



SOUTH EAST ESSEX ORGANIC GARDENERS



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NEWSLETTER NO: 155 – JANUARY 2021

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

<https://www.facebook.com/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!

WISHING EVERYONE A HEALTHY AND SAFE NEW YEAR! AND WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS!

Venue, notes etc.

If you don't already have the Zoom client software installed on your PC, phone or tablet, it will download automatically when you access the link shown on the invitation. It's probably a good idea to do this a few minutes before the first meeting starts as it can take a little time to familiarise with and install. Please try to make sure that your camera, microphone and speakers on your device are all working properly before joining the meeting as this can help avoid delays in getting the meeting underway.

For future reference, our newsletter copy 'deadlines' for 2021 are as follows:

March	-	Sunday 21 February
May	-	Sunday 25 April
July	-	Sunday 20 June
September	-	Sunday 22 August
November	-	Sunday 24 October

SEEEOG GROUP NIGHTS/EVENTS/VISITS

To be arranged: either an OGQT or quiz – watch this space!

Monday 18 January 2021: Group Night

'Responsible Sourcing of Growing Media'

A 'Zoom' presentation by Catherine Dawson, Technical Director, Melcourt Industries Ltd. We will send you the link as soon as it is available.

"Where has the UK growing media industry got to with peat reduction?" Information about industry-wide, Defra-supported Responsible Sourcing of Growing Media Scheme, which is soon-to-launch. Melcourt will be used as an example to illustrate how peat-free growing is perfectly feasible across a wide range of growing applications together with information about how the uniformity and consistency - that is so essential - is achieved.

Catherine Dawson, who is Technical Director of Melcourt and a former chair of the Growing Media Association, has worked with peat-free horticultural growing media / composts for more than three decades. In that time, she has developed with colleagues various award-winning peat-free growing media that are now sold throughout the UK to a wide range of professional growers and gardeners alike. Catherine will start at 20:00, but you'll be able to log in at 19:30.

Monday 15 March: Group Night

'Clippings: Topiary & Pruning Techniques' presented by Darren Lerigo

Monday 17 May: Group Night

Chris Collins, Garden Organic

Monday 19 July: Group Night

'Water conservation, how to best use and save water within allotments, water management and how to prevent water contamination' is presented by our own Ray How, Regional Representative of the National Allotment Society.

Monday 20 September: Group Night

The British Sea Buckthorn Company, presented by Ben Eagle (Director, Sales and Marketing)
The company grows sea buckthorn berries on the Essex coast and works with partners from across the world to bring you products that will help you to stay healthy for longer. Ben was on Countryfile recently.
<https://www.britishseabuckthorn.com/>

Monday 15 November: Group Night

Matthew Oliver, Horticulturist, Fruit & Veg RHS Garden Hyde Hall

NEWS

Allotment news

The allotments for Hockley took a step forward at Hockley Parish Council's November meeting. The Parish Council agreed to instruct their solicitors to progress with the freehold transfer of the land to the Council. The next Environment Committee will be on Monday 4 January 2021 at 19.30. There will be public speaking time should any resident wish to speak on items on the agenda. To join the meeting, please contact the Clerk at clerk@hockley-essex.gov.uk or phone 01702 207707 before 12:00 on the day of the meeting and a link and password will be sent to you. Item 7: Folly Grove Allotment Site: to consider the update on the transfer of land.
<http://www.hockley-essex.gov.uk/upload/files/Environment%20Agenda%20and%20paperwork%20-%204%20Jan%202021.pdf>

Bee Happy - A Strategy for bees and other pollinators 2020 - 2025

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council is seeking residents' views and comments on an updated pollinator strategy, which looks at improving and increasing habitats for pollinators across the borough. Pollinators play a key role in fertilising plants, in turn improving the local ecosystem and creating a habitat for pollinators to thrive in the town. In short, pollinators eat pollen and nectar from flowers, it sticks to their bodies, it transfers between flowers they visit and this fertilises the plants visited and allows the plants to reproduce and grow fruits and seeds. The consultation, which went live Tuesday 15 December and runs until Tuesday 16 February, can be found at https://yoursay.southend.gov.uk/bee-happy?tool=survey_tool#tool_tab

Chairman's (and Treasurer's) notes

1. In November – 'A year in the life of a flower farmer: how to sow, grow, cut and condition flowers for market' - Amanda Powell took us through her research for her bought 0.7 acre plot with 60 beds, working on 2/3 successions. She/we are in USDA zone 9b. Her inspirational guides are Erin Benzakein and Georgia Newbury. Amanda's unique selling point is organic, local, sustainable English flowers. It was heavy investment in the first year. This presentation was recorded and can be found at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-9OwCAH71OOd2SOX35goqoY5d4sMAQZ/_view

2. At Manchester Drive allotments there has been a keen increase in interest in no dig beds and growing, cardboard and compost/manure mulch on top to plant into.

