support_us/fightingfund.php

GMWatch news

NEW FILM ON EUROPE'S FARMING FUTURE IF GM HERBICIDE TOLERANT CROPS ARE APPROVED

In a new Greenpeace documentary, Growing Doubt, farming communities describe how herbicide tolerant GM crops have affected their economy, environment and communities.

<http://www.growingdoubt.org>

The GMWatch website has been under sustained attack since the publication of the explosive GMO/Roundup study and apologise to those who have at times found the site difficult to access.
<http://www.spinwatch.org/-articles-by-category-mainmenu-8/46-gm-industry/5546-smelling-a-corporate-rat>

The time has come around when they need to ask for your help once again to keep their news and information service going. They really do rely on our support and every penny goes towards opposing and exposing the multi-billion-dollar GM juggernaut. Please donate generously by Paypal or by sending a cheque (to 'NGIN'), based in Norwich, to the address given here: <http://gmwatch.org/donations>. If you have trouble accessing the site, please try again later!

WHO IS OWEN PATERSON?

UK environment secretary Owen Paterson has campaigned against wind farms, called for all alternative energy subsidies to be stopped, wants fracking projects accelerated, has branded anti-hunt protesters "Nazis", and wants airport expansion urgently investigated.

Guardian columnist George Monbiot commented that his appointment as environment secretary was "a declaration of war on the environment, and another sign that the right of the party – fiercely opposed to anything that prevents business from doing as it wishes – has won."

And Owen Paterson backs UK-grown GM food – you can read more at <http://www.gmwatch.org/latest-listing/51-2012/14506-owen-paterson-backs-uk-grown-gm-food>

Website: <http://www.gmwatch.org>

Profiles: <http://bit.ly/12UA12>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/GMWatch>

Facebook: <http://bit.ly/c6OnaX>

Manure

1. Pam Mitchell, The Grange, Murrells Lane, Hockley (Tel. 01702 207491) has a very good, old supply of manure. If you ring her first, giving a couple of days' notice, she will arrange for a load to be brought to the gate to ease bagging up.

2. We have another provider of free manure, chemical free, in Barling, near Wakering.
Tel. 01702 219835

3. Julie Davis has a large, well rotted manure pile in Great Wakering, ready to be taken away and put to good use, with good vehicle access. You can help yourself to a bagful, a car load or a lorry load if you want it, but please contact her first to arrange a time as her yard is kept locked for security reasons. Julie says she can't say it's organic, but she has run her land along organic guidelines, so there have been no sprays, medicines, etc. used and all their livestock were fed on organic feed, with no growth promoters or hexane, so it is completely safe for organic vegetables, etc. Tel: 07742107855

4. Our most recent provider is Hummerstone Farm, a family run farm near Billericay. They raise their own pigs and sheep producing free-range organic meat which they deliver locally every Saturday. They also have free-range chickens to provide fresh eggs. Parts are very well rotted, others partially, with manure from chickens, pigs and horses. They would ideally want it to go all in one lot as it is then easier to deliver within 15 miles of Billericay. Contact them on 07850789000 or on Facebook through their farm page <http://www.facebook.com/groups/Hummerstone.farm/>

Members' news -

Maltese Bees and the work of EcoGozo

As the smaller, quieter sister island to Malta, Gozo is generally greener and a lot more laid back as its bigger neighbour. It's also possible to walk, cycle, or for very little cost, tour the whole island by bus (Arriva Malta no less). Gozo is easily reached by a regular, short and cheap ferry trip from Malta.

There is a long history of keeping bees on both islands, and also on the adjacent tiny thyme-covered isle of Comino. Up until the 1950's bees were usually kept in clay pots, often shaded from the strong sun under Carob trees. (see Michael Buhagiar's excellent website for photos and more information) <http://www.maltesebeekeeper.com/traditional-beekeeping.php>

Ahead of a recent visit, we also contacted EcoGozo www.ecogozo.com to ask if they knew of any English-speaking beekeepers on the island willing to tell us more about Maltese bees (*Apis Mellifera Ruttneri*), try some local honey and look at hives.

Thanks to EcoGozo we met up with Saviour, who generously spent some of his time explaining about bee-keeping on the island. It was interesting to see the large number of hives he manages and also to learn about the many bee-friendly wild plants on Gozo such as thyme, lavender, thistles, fennel and wild daffodils to Eucalyptus, Carob trees etc.

