

SOUTH EAST ESSEX ORGANIC GARDENERS

NEWSLETTER NO: 115 – MAY 2014

<http://seeog.org.uk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Southendfoodgrowersandproducers>

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

Twitter @seeorganic

<https://twitter.com/seeorganic>

SEEOG 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 SEEOG? If not, we offer free membership on receipt of application form!

Venue

The Cheryl Centre, Growing Together Community Gardens, 47 Fairfax Drive, Southend-on-Sea SS0 9AG (corner of Fairfax Drive and Prittlewell Chase) - please let us know if you have difficulty with transport and we will try to help.

Housekeeping notes: unless stated otherwise, our speakers start at 8.00pm, but Growing Together will be open from 7.00pm to allow members to change their books, etc. The next committee meeting is on Thursday 15 May, 7.30pm at Jane's. Please notify Graham Oster-Ritter at grahamoster@btinternet.com if you wish to receive your newsletter by post/email, or to change your email address.

For future reference, our newsletter copy 'deadlines' are as follows, but please do not wait until the last minute!

July newsletter: Sunday 29 June; September newsletter: Sunday 31 August; November newsletter: Friday 31 October

SEEOG Group Nights/Events/Members' News

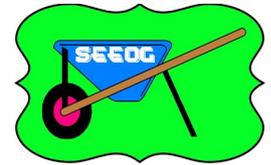
Unfortunately we have had to decline the following invitations, mainly because it is so difficult (nay impossible) these days to obtain help with our stalls: the Discover Wildlife event, in Priory Park; the Central Parks Nursery Open Weekend and more than likely the Southend Tenants & Residents Federation's 13th annual Community Event to be held on 6 August, again in Priory Park - all ideal opportunities to let people know about organic gardening and with the prospect of gaining a few new members.

Very many thanks, everyone, for your contributions – and we look forward to receiving more (short) Members' Profiles in future, plus items on compost making, pests, no-dig, raised beds, planting density, varieties, preserving crops, biodynamic gardening, etc – plus a photo or two for our website, please. Now here are some items from Simon:

Our backyard bees are buzzing! We are delighted to report both our bee hives successfully came through the winter. The early warm spring weather has also meant that both Queens are now very active laying eggs and we have lots of new brood. Here are a few photos taken a week ago or so - <http://seeog.org.uk/> - when Dan from Essex Bees carried out an inspection of both hives to see how things were going. <http://www.essexbees.co.uk/>

If you want to see more honey bees in your backyard, the British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA) have a very handy free factsheet which lists pollen and nectar rich plants for your garden by season. http://www.bbka.org.uk/files/library/pollen_&_nectar_rich_plants_for_your_garden_by_season_june_2011_f_or_website_1310045511.pdf

The BBC website has also put together some fantastic images and information together about bees at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/collections/p007rdq3>



Soil Association

The Wonder of Bees is a new BBC4 TV Series which “follows Martha Kearney's bee-keeping year and explores the science, art and culture of the honeybee, the most ingenious insect known to humankind”.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01t6nz6>

Two new books both available from libraries worth looking out for are “The Urban Beekeeper: A Year of Bees in the City” by Steve Benbow and “Bees and Bee-Keeping” by Derek Hall.

Essex Life Magazine (May 2014) includes an interesting article on the Adopt a Beehive scheme and the experiences of Morag Chase, a beekeeper from Colchester.

Simon

Saturday 10 May: Visit to Crapes Fruit Farm, Rectory Road, Aldham, Colchester C06 3RR

A guided ramble around Crapes Fruit Farm when you will be able to see and hear what they are up to without 'changing' too much! We will have a beaker of apple juice for refreshment and some bottles (their own product). Andrew is looking forward to seeing us at the farm again with plenty of questions! Blossom is about 10 days ahead (written on 23 April), so there will be some small fruitlets to see and hopefully no frost damage to be gloating over. We will car-share for this trip, with estimated time of arrival being 11am. Please contact Carole if you wish to join us asap so that we can forewarn Andrew in good time. More to read at <http://crapec.wordpress.com/author/crapec/>

This is Ben's Diploma site <http://dreadbensdiploma.weebly.com/index.html> - just hover over Projects at the top of the screen to view each of one.

Monday 19 May

Local Food Roots – a film celebrating the local food movement - bringing together the sustainable local food community in one big celebration like never before! This film is the idea of Joy Carey, a member of f3 – the local food consultants who provide strategic planning and policy advice to develop sustainable local food systems and practical advice to private food businesses and community enterprises.
<http://localfoodfilm.org.uk/>

Saturday 5 July, 1.00pm – SEEOG's 20th anniversary

Our friends in the Braintree Organic Gardening Club have invited us, SEEOG members, to a picnic lunch at the home of Sally and Tony Dunn, two of their most long-standing members. They live in Stisted on the A120 on a two acre plot of land. They grow lots of fruit and vegetables and they have a very interesting garden. They even have a wind turbine. They thought if we all met at 1.00pm we could have lunch and a generally relaxing afternoon.