3. Biden soon in US with hopes of a Green New Deal is highlighted in Jane Fonda's book 'What Can I Do? The Truth About Climate Change and How to Fix It'. Many cities in the US are moving toward greener ways. The book brings together oceans, women, war, the military, environmental justice, water, plastics, food and agriculture, climate migration and human rights, jobs and a just transition, health, forests - all these and climate change. Quite a synthesis to move to solutions and, as Noam Chomsky says, it is social movements and activity by which change is pushed. So get active in ways that you can - your circle of influence.

4. Soils - we are dependent upon this thin layer - a very vulnerable living skin. The main causes of damage to soils are INTENSIVE AGRICULTURE with excessive use of fertilisers, pesticides and antibiotics killing soil organisms and leaving it prone to erosion. The DESTRUCTION of natural habitats to create farmland also degrades soil. Degraded soils can be restored by growing a diverse range of plants; inoculating barren soil with healthy earth may also help it recover. BUT the most important action is to protect existing healthy soils from damage. There needs to be changes to most farming practices.

5. At Ilkley part of the River Wharfe has been designated as bathing water. Earlier this year, no English river met quality tests for pollution because of the scale of sewage discharge and agricultural and industrial chemicals entering. The Chair of the Environment Agency said the idea of rivers becoming bathing waters was a game changer.

6. Remember not to tidy

Leave those gone to seed flowers and veg etc for habitats and food. Leave a wild area and a wood pile for fungi. The days get longer and GO said sow your onion seed on Boxing day - a while back now.

7. Some Reasons to be Cheerful

We are still finding new species in the UK and elsewhere. There is fossil fuel Disinvestment and Discontinuance. Builders were fined (not enough) for destroying a bat colony (Bellway Homes). Having re-read Shanahan's "Ladder to Heaven" about figs (750 species) and their amazing regenerative abilities: pioneering in lava fields post eruption, the 1st tree very quickly fruiting and from this come fauna of all complexions, and soon, flora; their tropical rainforest regenerative powers, too. The role of regenerative methods within agroecology, biological solutions - essentially what we advocate and campaign about. Yes, ways forward!

Crapes Fruit Farm news: Some reflection still more anticipation

In many respects, nationally, we are a little further forward from this time last year. For some individuals, the year has been dominated by illness and tragic loss. Now there is a glimmer of hope that, just maybe, this encompassing threat to our health will eventually diminish during 2021 - thanks to the universal efforts by scientists. Illness aside, as a nation, we are wobbling out of 2020 into a future of fresh challenges and, no doubt, many obstacles - we will see. This, you will have already noticed, is at variance to my usual commentary.

Each day, WordPress kindly show a chart on my screen which illustrates the pattern of activity in statistical form. A highlight for me is the origin of the interest shown. Whether you are tuning in from Finland, Poland, Kenya, Singapore, Germany, from the North or South of the USA, France, Spain or elsewhere, I hope that you feel able to continue! It is unfortunate that my nation chose to follow an 'independent' path forward.

The third, and for myself and growers internationally, the most important concern is how the hitherto subtle local changes in seasonal weather have, in recent years, accelerated significantly both in frequency and marked change - often from one end of a week to the other, let alone the number of see-sawing temperature and rainfall incidents within a month - any month. As I type, this wet December will bring our annual total for 2020 nudging 690mm.

Of course, it isn't just the crop making knee jerk reactions constantly, but also the threats to it - insects in particular. A couple of very warm days late in February seem to wake up overwintering forms of flies and moths, particularly if surface soil temperatures are rising already. How often do the meteorologists mention the current position of the Jet stream influencing our present weather event? We mortals will make little influence on the trends of the Jet stream. What can't be changed will have to be endured. That in itself might be easier if those of us on the ground had more grasp on the nature of the beast, which we have no alternative but to learn to grow along with. A complex subject, yes. Another reason to not only fund science, but to be more diligent at taking heed of its findings as they emerge and amending our ways..

