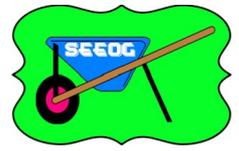


SOUTH EAST ESSEX ORGANIC GARDENERS

NEWSLETTER NO: 133 – MAY 2017

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

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/43705483846/>



Soil Association

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, notes etc.

This month, we welcome all our new members and look forward to meeting you at Growing Together Westcliff when we welcome Jeff Barber, Eastern Region representative of the National Allotment Society. Please use the entrance in Prittlewell Chase, Westcliff-on-Sea SS0 9AG (corner of Fairfax Drive and Prittlewell Chase). Our speakers start at 20.00 sharp, but Growing Together is always open from 19.00 to prepare the room, etc.

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

For future reference, our newsletter copy 'deadlines' for 2017 are as follows:

July	-	Friday 23 June
September	-	Friday 25 August
November	-	Friday 27 October
January	-	Friday 22 December

The Spring Planting Session at Leigh Community Centre last month was a great opportunity to connect with people in the community and promote SEEEOG and its principles. The feedback Jane and Sharon received from the parents/carers was very positive: they said it was priced right, they felt they learnt a lot and the activities were ideal for the age group. Sharon has since drawn up a list of items which can or cannot go into a compost bin. There's more that could be added but it's a good starting reference for beginners. Ideas are also in the pipeline for a more child-friendly one or even create a game/chart? You can have a look at her chart at <http://seeog.org.uk/2017/04/spring-planting-session-compost-list/>

Saturday 13 May: May Fayre at Growing Together Westcliff, 11:00 – 14:00

They're very excited at Trust Links HQ as their May Pole for the May Fayre has arrived!!! This is taking place at Growing Together Westcliff - make sure the date is in your diary!!!

Monday 15 May

'How Deep is your Green?' Jeff Barber, Eastern Region representative of the National Allotment Society, takes a historical look at the emergence of 'green' and 'organic'.

Saturday 20 May, 10:00 – 15:00: SEEEOG stall at Plant and Craft Market, Leigh Road Baptist Church, Leigh-on-Sea – we need plants, please!

Saturday 27 May, SEEEOG stall at Canvey Island Wildlife Day, RSPB West Canvey Marsh, 11:00 – 16:00

Wednesday 7 June: SEEEOG stall at Essex Schools Food & Farming Day, Writtle College

Saturday 24 June, 10:00

Visit to Kings Seeds, Kelvedon, including their famed sweet pea display and seed production area. Provisional bookings now, please, as at the moment we have only allowed for 12 people.

Monday 17 July

Colin Turner, Seekay Horticultural Supplies, a family run business based in Shoeburyness. They supply quality flower/vegetable seeds and garden sundries.

Colin told us earlier this year (as you probably already know) that the organic licensing bodies are having a tough time at present with the possibility of new legislation etc. coming into effect in the next few years.

This could have a very dramatic effect on the UK's organic produce and the ability to purchase sustainable amounts of seed at realistic prices. It would seem that farming was somewhat forgotten when the vote to leave the EU was taken.

As a business, they are looking to move forward with the organic side of their business but, as you can imagine, the future is very uncertain. Several of their usual UK suppliers have started to reduce their ranges and some have even pulled out of organics totally. They think the problem is not just caused by the Brexit vote but also by the cost of licensing such endeavours.

Colin would be more than happy to talk about any part of the organic business, from advice to what the future may hold. If you have any ideas as to what you would like to discuss/participate in, he can get a better view on what he would be able to bring to the discussion.

<http://seekay.co.uk/>

Sunday 3 September: Manchester Drive Allotment Society Open Day

11:00 to 15:00 - Manchester Drive (opposite Cricketfield Grove), Leigh-on-Sea, SS9 3EZ

Free admission – there'll be plenty to see and do. As usual, hoping for good weather and lovely music!

Monday 18 September

Tracy Mackness, The Giggly Pig Company

As Tracy Mackness describes in her website, she is an Essex bad girl turned good. She is now the owner of the successful "farm to fork" Giggly Pig Company, with its distinctive pink and black vans and its slogan "No fat or crap in our sausages!" She is passionate about pigs, farming and the challenges of running a small business. She has also written a book about her past called 'Jail Bird: The Life and Crimes of an Essex Bad Girl'.

