

SOUTH EAST ESSEX ORGANIC GARDENERS

A Local Group of...



Supporting and Working With...



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NEWSLETTER NO: 186 / MARCH 2026

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

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

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

We are a local group of Garden Organic; supporting and working with the Soil Association and Pesticide Action Network UK.

We also have a Facebook group for SE Essex Organic Gardeners, for members and supporters at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/43705483846/> Why not check it out?

Housekeeping, etc.

To avoid disappointment, do please make a careful note now of ALL EVENTS IN OUR CALENDAR. Our meetings start at 20:00 sharp, unless stated otherwise.

Membership

Membership fees or renewals are usually due in **July** unless you joined at the beginning of the year, in which case you don't have to re-join until July of the following year. You can pay by Bank Transfer, cheque, cash or by post. Bank details: Account No: 65198805; Sort Code 08 92 99.

If you're paying by cheque, please send it to Ray How, SEEEOG Membership Secretary, 5 Dalys Road, Rochford, SS4 1RA. It should be made payable to South East Essex Organic Gardeners. Alternatively you are welcome to pay in person at one of our meetings.

If you wish to set up a standing order, you can pick up a form, fill it in and let your bank know what you want to do. This is an easy way to remember and it just gets done automatically.

<https://seeog.org.uk/joi/>

Newsletter copy

Spring-themed? And pictures for our website! Any knowledge or insight you want to share? A write-up of a SEEEOG event (Potato Day?) or other related event you've been to and more! We're receiving final submissions for the **May 2026 newsletter by Sunday 26 April**. Suggestions for trips out? The odd article on other areas of organic thought would also be most welcome. Please include a link to each item, if possible, for fact-checking purposes, names, etc. This does save a lot of time!

SEEOG GROUP NIGHTS/EVENTS/VISITS 2025

How to get to Trust Links Rochford: Trust Links House, College Gardens, Rochford, SS4 1YL.

Do please let us know whether you need a lift and we will try our very best to assist.

<https://seeog.org.uk/2022/04/how-to-get-to-trustlinks-rochford-update/>

If you missed our January meeting, you can email John Metcalf for a copy of his January presentation:

sowseedgrowfeed@protonmail.com

Can you spot yourself with your bags of seed potatoes, onions and all the rest? Here are the pictures taken on Potato Day, mostly taken by Trust Links!

<https://seeog.org.uk/2026/02/seed-potato-seed-2026-photos-work-in-progress/>

Monday 16 March: “Allotments-Advantages and how to keep the land free” presented by Ray How.

Ray covers the Eastern Region of The National Allotment Society. Definitely not to be missed, so

please flag this up with your fellow plot holders, if possible.

<https://thenas.org.uk/>

Monday 18 May: ‘Niche No Dig’ presented by John Pollard and Jong Longhurst. It's a kind of deviation from the all-or-nothing approach and is based on their own rookie experience, reading, etc. It reaches to limited-space growing.

Tuesday 23 June / 08:15 for 09:00: Essex Schools Food & Farming Day, ARU Writtle

(event not for the public): SEEOG's interactive stall, 'The Benefits of Organic Food, Organic Growing, Healthy Soil & Composting-with demonstrations & advice.'

This interactive event has been running since 2008. Hosting 3,000 pupils aged 8-11 (years 4, 5 & 6) from Essex Primary schools, it is an extremely popular event, and they are always oversubscribed.

They will have the same six zones again in 2026, including Crops, Food, Livestock, Machinery, Countryside & Environment, and Rural Safety & STEM. Volunteers gratefully received! Here's what we did last year!

<https://seeog.org.uk/?s=Writtle+2025>

Monday 20 July: “How to use what's in season and your harvest” presented by Fiona Clapperton.

Given how climate change is affecting us, it's very hard to judge.

Monday 21 September: “Japanese Gardens-a brief history, reflections on the 2025 Japanese Garden Intensive Seminar” presented by Damien Errington

Monday 16 November: “Gardening the World”, presented by a speaker from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

World Soil Day: December: Guest speaker: Spencer Christy, Farm Director Lauriston Farm Limited

NEWS

Allotment news:

1. The National Allotment Society are delighted to announce the theme for National Allotments Week 2026: Grow to Learn – Lifelong Lessons from the Allotment. Taking place from 10–16 August, this year's celebration will highlight the educational, personal development, and well-being benefits of allotment gardening. From practical gardening skills to life lessons like patience, resilience, problem-solving, and teamwork, the allotment is a place where learning grows alongside plants.

Throughout the week, we'll be sharing inspiring stories across social media, featuring ambassadors, members, and young gardeners reflecting on the lessons they've learned from their plots.

More details about events, resources, and ways to get involved are available on our website, with further updates coming soon.

<https://thenas.org.uk/NAW-%202026-Grow>

GM news (just a snapshot and not good news!)

EU consumers could lose the battle for GMO-free organic food, SAFE warns

SAFE – Safe Food Advocacy Europe, a European consumer organisation specialised in food policy – is calling for the protection of organic food in the European Union at the start of this year's BIOFACH, the world's largest trade fair for organic food and agriculture.