You will recall that May 2020 holds the record for phenomenal sunshine hours. Possible, particularly, as here at Crapes we saw no precipitation for the whole month. That indicates few clouds were apparent. Cloudless skies at night during early May, especially, are associated with damaging frosts. I need not continue. Just as well we have another, albeit short, string in our bow. We expect to maintain our Friday vegetable deliveries throughout the winter to Colcestrians. Hopefully by next summer, as a nation, we can all relax, just a little, though the need for crutches will be ongoing, no doubt. Also, I hope to be reporting on an apple crop at Crapes!

<https://crapes.wordpress.com/>

Garden Organic news: Garden Organic signs peat ban letter to George Eustace, Environment Secretary

Garden Organic has signed a letter to the government calling for a complete ban on peat in garden compost in the next five years. They joined Monty Don, as well as other organisations such as The National Trust, Friends of the Earth, The RHS and Plantlife, in writing to George Eustice, Environment Secretary, after new figures show the government has missed its target on banning peat for gardeners by 2020.

<https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/news/garden-organic-signs-peat-ban-letter-george-eustace-environment-secretary>

GM Freeze: Key consultation coming soon

Back in July a Government Minister announced that the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) would launch a public consultation on the status of genome editing "in the autumn". GM Freeze have now heard that this key opportunity to have your say on the future of GM regulation will open "early in the New Year". The questions posed by the consultation are still under wraps, and they haven't been able to find out when it will close, but they do know that it will run on the Government's Citizen Space online consultation hub. They will soon be in touch with suggestions for effective ways to respond.

Members' contributions

1. Seed Keepers & Truth Tellers: From the Frontlines of GM Agriculture is Now Available Online!

The animated short is now available online at <https://www.seedsandtruth.com/>

2. You can now watch the recording of " New Breed GMO's - Threat or Promise " on BDA YouTube Channel via this link <https://youtu.be/V9dCLHTGgoQ> It was deeply fascinating. Pat Thomas gave a slide presentation with an excellent overview. Lawrence Woodward shared some provocative insights about the need to re-set the narrative raising the question could gene-edited organisms impact adversely on the very essence of life?; and the need to advocate Whole Health agriculture, and practice wholistic farming systems which enhance the health and well-being of soils, plants, animals and people. Which is a pretty good definition of what Biodynamics is all about! The webinar gave us all much food for thought - there is much more to find out about, but we hope this has awakened your curiosity.

3. Start Out No Dig, one method with cardboard and compost

Charles Dowding's "maximum compost" method for starting out. Add a lot to make new beds, then very little in subsequent years. The cardboard is only for this stage of smothering weeds - keep them in the dark and they expire! Then you don't need to lay any more cardboard, once there are no weeds.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=0LH6-w57Slw&feature=share>

4. Wild Finca! Returning to nature! Spain is one of Europe's most biodiverse countries and Asturias, where Wild Finca is located, is one of the most diverse provinces in Spain. The family are learning how to live alongside wildlife in as sustainable and low impact manner as possible.

<https://www.wildfinca.com/>

5. Agroforestry has been ignored for too long as a solution to farming and environmental problems

This post is by Helen Browning, farmer and CEO of the Soil Association. The nature-based approach to tackling climate change is, more often than not, trees. Perhaps for simplicity as much as anything. And of course, it is true, trees do offer huge potential to both mitigate climate change and adapt to its worst effects, as well helping to make space for nature and provide livelihoods. But our efforts to get them in the ground have so far proven disappointing to say the least, and my view is that we have overlooked the key implementers in the tree revolution that we need: farmers. So, with the Committee on Climate Change's sixth carbon budget and the England Tree Strategy imminent, as well as new farm payment schemes gearing up, now is the time to initiate a farmer-led tree revolution.

<https://greenallianceblog.org.uk/2020/12/04/agroforestry-has-been-ignored-for-too-long-as-a-solution-to-farming-and-environmental-problems/>

6. New books

Prof Tim Spector, Kings College, *Spoon-fed: why almost everything we've been told about food is wrong*. Jonathan Cape £12,99; big section on glyphosate.