<http://www.gigglypig.co.uk/index.html>

Monday 20 November

John Little, Green Roof Shelters

Green Roof Shelters Ltd brings together some of the foremost experts in green roofs planted for biodiversity, designing habitat creation and low maintenance native planting, alongside designers experienced in producing buildings, structures, and retrofit products that enhance our environment. These include John Little, Dusty Gedge, Dan Monck, Duncan Kramer. <http://greenroofshelters.co.uk/>

Allotment Bird Survey 2016

More at <http://seeog.org.uk/2016/01/seeog-allotment-birdtrack-2016/>

For more information, please email ga.adamson@gmail.com

Allotment news

1. National Allotments Week 2017: 14 to 20 August

What are you doing for National Allotments Week? This year, their theme is "Growing the Movement" - a celebration of all the hard work put in by voluntary association management committees, plotholder volunteers and councils managing, creating, developing and safeguarding sites. So let's tell the world about our thriving movement; they want to hear about new sites, site regeneration and innovative projects across the UK to include in their National Allotments Week press release. Please email diane@nsalg.org.uk with details.

2. Ray, Vic and Carole attended the NSA regional meeting last month at Bedfords Park Walled Garden, Havering Atte Bower, Romford. It's a community-focused food growing space on the edge of London. It sits within a nature reserve and an historical setting. The aim of the garden is to teach people about food, growing their own, giving valuable life skills to some and 'skills for working' to others. There are gardening clubs for the new and the experienced as well as many events, workshops and activities to enjoy whether you're a gardener or not. To learn more, you can visit their website at <http://bedfordswalledgarden.org/>

Crapes Fruit Farm:

1. 'I like to be a busy, busy, bee!' Especially when the apple blossoms are beginning to open and their nectar is so succulent. Some chilly days and nights have featured through April though to date - 20th - no damaging frosts have occurred. We are surrounded by bare arable fields so the warmth which the soil has absorbed from the sun during the daytime is lost back to the atmosphere at night time all around us (warm air rises). Within the orchard our army of earthworms have done sterling work during the winter, as evidenced by the number of worm casts and the springiness of the sward as we walk between the trees. Warm air will rise through the night via the worm channels, also contributing to warming the worst of any chill.

It is not always good to look back at previous years, though here at Crapes the serious frosts of April and May 1997 will never be forgotten.

Some pests are showing themselves, though Vapoura larvae are much less evident this spring. Some Apple blossom weevil and the first few Tortrix larvae can be found within the growing tips of some shoots. Chilly weather and actively nesting hungry birds will help reduce these.

So, yes, we always have an eye over our shoulder at this time of year with regard to early dawn temperatures and the safety of the various stages of blossom bud flowers and eventually, fruitlets. The latest damaging frost here was 6th June 1990.

There is a limit to how long the blossom nectar will remain succulent as this long dry spell continues. If it dries, then it is not attractive to pollinating insects.

Our vegetable area also needs a few properly wet days to enable the germinated seedlings to develop.

2. Early Blossom Thoughts

Headline reports of meteorological records being broken don't necessarily make for happy growers and farmers! We have to admit that the dryish winter and spring enabled much outdoor work to be achieved. Both air temperatures and moisture availability are crucial for a successful blossom time to actually bear some fruit for later in the year.

Both plum and cherry have bloomed during good sunny weather and plenty of insects have been about. The apple trees have begun flowering about 7- 10 days earlier than average - three weeks earlier than 2016 and one week later than 2015! Fortunately this very warm spell is to be followed by cooler conditions, although rainfall still eludes us here. Yes, we need warm sun for pollinating insects but not so hot as to dry the flowers thus making them unattractive with poor quality nectar. This spell of unseasonably warm days has already yielded some hatched Vapoura moth larvae. Apple sawfly will be flying now. Preferred conditions for the next six weeks include some much needed rainfall with associated cloud and breezes to fend off overnight frosts.

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

Farmers' Markets 2017

These are the two markets where we have a stall and always appreciate help, produce and plants where available! We would like to put a request in now for seasonal produce/products/gifts to sell at the December markets – even bird boxes, planters, etc?