We should have a very enjoyable time meeting some of their members and perhaps pick up tips from each other about running our respective groups. They will very kindly supply lunch but obviously we need to let them how many of us will be going – **can we therefore suggest a deadline, please, of Saturday 28 June?**

Sally and Tony's house, Ballaglass, can be found on Google Maps and, as they run a holiday let, they have a website with an interactive map and details of how to get there, which is:
http://www.ballaglass.co.uk/Ballaglass/Contact_us.html

Monday 21 July

Growing Wildflowers in Urban Gardens, Allotments and Orchards, and what River of Flowers is trying to do in creating trails or “rivers” of native wildflowers as forage and habitat for pollinators’ - presented by Kathryn Lwin, Founder Director of the River of Flowers.
<http://www.riverofflowers.org/city/southend-sea/about-our-river>

Monday 15 September

Natural Beekeeping’ presented by Spencer Christie, Lauriston Farm, Goldhanger. Situated right on the Blackwater Estuary, just outside Goldhanger, Lauriston Farm's 225 acres are managed using biodynamic organic techniques and philosophy inspired by Rudolph Steiner's agriculture lectures from 1924. The farm is home to Rare Breed cattle and sheep, bee hives, laying hens, vegetables and woodland. Eighty-five percent of the farm is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Within this, there are also two listed ancient monuments.

Monday 17 November

Danielle Perkins, Chairman, East Essex Smallholders Group. Formally constituted in July 2011, they are a group of micro farmers who operate different size "smallholdings"; some of them have a few backyard chickens, maybe some grow a few fruit or vegetables, while others may have a pig, small herds/flocks of sheep or even a cow (named Tilly!)

Monday 15 December

An oasis in Benfleet and the last of its kind: Mo Perkins and Hilltop "Pick Your Own" Fruit Farm. Her land is not easy to farm because of the steep slopes, but a visit to her hidden valley is a refreshing and rewarding experience.

Allotment news

SEEOG supporter Jill Poet said she tweeted about the allotment e-Petition and had a comment back from @CommunitiesUK – the Department for Communities and Local Government - that the "petition is untrue with no basis in fact. There are no plans to change things. More here: ow.ly/vOYp0". She added that she trusts that's the case – but at least the petition shows the strength of feeling.

Hockley Parish Council has formed a little sub-committee to oversee their allotment project brief which met for the first time on 30 April. It is now in the process of identifying further pieces of land and arranging visits to neighbouring allotment sites.

And some further items from Simon, for which grateful thanks as we know he is very busy at this time of year:

Spring is here - and so are the weeds! I've tried various tactics to reduce annual weed growth on my plot (though I have a sneaking admiration for the way Dock and Dandelions find their way into even the tiniest of gaps to flourish and flower).

As part of a developing "Beauty and Bounty" approach I like to mix and match flowers with vegetables and herbs - this way I feel you can have plot interest for longer, still get a reasonable harvest and best use the time I spend on the allotment – there's also no need to routinely dig over everything annually and by using plot-generated compost and mulches at the right time you can successfully mix and match.

One square bed measuring 15 foot by 10 foot is covered by self sown Chard, three planted varieties of Rhubarb, Valerian ("Snow cloud" – a nice white variety) and patches of Calendula for a lively shot of orange. I also have Cardoon for their fantastic silver foliage and later on the huge purple thistle-like flowers attract lots of bumble bees which like to crash land on these. The bed is edged with hardy Geraniums, Gaura, a drought tolerant shrub, white flowering Symphytum, Verbascum and a free flowering Clematis complete the picture. All are drought tolerant and easy to look after. Bees seem to be attracted to such beds and by enticing them from neighbouring plots (imagine a big sign – Free pollen and nectar this way – ALL bees welcome); I seem to get very good crops of soft fruit on my beds of red, white and blackcurrants which are sheltered from winds by other climbers such as Clematis.

"Hiding" vegetables in between flowers also seems to keep down damage from birds. Early in the year Rhubarb leaves also act as "suicide crops" for snails - which I can easily find, pick off and re-locate before they do more serious damage later in the season.

It's not perfect and my gardening relies on elements of luck, self-sowing and a healthy input from Mother Nature! But surely growing things shouldn't all be about maximising crop yields – but more about enjoying what you see across a year, listening to your plot come alive with the sound of bees... and worrying less about your weeds.