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/1119112/spoon-fed/9781787332294.html>

'Entangled Life' by Merlin Sheldrake - incredible work on fungi taking over ants using their bodies for their own needs, on lichens and their durability, and on psychedelic substances from fungi and much else.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/series/m000pm13>

7) Tune in to Farmerama Radio to hear the latest from the world of independent farming

It's good to be back this month with a collection of conversations with farmers who are building a more ecological future. We begin at Whistlebare Farm learning how raising sheep and goats ecologically results in wool that's extra special – all because of good work going on in the soil. We head to France, to Andy Cato's farm, to hear about his regenerative learning journey, and discover how he's putting that learning into practice here in the UK. And finally, we're in Germany, where the Kulturland Cooperative has created an innovative funding model bringing farmland back into common ownership, and securing it for generations to come.

<https://soundcloud.com/farmerama-radio/61-fine-fleeces-pasture-cropping-and-land-in-commons>

8) Planting a community orchard

We thought you might enjoy this wonderful video of the newly planted Guilden Morden community orchard in Cambridgeshire. It's on Vimeo and was filmed by one of their tree sponsors.

<https://vimeo.com/493120396/785088731b>

9) Our Heritage Fund grant for Orchards East is sadly drawing to a close, but what an enjoyable and fantastic ride it's been!

With Heritage Fund support, they have surveyed more than 10,000 historic orchard sites across East Anglia, investigated the history of orchards and fruit in the region, recorded peoples' orchard stories and memories, and studied the importance of orchards for biodiversity and wildlife. They've planted 63 new community orchards, delivered 45 orchard management, pruning and grafting workshops, plus 10 traditional fruit cookery workshops. They've given talks for more than 40 community groups, advised more than 100 orchard owners, and identified fruit varieties from many many more! More than 800 wonderful invaluable volunteers have been involved in many ways throughout the project.

A volunteer group will continue some of Orchards East's work; look out for their new website which will go live in January. This includes advice for orchard owners, details of orchards you can visit in the region, and some brilliant teaching materials for primary school teachers. They are also organising a celebration and orchard conference for the coming summer, at which time they hope social

distancing rules will be at least somewhat relaxed – look out for details in due course.

10) Seed Week is coming!

From 18 – 22 January will see the fourth Seed Week, which aims to raise awareness of local, open pollinated, agroecological seed being grown and sold in the UK and Ireland. The week, organised by Seed Sovereignty UK and Ireland, coincides with growers shopping for seeds for the coming season. They hope to raise general awareness of the importance of agroecological and locally-grown seed with a wider audience. A highlight of the week will be the webinar 'Our Seeds are Our Stories'. Book your ticket here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/our-seeds-are-our-stories-special-seed-week-event-tickets-132511526543>

With grateful thanks to Pat and Sharon and many more....

Our member from Gozo, Simon Wallace's latest despatches, a little intro

Back in 2016, Simon and Mary moved 1300 miles from Westcliff-on-Sea to start a new life on the island of Gozo. This smaller, greener sister island to neighbouring Malta measures roughly 14 km long by 7.25km (67 square km or about the same size as Manhattan). The island has a sub-tropical Mediterranean climate and is located just south of Sicily, enjoying very mild winters and warm/hot summers with long hours of daylight, even during the winter (10.3 hours in January).

On their small field they use no-dig systems and permaculture techniques – modified to cope with the summer drought conditions, strong winds and lack of on site water (lasagne beds, mulching /recycling grey water/winter rain water capture/straw bale growing, etc).

Originally hailing from Latin America, the Chayote is also known as mirliton squash or vegetable pear. It is crunchy and mild and ever so slightly sweet. The entire vegetable, including the flowers and rind, is edible. It can be eaten both raw and cooked and tastes great shredded in a salad or slaw, or cooked into a stir fry or stuffed and baked in the oven.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/gardening-blog/2010/jul/15/exotic-organic-vegetables>

A single chayote could give you protein, manganese, zinc, potassium, magnesium and vitamins C, B9, K and B6. It is also low in calories, fat, sodium and total carbs.