Leigh-on-Sea Town Council's Farmers' Market at Leigh Community Centre, 71-73 Elm Road, Leigh-on-Sea, 09:00 to 12:00, apart from December (08:30)

Friday on 19 May, 16 June, 21 July, 18 August, 15 September, 20 October, 17 November and Saturday 23 December

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1818935024986153/>

Rochford at the WI Hall, West Street, 09:30 to 12:00

Saturdays on 6 May, 3 June and 1 July (further dates to be announced)

<https://www.facebook.com/rochfordfarmersmarket>

Garden Organic news

For four fantastic days, BBC Gardeners' World Live will be the garden party of the year as BBC2's Gardeners' World turns 50 – and Garden Organic will be there, 15 - 18 June at Birmingham's NEC!

Described by Monty Don on air as 'our big anniversary bash', this year BBC Gardeners' World Live features:

- The BBC TV team filming on Thursday for the 1-hour anniversary special airing on BBC2 the next evening
- The crowning of the much-anticipated Gardeners' World Golden Jubilee Plant
- Anniversary Show Gardens packed with iconic garden styles from the past 50 years
- Past and present Gardeners' World presenters including Monty Don and Alan Titchmarsh and newly confirmed Diarmuid Gavin and Peter Seabrook
- Themed Beautiful Borders and birthday cake created exclusively by Nadiya Hussain

The Show is full of inspiration - brimming with garden ideas, shopping and a fantastic line-up of experts. All this plus entry to the BBC Good Food Show included in your ticket, too.

Take a further look here for details of what's on at the show at <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/news/bbc-gardeners%E2%80%99-world-live-15-18-june-nec-birmingham>

GM news

1. GM Freeze, which we joined earlier this year, is the UK's umbrella campaign on GM food, crops and patents. Formed in 1999 as the Five Year Freeze, they became a not-for-profit registered company in 2005. Their members include large national charities, small specialist organisations, scientists, farmers, retailers and grassroots campaigners. It is run by a small staff team and a management committee of representatives from member organisations, elected each year at the Annual General Meeting. They now have a good selection of leaflets available, plus their newsletter 'Thin Ice' and Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

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

2. Glyphosate: Harmless tool or sneaky poison?

It's great that the MEP Pavel Poc is hosting a scientific conference in the European Parliament on the health risks of glyphosate herbicides. Among the speakers will be Helmut Burtcher, of the NGO GLOBAL2000, who will talk about the new report that shows glyphosate producers are "buying science" to keep the chemical on the market.

However, there is one important omission. The list of speakers doesn't yet include one of the authors of an important new research study. This study is the first ever to establish a causative link between a glyphosate herbicide formulation at real-world exposure levels and a serious disease — fatty liver disease. Fatty liver disease is a risk factor for liver cancer, so there is a connection with the cancer issue that has made headlines since IARC classified glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen.

<http://gmwatch.org/news/latest-news/17589-glyphosate-harmless-tool-or-sneaky-poison>

Manure/Compost

This information is now on our website, apart from updates, of course, which we trust won't inconvenience too many people.

Members' contributions

1. Capture Carbon In Your Garden

For the 2017 Chelsea Fringe, Modern Mint will be detailing ways you can capture carbon in your own garden. Check out the blog post detailing what you can do to sequester carbon and improve your carbon footprint, your soil and your plants here - <http://modernmint.co.uk/capture-carbon/> - and look out for further posts exploring the theme, who influenced us to make this project and who else is capturing carbon by searching for the #capturecarbon hashtag. You can see Darren's photo at <http://seeog.org.uk/>

2. Gozo Growing: Plants, Pots, Bologna

You know what it's like. You find yourself standing outside high garden walls, catching tantalising glimpses of what lies beyond. All the while wondering what must it be like on the other side of those gates and hoping to someday get the opportunity to look around the place!

This became reality for us recently, when we (Simon and Mary) managed to get through the gates of the working estate and gardens of Villa Bologna in Attard on Malta. I'd been intrigued by the place for a while, and was keen to discover more about the history of the fine 18th century Maltese house, gardens and grounds. The visit proved an ideal opportunity to learn more about the ongoing efforts by a small team of staff and volunteers to restore the gardens using organic growing methods.