As an antidote to weeding – put down the trowel and pick up a copy of Richard Mabey's brilliant book "Weeds: How Vagabond Plants Gatecrashed Civilisation and Changed the Way We Think about Nature".
Simon

Chelsea Fringe

SEEOG member Darren has very kindly written to say: 'Thank you for the talk with Richard at SEEOG last Monday, was really enjoyable again - I hope he can come back and talk about Japan sometime, it is an incredibly interesting country! Attached is news of a project I am doing at the Chelsea Fringe this year...' All gardeners do it – point out the barely noticeable weed seedling tucked into the depths of a vast

rhododendron, or apologise over the peony that has collapsed into a soggy heap – as if their companion was aghast and repulsed by the lack of horticultural skill on show.

“You should have seen it last week...” the proud gardener mutters, chastising themselves for their negligence and diving onto their hands and knees, backside thrust into the air, rooting out any stray plants that ruin their vision of perfection.

The companion smiles nervously, wondering why the gardener makes such a fuss... looking around they are content just to be in this outdoor space.

This project aims to give hard working gardeners a break. From May 17th to June 8th 2014, photographers from three different continents will take a new picture of their garden everyday, creating a gallery of plants from different places and climates so we can see exactly how they change over time. With this project, we actually do have the opportunity to see what the garden looked like last week!

You can see what the project is about here at <http://modernmint.co.uk/chelsea-fringe/>

EC proposes to overhaul organic farming rules

The European Commission proposed at the end of March to strengthen rules on organic food production. Farmers would no longer be allowed to practice conventional farming using pesticides if they also produce organic food. And stricter, EU-wide rules would be put in place on the levels of contamination from conventional farming pesticides permitted in organic produce. Currently, member states are able to make their own decisions on this issue.

The Commission says residue levels set out in the 2006 baby food directive should be used but this is likely to be finalised in secondary legislation, a spokesman said. An exemption allowing organic farmers to use non-organic feed would also be scrapped. There is now enough organic feed on the market, the spokesman said. Seeds and reproductive materials should be 100% organic by 2021. The system of inspections in the organic food chain would be extended to focus more strongly on processing and distribution.

Organic farming makes up 5.4% of the total agricultural area in the EU but production is not keeping step with demand, the Commission said. The market for organic food in the EU has quadrupled in the past decade but organic land only doubled, which could limit the associated environmental benefits.

The proposal aims to boost consumer confidence in certified organic food and to make it easier for farmers to switch to organic production. It would enable small farmers to sign up to group certification schemes, cutting administrative costs. Either contact valerie.flynn@haymarket.com or visit the IFOAM website at http://www.ifoam-eu.org/sites/default/files/page/files/ifoameu_reg_regulation_proposal_pr_20140324.pdf

Farmers' Markets 2014

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 16 May, Friday 20 June, Friday 18 July, Friday 15 August, Friday 19 September, Friday 17 October, Friday 14 November and Saturday 20 December from 9:00 – 12:00

Rochford in the WI Hall, Market Square on (Saturday) 3 May, 7 June, 5 July, 2 August, 6 September, 4 October, 1 November and 6 December from 09:30 – 12:00

Friends of Yalding Organic Gardens

For the benefit of our new members, Yalding Organic Gardens started with the generous gift of 10 acres of land, and a sum of money in trust, from Donald and Pixie Cooper, who owned an organic farm at Yalding; with the intention of setting up a display garden for the Henry Doubleday Research Association – now Garden Organic. You can read more of Yalding's background history at <http://www.foyog.org/> FOYOG have apparently heard nothing further from the Congelaw Trust, or anyone else connected with the Gardens apart from a new website for “Yalding Gardens Weddings & Events”, apparently launching in the Spring. The website describes the Gardens as “Kent's premier wedding venue” and also as being available for hire for charity and corporate events and private parties. There appears to be no mention of public access, or organic growing – other than a reference to the site's original name. Please do try to publicise the Gardens' plight by forwarding this link to anyone you think may be interested and, of course, feel free to post any comments or observations; either on the website, or on their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/FoYOG> <http://www.foyog.org/>

Garden Organic news

Garden Organic has a new logo and website. The new site uses a modern content management system so it will be much, much easier to keep it up-to-date. They feel it has a fresh, light design with an open feel and that it quite shamelessly puts organic growing first.

A real achievement in its day, the 'old' site was comprehensive but difficult to maintain. It originated this millennium (just), but wasn't designed to work on your iPad and smartphone - they didn't even exist then. And it had grown - well, organically - resulting in a lot of duplication, which made it rather rambling. It was high time to pension it off. But as it's such a big site, they have decided to tackle the task in three distinct phases.