Pesticide Action Network UK: Major opportunity for change as public consultation on UK pesticide use launched

On Friday 4 December, the UK Government published the long-awaited UK 'Revised National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides' (NAP). The draft, which has been agreed between Defra and the devolved administrations, was released alongside a public consultation that will last for 90 days ending on 26 February 2021. PAN UK will submit and publish a full response to the NAP consultation early this year and will also be providing a simple way for members of the public to respond. Full details available at <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/pesticides-future-strategy/sustainable-use-of-pesticides-national-action-plan/>

Pesticide Action Network North America: What's next? Vibrant global solutions

Back in November PANNA launched the animated short video 'Seed Keepers and Truth Tellers: From the Frontlines of GM Agriculture' with their partners at Hawai'i Alliance for Progressive Action and PAN Asia and the Pacific. In this animated video, farmers from Senegal to Hawai'i, from the Philippines to Venezuela, explore the origin story of genetically modified (GM) seeds, the vast implications of industrial, chemical-intensive agriculture, and how we can build toward food sovereignty and resilience. For years, GM agriculture has treated the farm as a factory, with "inputs" (pesticides, fertilisers) and "outputs" (crops). The primary objective is increasing yields while controlling costs, usually by exploiting economies of scale — this means large-scale, industrial monocropping of GM seeds. This corporate approach to farming undermines a healthy food and farm economy, distances farmers from their seeds and craft, and leaves farmers and consumers disconnected from sovereignty over their food supply.

<https://www.seedsandtruth.com/>

Pesticide Free Southend on Sea

We set up this page on Facebook as a result of Pesticide Action Network UK's Pesticide-Free Towns Campaign. People up and down the country are calling for an end to the use of hazardous chemicals in their towns and cities. From Edinburgh to Derry, to Glastonbury and London, towns and cities across the UK are significantly reducing their pesticide use, or phasing it out altogether. So far, we've emailed all Southend-on-Sea Borough councillors, following up by notifying local community and residents' organisations. We have already received some helpful replies, including one from Martin Berry, Labour Candidate for St. Luke's Ward martin.berry@southendlabour.com

But we need your help! As the council is already reviewing its pollinator strategy, and its public consultation is open until mid-February, we think it might be a bit premature for us to ask specific questions at Full Council - at least until we can see what's likely to be in the revised policy. However, we are fairly confident that some members would like to contact their Ward Councillor/s early with one or two pertinent questions for Full Council. You can find the list at this link:

<https://democracy.southend.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?FN=ALPHA&VW=LIST&PIC=0>

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

SEEOG membership

You can also pay by bank transfer. The details are as follows:

Bank Account: 65198805

The Co-operative Bank

Sort code: 08 92 99

SEEOG mentors

Our mentors, so far, include Ron Bates (Leigh-on-Sea) 01702 477681; Carole and Vic Shorney (Hockley), 01702 20914; and Ray How (Rochford), 01702 544632. We could put a package together of Top of The Crops and Square Foot Gardening, if applicable. Maybe survey their plot and make seasonal suggestions for really easy crops to grow, to avoid disappointment? Our members might like to be involved with suggestions?

SEEOG website update

We very much hope we've made it quicker and easier for you to send your membership renewals/meeting donations to us via our Paypal button, on the RHS of our website at

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

https://www.paypal.com/donate?hosted_button_id=ALVA2MKFR67WS

Soil Association: Some snippets from 'Living Earth', Winter 2020

1) The new Trade and Agriculture Commission will be placed on a statutory footing. Despite the proposed amendments to the Agriculture Bill being voted down, the Government has conceded that there will be a report to Parliament on how free trade agreements may affect the UK levels of statutory protection in relation to human, animal and plant life and health, animal welfare and environmental protection. The Soil Association thinks this means that Parliament won't automatically get to vote on Trade Deals, and unfortunately equivalent food and farming standards for imports will not be put into law so they will be watching new trade deals closely.

2) Looking ahead to 2021 will bring the Environment Bill and there is much work to be done to secure ambitious, legally binding targets for biodiversity, water, air quality and waste.

3) Book Worms Book Club

At Soil HQ they love a good read and they've been running a monthly book club on their social media channels for a year now. They want to share a couple of their favourite books that you might like to delve into over the New Year: Wildwood, by Roger Deakin; and Food for Thought, by Phil Horton. Get in touch with your recommendations and share any books you've read that have changed the way you think about your food and where it comes from.

memb@soilassociation.org

4) Agroforestry: The potential for tree-mendous change

Only 3% of the UK's farmland currently practices agroforestry. The Soil Association is working with farmers to achieve their goal of over half of UK farms incorporating agroforestry by 2030.

5) Grow better together: what will 2021 bring for climate, nature and health?

Save the date: Thursday 21 January 2021 at 17:30 – 18:45.

The Climate Coalition will be joining the Soil Association to give us an overview of plans for climate action next year around COP26 and how we can all get involved in the lead up to November 2021. This will be a virtual event using an online conference platform. Please register for this event at: soilassociation.org/memberevents.

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