You can read their whole story, plus wonder at their stunning photos, at <http://seeog.org.uk/2017/04/gozo-growing-5-plants-pots-bologn/#more-4871>

3. The ruttneri black bee, an endemic species of the island of Malta, was first identified in 1997, by a group of researchers. It was named ruttneri to honour the Austrian entomologist Friedrich Ruttner, who in the 1950s visited Malta and collected data on local bees. Ruttner believed that the Mediterranean was an important centre for the biodiversity of *Apis mellifera*, even if it originally stems from further east. There are many sub-species in the areas around the Mediterranean Sea, not only in Malta, but also in Crete, Cyprus and Sicily. <http://www.fondazioneSlowFood.com/en/ark-of-taste-slow-food/ruttneri-bee/>

4. Wild Thyme Honey by Dr Noel Buttigieg

The production of honey and the art of beekeeping in Malta have a long-standing history. Wild thyme honey, locally known as għasel tas-sagħtar, mainly originates from the naturally growing wild thyme of the Maltese Islands. Honey is used locally in the production of several types of sweets and savouries. Similar to several Mediterranean communities, the Arab culinary influence had its effects on the use of honey particularly with sweets: ħelwa, kagħak, kavati, maqrut, qastanija, xkunvat and qubbajd. Recently, Slow Food Malta registered wild thyme honey as part of the Ark of Taste. The aim is to protect quality products, local breeds and to understand how communities have preserved them over time. <http://www.fondazioneSlowFood.com/en/ark-of-taste-slow-food/wild-thyme-honey/>

5. Meet Girl Next Door Honey, the woman rescuing millions of honey bees from extermination and giving them new homes in backyards across San Diego!

<https://www.facebook.com/RobGreenfield/videos/1160137600779983/?>

[autoplay_reason=all_page_organic_allowed&video_container_type=0&video_creator_product_type=2&pp_id=2392950137&live_video_guests=0](https://www.facebook.com/RobGreenfield/videos/1160137600779983/?autoplay_reason=all_page_organic_allowed&video_container_type=0&video_creator_product_type=2&pp_id=2392950137&live_video_guests=0)

6. Gozo Growing: April 2017

What a difference a year makes! Twelve months on we have just about recovered from one of the worst droughts the island of Gozo had experienced in a very long time. The good news is that over the previous winter and into this spring, we have had good spells of rain, and even hail, as intense showers or dramatic thunderstorms lasting for just a few minutes passed over the Maltese Islands. The impact of the rain has been amazing and the countryside around our village has been transformed into a green and floral delight - with wildflowers, bulbs and trees seemingly in bloom across large parts of the Gozitan countryside. The full text, plus a few recent photos of the plot to show you how things are looking right now, is at <http://seeog.org.uk/2017/04/gozo-growing-4-april-2017/>

7. Brian Halweil of the Worldwatch Institute has compared the quality of products from current conventional farming with the quality of food produced in the 40s and 50s, and that of current organic foodstuffs. And here is what he has discovered. The loss of quality of nutrition in "modern" foods, which Weston Price discovered in the first decades of the 1900s, has gradually worsened as industrial agricultural techniques and processing of food has been increasingly "perfected", and has become more mass-oriented. It is due to these farming techniques that there is a profound difference in the quality of conventional food products and those that are organic or biodynamic. But why exactly is this? <http://www.perchebio.com/site/index.php/english/611-is-organic-better>

8. Industrial designer Anna Haldewang has created a bee-like drone that could replace real bees in pollinating flowers, should the population die out. Aptly named 'plan bee' the prototype is a self-sustainable device that works peacefully alongside nature in order to continue to growth of plants by cross-pollination. The project draws parallels with earlier research from this year by Japanese scientist Eijiro Miyako, who successfully pollinated a flower using a \$100 drone from Amazon covered with patches of horse hair.

<http://www.designboom.com/technology/haldewag-plan-bee-drone-03-03-2017/?>

[utm_content=buffer8140b&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer](http://www.designboom.com/technology/haldewag-plan-bee-drone-03-03-2017/?utm_content=buffer8140b&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

9. George Monbiot: "We have sixty years of harvest left"

"According to the UN Food and Agriculture organisation, we have sixty years of harvest left at current rates of soil loss and degradation... no one is talking about this"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65usnzkhIR0&feature=youtu.be>

10. How to Build a Mason Bee Nest

Mason bees are just one of the 4,000 species of bees native to the United States. They don't live in hives like honeybees, but instead are solitary bees and make nests in hollow stems or holes in wood. In my last post, I talked about how nesting sites are one of the key elements to a pollinator garden. It's super easy to welcoming these native bees to your garden by making a mason bee nest!