He learnt from his relatives (many villages on the island still have older "resident" beekeepers). Saviour has his hives located across Gozo and, like many UK beekeepers, he builds his own supers and hive frames. He also imports various beekeeping bits from Thornes of Wragby in Lincolnshire. There is strong demand for honey and bee-products on Malta, born out by a beekeeping job advert we noticed in the Times of Malta for that week. It was also nice to look at his well-tended vegetable plot (harvesting tomatoes and beans outdoors in late November!)

EcoGozo are currently trying to raise awareness around the vital role bees play on the island through school-based projects etc. We also learnt about recycling schemes, grey water-harvesting and a planned solar farm for the island later in 2013.

We are returning to the island next year to meet Saviour again and hopefully visit the Bahrija Oasis project in the north of Malta, which featured in a recent edition of Permaculture Magazine - see <http://bahrija oasis.blogspot.co.uk/> and http://www.youtube.com/share_popup?v=ZppNaMScOn4

The EcoGozo vision (from their website) *"Gozo will become an eco-island by 2020, supported by a keen and committed sustainable community. We want to see quality of life in Gozo improving further through education, economic development and social progress. Gozo will strive to reduce its carbon and water footprints. We want to protect the Gozitan lifestyle, the island's environment, resources, culture and identity, and see that all these play a significant part in attracting more visitors and investors to the island".*

"The eco-island foresees a sustainable, and therefore, a secure future for the island of Gozo. It is a vision rooted in the island's potential and the capabilities of its people. EcoGozo is a vision for an island to become even more beautiful, inspiring, welcoming, thriving, inclusive and successful. A healthy and successful place to live in, in equilibrium with the environment. This is essentially what eco-island will strive to achieve".

Simon & Mary Wallace

And Simon's cookery book of the year is "Persia in Peckham: Recipes from Persepolis" by Sally Butcher - *"Cookery, Iranian-in-laws and when you are tired of cooking, you'll find a chapter on making merry..."* - Prospect Books.

Available from Southend Libraries (641.5955 for Dewey fans)

New members

When you join SEEEOG, not a lot will happen in the beginning. If you join on Group Night, you can collect a current newsletter from Carole, our Secretary. Alternatively, you can download a newsletter from SEEEOG's website at <http://seeog.org.uk/resources-information/newsletters/> - our website will also give you lots of useful information. In future, you will receive a newsletter bi-monthly either by email or post. We do not issue receipts or membership cards at present on order to keep down costs.

News from Trust Links

Proposed trips and events for 2013, subject to confirmation, are:

Wednesday 17 April: Hadleigh Farm, garden project and Hadleigh Castle

Thursday 11 July: Barnards Farm and Weald Country Park

Tuesday 20 August (from lunchtime onwards): Priory Park picnic and museum

Wednesday 6 November: Tropical Wings

Saturday 23 February: SE Essex Seed Potato Day, 10.00am – 2.00pm

Saturday 11 May: May Fayre, 11.00am – 2.00pm

Wednesday 19 June: Midsummer Open Garden (possible as part of Red Cross Open Garden Scheme), 2.00pm – 4.00pm

Saturday 12 October: Apple Day at St Laurence Orchard, 11.00am – 3.00pm

Wednesday 23 October – Trust Links' AGM, 2.00pm – 4.00pm

Saturday 30 November: Christmas Open Day, 11.00am – 2.00pm

Peru Potatoes Preserved

Global warming is making food production more unpredictable, but while world leaders argue about how to deal with the consequences of climate change, indigenous people in the Peruvian Andes have taken their communities' food security into their own hands. Six Quechua communities have joined forces to create a Potato Park, in which more than 1,500 varieties are grown in a living gene bank, where they adapt to new weather conditions. Unlike in traditional gene banks, where the seeds are stored in isolation, here they are cultivated in the field. Thanks to ancestral knowledge and techniques, hundreds of lost varieties have been revived, and the Potato Park now grows the largest variety of potatoes in Peru – completely organically.

'Agriculture only works if there is diversity. This is especially true in times of climate change when no one knows what the future holds', says Alejandro Argumedo, director of the organization ANDES that assists the Potato Park, <http://www.andes.org.pe/en/> As a back-up system for the future, the Quechua have sent their seed collection to the 'Noah's Ark' of the world's most important plants: the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway.