Phase One (now complete) involved getting the most widely-used content onto the new site. A few specialist sections (e.g. Education, Research, HSL) are still mainly on the 'old' site at present. They'll move this summer, in Phase Two. For the time being, the Members' Area in its entirety remains on the 'old' site. It will be moved in the third phase, this autumn.

So until this autumn you'll find yourself switching between the new and 'old' sites occasionally. They've created a 'transfer page' to do that smoothly. It pauses for a few seconds before taking you to the 'old' site automatically. Once you're used to it, pressing the 'Transfer' button will move you over immediately. For most people, this halfway stage shouldn't be too taxing, but for the inconvenience it's bound to cause a few people, they apologise right now.

They want your feedback on the new site, so they've made it easy to send them a message using the Contact Us menu button on the right-hand side of the screen at <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/contact> If you're using a mobile phone, it'll be nearer the bottom of the page. When the content's too wide for your device, the right-hand sections drop down so as not to squash important information. It's called 'responsive' design and means that the one-in-three of you who already use their site with a handheld device will have a much better experience from now on.

Please have a good look round and then tell them what you think.

<http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/contact>

GM Watch Review 340, 17 March

This particular item drew our attention, re the authors of a report calling for GM crops to be fast-tracked into Britain's farms and kitchens all have links to the industry - though the Science Media Centre presented it as the work of "independent" scientists and it was published by a government advisory body. The scientist authors included Jonathan Jones, who founded a biotech company that has Monsanto as a major client. GM Watch's Claire Robinson was quoted in the Daily Mail as saying: 'By no stretch of the imagination can these people be described as independent scientists. Their views should be treated with the same scepticism we would apply to any sales pitch.'

GM Watch is an independent organisation that seeks to counter the enormous corporate political power and propaganda of the biotech industry and its supporters. You can read on at <http://www.gmwatch.org/index.php/about>

Green Books

Charles Dowding is launching his new book *Gardening Myths and Misconceptions* on 16 May. Last month Green Books took a trip to see Jack First, author of *Hot Beds: how to grow early crops using an age-old technique* at his open day. You can also take a look at the books they have coming out later this year by going to: http://www.greenbooks.co.uk/forthcoming.html?mc_cid=05b21cac53&mc_eid=a9718ad00c

How Does Your Garden Grow?

Outline Productions is a TV production company and the makers of BBC2's 'The Great British Garden Revival' and are currently making a brand new series which explores Britain's beautiful private gardens.

They're looking for people who would like to showcase their stunning, imaginative or unique gardens to the nation, no matter what style, shape or size. Does your garden represent peace and tranquillity? Is your garden fit for entertaining? Are you the proud owner of a National Collection? Perhaps it's a tropical paradise or has an impressive prize winning fruit and veg patch? They are looking for people to apply and go head to head in a competition with other garden lovers to compare and critique who has the best garden/ gardening skills and hospitality in town.

They are very keen to base one of their episodes in the Essex area and would love to reach as many local gardeners or gardening enthusiasts as possible to encourage applications to the show and represent some of the finest gardens Essex has to offer.

Is SEEEOG the perfect group to contact? Well, Carole did ring Talitha Smith of Outline Productions to find out a little more – you can contact Talitha by phone (0207 424 7626) or email talithas@outlineproductions.co.uk if you have any questions or would like to discuss further.

John Walker: sustainable sowing

Instead of giving any more time to the myths about sowing in peat-free composts, put them to the test. You'll find they do the job as well as peat – without the ecological price-tag. Award-winning gardening and environment writer John Walker discusses how at <http://www.hartley-botanic.co.uk/featured-blogs/john-walker/sustainable-sowing>

The Soil Association is also looking at peat-free composts, as part of their Duchy Originals Future Farming Programme field labs. Find out more at <http://www.soilassociation.org/innovativefarming/duchyoriginalsfuturefarmingprogramme/fieldlabs/composts>

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 in order to keep down costs.

Putting Food at the Heart of Local Policy

The proceedings of the first national Sustainable Food Cities conference are now online at the link below. The conference was a sell-out with over 120 people attending from all over the UK – participants included officers from local authorities, representatives from community groups, academics and NGOs. The theme of the conference was how to embed food into relevant policy and strategies at a local level, from economic development and planning to health and wellbeing and sustainability.