<http://sweetbeegarden.com/build-mason-bee-nest/>

11. Planting for Bees, a Cosmic Garden & A New Saw

Top tip: Plant Helenium in your garden, a fantastic daisy that often gets the 'Chelsea Chop' in late spring. It provides a massive nectar buffet for the bees!

When a disease wiped out all the plants in his garden, Fernando Caruncho had the chance to start again and make something new ... See how his minimalist garden of evergreens has been transformed into something cosmic.... or should that be cosmos?

It has arrived, our lightning quick, make pruning easier, fold up and fit in your pocket pruning saw...

<http://modernmint.co.uk/>

12. Join Friends of the Earth for the Great British Bee Count from 19 May to 30 June 2017 and discover the wonderful world of bees in our gardens, streets and green spaces this summer. Bees are essential: we rely on them to pollinate many of the plants in our landscape, including most of our fruit and veg. But right now they're in trouble. Since 1900, the UK has lost 20 species of bee and a further 35 are considered under threat of extinction. So it's vital that we better understand how they're doing across the country. You can help by counting and recording all the bees you see this summer with their free app.

<https://act.foe.co.uk/act/join-great-british-bee-count>

13. Earthworms for a better Earth! "This spring, join your fellow scientists across the country by conducting your own earthworm survey to help map where they are, better understand the vital benefits they bring, and ultimately, help protect them."

<https://www.earthwormwatch.org/welcome-science-education>

14. We meet the volunteers of Forty Hall Vineyard - a 10-acre organic vineyard in north London just within the M25. The vineyard is the first commercial scale vineyard in London since the Middle Ages and is run and managed by the local community. They planted the first vines in 2009 and are now producing their own English still and sparkling wines. Forty Hall is also a local food project and provides volunteering opportunities and health and well-being benefits to a wide range of local people. Philippa Hall visits the vineyard at the peak of Spring pruning to hear about how the project got off the ground. We have visited once or twice and it's well worth the effort.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08n1zyk>

15. If you are using Dalefoot seed compost could you please give us feedback on germination success or not; whether you mixed it; if so, with what? Maureen has raised this and Ron is running a trial of their seed compost with perlite per Maureen and also 50% added sharp sand to see what happens.

For those who have Heritage seed, could you please spread the plants to others for diverse growing places and seed saving?

16. Allotments: Council Provision - 06 March 2017

Question asked by Baroness Sharples: To ask Her Majesty's Government, in the light of the Statement by Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth on 7 February on the Housing White Paper, what steps they are taking to ensure that councils continue to provide suitable plots for allotments.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2017-03-06/debates/FD1CF687-AF0E-47B0-BCEF-6C87B1E37F53/AllotmentsCouncilProvision>

17. Do read this fascinating set of articles. The Natural Beekeeping Trust describes its new joint venture with Northern Bee Books, the international Journal for Bee-Centered Husbandry. Feel free to share these with any local bee contacts; someone might out themselves as a natural beekeeper. You will find the pdf of issue 1 here at <http://www.naturalbeekeepingtrust.org/natural-bee-husbandry>

18. This room from Ikea is actually a garden that can feed a neighbourhood

[https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/ikea-growroom-community-garden/?](https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/ikea-growroom-community-garden/?utm_source=iterable&utm_campaign=UK_3_March_2017_content_digest_alive&utm_medium=email)

[utm_source=iterable&utm_campaign=UK_3_March_2017_content_digest_alive&utm_medium=email](https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/ikea-growroom-community-garden/?utm_source=iterable&utm_campaign=UK_3_March_2017_content_digest_alive&utm_medium=email)

19. Malta's fruit and veg top EU pesticide tests

Maltese fruit and veg are the most likely to contain illegal levels of pesticides in all of Europe, a new report has found. European Food Safety Authority has confirmed that locally grown produce is more than twice as likely to exceed the acceptable pesticide levels as the EU average. More than five per cent of the Maltese produce tested by the authorities in 2015 was over the limit for chemicals sprayed by farmers. The EU average was less than two per cent. The local situation in 2014 was actually twice as bad, the report adds.