Katharina Wecker, from the 'New Internationalist', March 2012, spotted by Daphne Vivian-Neale, Norfolk Organic Group

Publications

'The People's Potatoes' by Alan Wilson, is essential reading for potato growers. Reviewing over 400 potato varieties, Alan tackles the challenging issues of modern day potato growing both in gardens and commercial farming. With a special chapter by Dr. Simon Bowen and paintings by award winning artist Caroline Bletsis, this is the book for all potato lovers - 160 full colour pages, hard back

http://www.organiccatalogue.com/p3524/THE-PEOPLEand%2339S-POTATOES-Alan-Wilson/product_info.html

Save Our Soils Campaign

The Save Our Soils campaign was initiated by Nature & More, as a partner in FAO's Global Soil Partnership, which is running from December 2012 until December 2017, the International Year of Soils. The campaign aims to raise consumer awareness about the importance of soil for our health, food security and climate. It wants to make people aware of the problem of degraded soils, and point towards solutions. Last but not least, the campaign aims to activate consumers to get creative and become *soildiers* for a better future. You can read more at <http://sos.natureandmore.com/home.html>

SEEOG library

Please contact Sue, if you wish to change your books, as she has very kindly become our new Librarian! Any book may be borrowed by members at a cost of 20p per book for each 2-month period. There are also back copies of Garden Organic's The Organic Way, the PAN journals, the Soil Association's Living Earth and the Norfolk Organic Group's newsletters.

SEEOG trips

Pat has suggested an Open Day at Writtle College, which we are investigating – any more ideas, please? Open Farm Sunday at the 'Tiptree' Farms is another suggestion.

SEEOG Website - <http://seeog.org.uk/>

There will shortly be some photos of Simon and Mary's trip to Goza last year – look under 'Gallery' and scroll down.

Soil Association news

On 20 November the Soil Association gave evidence to the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee inquiry into Insects and Insecticides. Speaking to MPs on Wednesday 21 November policy director Peter Melchett and policy manager Emma Hockridge called on the Government to take strong action against one of the key culprits causing a catastrophic decline in bee and other pollinator numbers: neonicotinoid pesticides.

The inquiry was held following a decision from Defra to take no action to withdraw neonicotinoid pesticides. The Committee examined the basis on which Defra decided not to take action and whether this course is justified by the available evidence. The Soil Association's Keep Britain Buzzing campaign wants to ban neonicotinoid pesticides and is working to promote bee-friendly organic farming so that everyone can make a difference by simply changing their shopping habits.

<http://www.soilassociation.org/supportus/keepbritainbuzzing>

The Soil Association told the inquiry:

The UK Government is ignoring the strong and quickly growing body of scientific evidence which points to the damaging impact of neonicotinoid pesticides on pollinating insects, including bumblebees and honey bees.

Defra has made commitments to put in place new research to explore further the impacts of neonicotinoids on bumblebees, and have acknowledged that the risks of pesticides to bees needs to be updated, but these plans ignore the weight of existing evidence, and will delay the action that the Government should take now.

Scientists have established that very, very small doses of neonicotinoids, well below what European governments consider a 'safe' level of toxic chemical, can disrupt bee behaviour in ways likely to contribute to the collapse in numbers of honeybees, bumble bees and other pollinating insects.

The European Food Standards Agency has admitted that neonicotinoid and other systemic insecticides have not been properly evaluated ever since their introduction and use of some neonicotinoids has been either banned or suspended in the USA, Germany and France. Italy banned neonicotinoid insecticide use on maize and this led to a halving of winter honey bees deaths over three years. Banning neonicotinoid pesticides need not adversely affect farmers' profits as Italian government research showed.

UK and EU pesticide safety testing is not of an acceptable standard. First, it relies not on science but on industry data, which is not subject to scientific peer-review and publication. Second, there is no requirement for companies to publish all the research they conduct, with the risk that cherry-picked, favourable studies are used to obtain regulatory approval. Third, no safety testing which looks at the impact of repeated, very low doses (below accepted 'safe' levels) of pesticide are required. Fourth, little or no research is done on the impact of likely combinations of pesticides (the cocktail effect) that insects like honey bees and other insects will actually encounter on farms.

You can view a video of the full evidence session on the Parliament TV website at <http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/Player.aspx?meetingId=11852>

The full evidence submitted to the committee can be found at <http://www.soilassociation.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=IEFGyyWI1Ws%3d&tabid=313>

And a comment from Ron: 'What a very interesting nearly two hours of discussion and debate. Buglife and PAN, along with Peter Melchett (SA), provided such good information that the NFU was humiliated with the position on the precautionary principle and their implied incontrovertible evidence not to change was teased out by the very astute science adviser. This illuminating piece is to be recommended to all to watch. We should support both these other organisations!'