We would say that any Council that takes a negative stance does so at their peril. Planning is extremely relevant and necessary for securing sustainable and resilient food systems at any scale. Food is a land use issue and globally, the UN, EU and across the UK people and organisations are making excellent progress in integrating Planning with Food at policy level. There is much current evidence for this, as well as advice and guidance, starting here at <http://www.sustainweb.org/publications/?id=192>
<http://sustainablefoodcities.org/newsevents/news/articleid/100/putting-food-at-the-heart-of-local-policy>

SEEEOG library

Please contact Sue if you wish to change your books. 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 The Organic Way, the PAN journals, the Soil Association's Living Earth and the Norfolk Organic Group's newsletters. We have two new books in stock: 'The Polytunnel Handbook' and 'How to grow food in your polytunnel'.

S E Essex Women's Environmental Network

Eileen says she has found a very friendly/helpful family business called Meadow in my Garden - they even sent her a free sample! If you are looking for an organic way to combat those dastardly aphids (and aren't we all?) you can't do better than take a look at a company called In My Garden Ltd who specialise in meadow flower seeds which are specially selected to combat aphids while being friendly to pollinating insects. The company say they are low maintenance ... low watering ... supply 3 - 4 months of flowers and are generally good for the environment. You can contact them by either visiting www.meadowinmygarden.co.uk or calling them on 01380 724963. Of course, you can also purchase your seeds from The Organic Gardening Catalogue at <http://www.organiccatalogue.com>

Soil Association news

Help us Save Our Seed today: <http://www.soilassociation.org/saveourseeds>

In the EU just five companies control a staggering 95% of our seeds. Ben Raskin, Head of Horticulture,

wrote on 19 March: I've always been fascinated by seed and how such a tiny thing can hold such complexity and potential. Being part of the entire cycle of life, from sowing seed and growing the vegetable through to saving seed for replanting, is part of what makes growing so wonderful. It's also astonishing how quickly plants begin to adapt to new surroundings or changing growing conditions. We live in uncertain climatic times and I can't believe that mankind, and more specifically the lumbering bureaucracy of Europe, can better safeguard our agricultural genetics than nature's own ability to adapt (with a little bit of help).

Of course we need skilled plant breeders, and I'm all in favour of innovation and progress in seed production. It's also clear that the advent of F1 hybrids has brought benefits to many growers (particularly of some crops such as brassicas). However I am really concerned about the disappearance of open pollinated varieties and the creeping concentration of genetic ownership into the hands of a very small number of seed companies.

The current EU legislation is over-complicated and not fit for purpose, and what's more has contributed to the 75% loss of agricultural diversity estimated by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation. The proposed replacement "Plant Reproductive Material" legislation has been devised by the Commission to suit large scale farming at both seed and crop production levels. It is clear that a different legal framework is needed for small and medium scale farming, one that removes rather than creates restraints, and supports rather than blocks diversity. There are clear precedents for this, for instance in America - where there is much less regulation over variety there is a thriving seed industry at all levels of production.

While it is heartening that MEPs recognised that the legislation was not fit for purpose and voted overwhelmingly (650 to 15) to reject it in its current form we're very worried that the Commission appears to be driving it forward without taking on board any of the comments or amendments made by the EU parliament. And you can read on at <http://www.soilassociation.org/blogs/latestblog/article/943/safeguarding-our-living-gene-bank>

The latest news on Keeping Britain Buzzing is that In March the Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) announced it was holding a public consultation on its 'national pollinator strategy' – its policy plan for protecting the health of bees and other pollinators. The Soil Association welcomes the initiative but think it needs to be radically strengthened, for example to be stronger in its support for organic farming with its proven benefits for wildlife including pollinators. We had to circulate this information by email because the consultation closed at the beginning of May. <http://www.soilassociation.org/keepbritainbuzzing>

Websites and information

Pleased bees rescued! More about this latest bee adventure can be seen on Southend Museum's blog: <http://southendmuseum.wordpress.com/2014/04/25/our-bees-take-to-the-wing/>
http://www.southend.gov.uk/news/article/130/pleased_bees_rescued

SEEOG committee

Ron Bates	Chair	01702 477681	anebates@hotmail.co.uk
Ray How	Vice-Chair	01702 544632	ray.how@btopenworld.com
Ane Bates	Treasurer	01702 477681	anebates@hotmail.co.uk
Graham Oster-Ritter	Membership	01702 558871	grahamoster@btinternet.com
Violet Poulten	Minutes	01268 768391	violetpoulten@talktalk.net
Carole Shorney	Secretary	01702 201914	caroleshorney@hotmail.com
Vic Shorney	Committee	01702 201914	caroleshorney@hotmail.com
Jane Ponton	Committee	01268 565776	JaneAPonton@hotmail.com
Kamil Pachalko	Committee	07411 457 259	kamilpac@gmail.com