<http://www.timesofmalta.com/mobile/articles/view/20170423/local/maltas-fruit-and-veg-tops-eu-pesticide-tests.645933>

20. Wander around the local supermarket and you will struggle to find any clues to the environmental impact of the food you eat. If you are lucky, some of the seafood might bear the mark of the Marine Stewardship Council, which certifies fish caught in a sustainable way, but that's about it. Yet farming is the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide, only slightly behind heating and electricity. And while it's relatively easy to cut emissions from electricity by switching to solar, reducing emissions from farming is a tougher nut to crack.

You might think buying local food is always preferable to imported food when it comes to carbon emissions, but even this is not a reliable guide. Food flown thousands of miles can still have a much lower carbon footprint than, say, local produce grown in heated greenhouses. The one label you're likely to find on many food items is the "organic" one. But if you care about the environment, don't buy it (it's not healthier either, but that's another story). For starters, you are not helping wildlife. Yes, organic farms host a greater diversity of wildlife than conventional ones. But because the yields are lower, organic farms require more land, which in the tropics often means cutting down more rainforests. And organic food also results in higher greenhouse gas emissions than conventional farming.

You can read the full article at https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg23231022-900-stop-buying-organic-food-if-you-really-want-to-save-the-planet/?utm_campaign=Echobox&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook

21. Food is Free Project: "A street in Brooklyn has vegetables growing for people to pick for free, amazing idea. #foodisfree" - Danny Tyler

<https://www.facebook.com/foodisfree/photos/a.233384676748311.57857.201890633231049/1311150662305035/?type=3>

With grateful thanks to Simon and Mary, Darren and Ron

New members

Earlier this year the Committee decided to recruit new members by offering incentives to anyone joining on Potato Day. This incentive consisted of 16 months' membership for the price of 12, a free draw for a gift voucher to value of £20 and a visit to an organic garden or allotment.

It has been decided to extend the draw to all members who renew their subs by Sunday 30 July 2017. The draw will take place on September Group Night.

Pesticide Action Network UK

PAN UK really needs your support!

We know that our politicians are finalising their manifestos for the upcoming election. We need to let them know, urgently, that we want tighter legislation on the use of pesticides in the UK as we leave the EU. They are a very small charity, but they have a big vision - to see the UK become a world leader in pesticide policy and regulation! But they need your help to get us there. Please click on the link below and take 30 seconds to send an email to your MP. And please encourage others to do so. Thank you for your support! <http://pan-uk.eaction.org.uk/lobby/m>

Pesticide Action Network North America

Right now, the very existence of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is being challenged by the people who are in charge of it, and by legislators who see it as a job-killing nuisance. Instead of tearing it down, let's focus on its mission — protecting our health and the natural environment — and make sure that it's helping those who need it most. In 1970, various federal anti-pollution efforts were merged to become the EPA in response to President Nixon's pledge "to repair the damage already done, and to establish new criteria to guide us in the future."

You can read on at <http://www.panna.org/blog/perfect-good-epa> and <http://www.panna.org/>

SEEOG library

Any book may be borrowed by members at a cost of 20p per book for each 2-month period. We would very much like to hear from anyone who could take out a few of the books from the cupboard and set them out on Group Night. Our Library needs to be used more!

Just recently, SEEOG member Mrs Betty Pudsey kindly donated her late husband's collection of HDRA booklets for which we are extremely grateful. And we have since been contacted by Ruth Bartram concerning gardening magazines and books found in the course of clearing her sister's house in Hadleigh. Betty's collection at least will be in the Library by Group Night.

SEEOG raffle

After complaints about excessive noise during the drawing of the raffle on Group Nights, the Committee has decided on a different approach. We are now employing the speaker to draw the raffle after his/her presentation, followed by tea, speaking to the speaker etc.

S E Essex Women's Environmental Network

S E Essex Women's Environmental Network invites you to their meeting on Thursday 18 May when a speaker from the Essex Bat Group will be telling us about their work. They've also asked her to say something about how wildlife is generally faring in Essex. The meeting is at 19:00 at the RELATE offices in Southend - 29 Harcourt Avenue, Southend-on-Sea SS2 6HT. Tea and coffee will be served for a small donation.