Tips and hints

And one from the **Permaculture Association** December E-bulletin: Have you yet to discover the [Orange Pippin](http://www.orange-pippin.com/) website? It's a fantastic website with a directory of apple varieties and a fruit tree register that "aims to be the most comprehensive resource for apples and orchards." Aside from [information on over 600 apple varieties](#) and [listings for over 2,000 apple orchards](#), [register your tree](#) or orchard and get interactive in the [800+ members forum](#). Orange Pippin also has varietal information on [cherries](#) and [plums](#).
<http://www.orange-pippin.com/>

Codling moth and the Tortrix moth and a lot of other moths that damage apple trees: most of our problems came from the Tortrix moth that damages young leaf buds and leads to the leaves having a lacy appearance once they unfold.

On our newly planted apple trees, I searched for them and other pests manually and squashed them. Once the trees establish well, you can cease doing this as they can cope with a certain degree of pest infestation and natural predators might appear if you hold your breath.

In very dry summers, even the established trees in the historic orchard were suffering from Tortrix moth. The best remedy for that so far, applicable even to a larger area, is employing some feathered friends on the ground.

Moths have a certain life cycle. They fall to the ground in initial stages, climb up the trunk and eat the buds, before they let themselves fall down again. With climate change and global warming, this can happen several times a year and any time of the year. (Remember we had 30 Degrees Celsius in March last year). Whatever they do, if chickens are present, they will get them out of the ground. Somebody with good eyesight might even borrow some hens when the time is near.

Maike

Guerilla gardening can easily be carried out even in January. This is what you do: You go to the shops and buy some Garlic and Spring Onions and find out where they come from. They will definitely be from China and Mexico respectively.

You ask the children to find out where these countries are and how far away that is. For example, how far away "far" is, like how many times your Mum or Dad would have to fill up the car or from Ongar to Chelmsford etc..

Then you tell them that there is a simple way of saving energy and present them with onion sets or garlic sets for planting. You decide where you could plant them without being disturbed. This is only weeks to months for the Spring Onion, but over half a year for the garlic. When they gather bunches, they can try to persuade their parents to change their sourcing for these items.

<http://www.guerrillagardening.org/>

And the last comes from Fordhall Farm's 'The Grazer': Always make sure you grow your **garlic** in worm compost that is lightly dug into the soil before planting - <http://www.fordhallfarm.com/index.php>

Q: Help! I've just opened a window to find 30 -40 ladybirds hissing there. If I close the window now I'm going to squash them!!! Are they hibernating? They're very slow...? What shall I do?

A: Ladybirds do hibernate, and in a variety of places, including in leaf litter, gaps in the bark of trees, empty flowerpots and seed-heads and, in fact, anywhere that will give them some shelter over winter. People "tidy-up" their garden and so happily dispose of them, but they are a great asset in the battle against blackfly and the like. Grow something like cardoons and they will over-winter in the seedheads and curled dried leaves...and are then on site to munch lots of green/blackfly next season.

Websites & information

1. Blight Warning! Blightwatch.co.uk has been working together with ADAS to develop this management tool which is available to all users free of charge. You can sign on for alerts at www.blightwatch.co.uk.
2. "Selling allotment produce, is it legal, is it right?" <http://www.organiclea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/sellingallotmentproduce.pdf>
3. Interesting food project <http://www.casseroleclub.com/about> 'Casserole' helps people share extra portions of home-cooked food with others in their area who might not always be able to cook for themselves.
4. What better time to launch a newly energised and revitalised Spiralseed, with a freshly designed website. As well as plenty of articles, videos and information, the new site incorporates Graham Burnett's new 'Spiralshop', making it easier than ever to purchase his publications, tee shirts and DVDs as well as book course and workshop places online. Over the next few weeks and months he will be adding plenty more content, so check back regularly to keep in the loop with developments. <http://spiralseed.co.uk/>
5. Britain in nutrition recession as food prices rise and incomes shrink. Families filling up on high-fat processed foods as 900,000 fewer in two years manage 'five-a-day' fruit and vegetables. [http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/nov/18/breadline-britain-nutritional-recession-austerity?](http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/nov/18/breadline-britain-nutritional-recession-austerity?CMP=twf_fd&utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=dlvr.it)
6. Rivers of Flowers - urban meadows project <http://www.riverofflowers.org/>
7. Eat organic! New study shows the pesticide Roundup (glyphosate) is not properly regulated and appears more often in British bread. <http://www.soilassociation.org/news/newsstory/articleid/4620>

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