Sheffield University Allotment Project

We have been asked to spread the word about MYHarvest (Measure Your Harvest), which is an opportunity to participate in an exciting research project that will estimate the contribution people who grow their own fruit and vegetable crops are making to UK national food production. Perhaps you could include information in your newsletters to plot-holders or put a link on your allotment page www.myharvest.org.uk

At present, there is a recognition that own-growing in the UK makes a really important contribution to food security, healthy diets and general well-being, but we currently have a poor understanding of how much own-grown food people are able to produce. This will be key to providing the vital evidence base to support the use of land for growing spaces within our cities and towns, at a time when people are becoming increasingly interested in growing their own fruit and vegetables.

The National Allotment Society is supporting the research team at the University of Sheffield who are working with members of the public growing food in allotments, gardens and other own-growing spaces across the UK to understand the yield of typical UK fruit and vegetable crops.

By providing the team with the area of land they use to grow a crop and the weight of the crop they harvest participants would be:

1. Contributing to a first national estimate of own-grown food production in the 21st century.
2. Helping us to understand how much allotment and garden space we need in the future to ensure sufficient access for the growing number of people in our cities and towns.

You need to go to <https://myharvest.org.uk/> for full details.

Facebook: <https://en-gb.facebook.com/MYHarvestUK> <http://seeog.org.uk/2017/04/myharvest/>

Soil Association news

1. Pupils and staff from Northbury Primary School in Barking were distraught to find their beloved organic vegetable garden burnt to the ground. Their shed, greenhouse and raised beds have all been incinerated, destroying pupils' gardening equipment and killing their lovingly tended crops. These all need to be replaced, so please give what you can.

<https://www.soilassociation.org/our-campaigns/rebuild-food-for-life-school-garden/>

2. A recent report from the Soil Association reveals that the UK organic market increased by over 7% in 2016 to £2.09bn. This is the fifth consecutive year of growth. In supermarkets: for instance, sales of organic products increased by 6.1%; independent and online home delivery increased 10.5%; beauty and well-being products increased by 13%; and sales of organic textiles increased a huge 30%.

The biggest leap in sales is through the online market – where small individual producers can showcase their products.

3. Does The Worm Forgive The Plough?

One of the great things about having a bit more time here this summer is that I can sometimes get to learn some new things myself. This week I made it to the Innovative Farmers group, hosted by Adrian Hares, to hear from Dr Jackie Stroud, from Rothamsted, and also about the phosphate trials that the group are running. Jackie's speciality is worms, and I used to think I knew something about them too ... but as I found, I was sorely in need of a refresher.

<https://www.soilassociation.org/blogs/2017/april/helens-notes-from-the-farm-week-6/?tag=Helen%27s+Notes+From+The+Farm>

4. Following the news that a general election will be held on Thursday 8 June, we're calling on all political parties to give food and farming a higher priority than ever before in their manifestos - including a major focus on soil protection.

As the UK prepares to leave the EU, the next Government will have an opportunity to produce an agricultural policy for the first time in decades. This must fully recognise the importance of food and farming to public health, our environment, and the economy.

We're urging all political parties to put climate change, public health, soil protection and farm animal welfare at the centre of their food and farming vision. We're proposing eight policies that we'd like to see in all manifestos – building on our recent report on post-CAP priorities. These are:

Investing in healthy soils; Zero carbon farming by 2050; Funding for farmer-led research; Stronger support for organic farming; A 'good life' for all farm animals within 10 years; Investing in child health; Better public procurement; Every hospital becomes a 'beacon of good food'.

There's a full briefing on these here at: <https://www.soilassociation.org/blogs/2017/april/general-election-2017-our-priorities/>

Southend in Transition Community Allotment

The entrance to the allotments is off Hamstel Road – the Garon's end - opposite the fish and chips shop Plai ce to Be. This allotment is where you can learn how to grow food, look after your garden, take fresh produce home and meet new people over a shared meal and exchange ideas on how to help the community thrive. Their next Taster Day is on Sunday 14 May, 10:00 to 14:00. Enjoy some gardening and poetry on the plot. Bring your favourite nature related poem, write something and present or just listen to others reading.

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