SAFE says it regrets recent legislative steps to make new genomic techniques (NGTs, new GM techniques) free from mandatory requirements applicable to other GMOs and warns that this will mean the end of organic food as we know it.

SAFE's Deputy Director Luigi Tozzi said: "Organic food production is at serious risk under the new legislation, because the measures in place to separate organic food production from food derived from new genomic techniques will disappear soon. This means that in the future, products sold as organic may contain traces of NGT crops, restricting consumer choice and undermining the very concept of organic food production. This is a very serious threat for an important sector trusted by millions of European consumers."

SAFE believes that the EU must make sure that all NGTs are fully traceable and clearly labelled, as is the case with other GMOs.

Tozzi said: "It is hard to understand why the EU is turning its back on organic food production, after decades of consistent support under the Common Agricultural policy. In the past decade, European consumers have spent between €50 and €55 billion annually on organic food products, a testimony to their success and appreciation. The new legislation can damage this forever."

<https://www.gmwatch.org/en/106-news/latest-news/20636-eu-consumers-could-lose-the-battle-for-gmo-free-organic-food-safe-warns>

Members' contributions

1. On Saturday 14 February a group of SEEEOG members attended a presentation by the Colombian grower and entrepreneur Giovanni of the fair trade and organic cooperative Fruandes Frutos de los andes SAS or Fruition (in English). Colombia often has a somewhat sleazy and violent image associated with drugs and gangs, but the land can also produce other important crops; particularly coffee, avocados and tropical fruits.

At the moment Giovanni is on a visit to England to promote their small packs of dried fruit which are air dried by solar power. There are five fruits used: mango, pineapple and banana, which we all know, but also yellow dragon fruit and golden berry. The cooperative has grown so that now there are 340 farms involved and that means that about 1,000 people are earning a living from the enterprise. Giovanni hopes that they will expand further and offer a wider selection of sizes as the packs are only snack size.

One sad fact that was mentioned is that wives often had to leave the farms and go back to the city because the land was not able to sustain more than one person. Their better organisation and the fair trade premium has meant that the land can now support more than one. A happy outcome for those concerned.

We feel this is worth supporting and offering a real alternative to coca and poppy. We will bring along some samples to our next meeting and, if there is enough interest, we may be able to buy a box to share.

Giovanni and his team are facing daily challenges with growing their crops due to climate change. They're also organic, so also cannot use some of the chemicals others would to solve the problems they face. Despite this, they continue to produce Fairtrade dried fruit successfully for the time being...

The Grocer magazine and Sun on Sunday warned recently that we will suffer some shortages of fruit and veg due to extreme weather impacting Morocco and Spain. We haven't seen it reported elsewhere. The rain in Spain has been brutal this winter. In the first five days of February, most of Spain saw triple the normal rainfall. A fruit and veg supplier has already warned a holiday company to manage their menus carefully due to just this (Spain and Southern Europe were specified). Nut prices impacted due to frosts in Turkey. Guy Watson from Riverford has reported similar regarding Riverford supply partners in Spain. Ron and Ane

<https://www.facebook.com/100064496632290/posts/1350688033757738/>

2. 24th-26th March: Client Earth Summit 2026

PANNA -PAN North America -Reaction to Ice.

Immigrant farmworkers have long been the backbone of the food and farming system in the US (true of other farm systems UK?). The industry includes some 2.3 million workers. The American Immigration Council reports that as recently as 2019 57% of crop production workers in the US were foreign born-36% undocumented. Some states 80%. Their statement is:

"We stand in unwavering solidarity with immigrants regardless of documentation status and demand justice and reparations for those harmed by the state's assault on our communities". "Federal government directs the masked agents to raid farms and neighbourhoods is an authoritarian strategy to induce terror and escalate discord in our communities". They use racial profiling.

Separately they believe the agroecological approach works best in clusters of 50 acres of 15 acre farms, that would follow the principles very much in line with the 10 point plan of the Soil Association (see other) article. That it be whole farm/cluster approach is very much that of the Biodynamic approach, endorsed early on by Dave Holmgren, a pioneer of Permaculture back in the 1990s.

Pickers of the farms harvest as harvests arise. Seasonal potato, pea, bulb picking and the seasonal work on smallholdings that were truly for local communities, that model has and will be very efficient and needed. Ron and Ane

3. Soil Association Newsletter February 2026. New Report-"No Drought About It". Farming Agroecologically for Climate Change. A truly resilient farm has healthy soils that hold water during dry periods and drain better in heavy rain. It grows a diversity of crops, reducing the risk of total crop failure. It does not rely on expensive synthetic and fossil-fuel based inputs, which are vulnerable to price shocks and disruption to supply. It supports wildlife and natural processes that help crops and livestock. Resilience also depends on fair supply chains and localised infrastructure. It is a whole system approach, with nature and not against it.

Heavy reliance on synthetic inputs and high concentrations of livestock undermining resilience by driving pollution and harming nature, reliance on imported feed (mind, most of the Dengie farms' arable land is for animal feed). Their 10 point plan:

1. National Resilience- a central role for organics
2. Strengthen soil protection targets for funding
3. Increase production of climate friendly foods-UK grown horticulture (beans and legumes) and local procurement
4. Reduce industrial livestock pollution
5. Reduce synthetic inputs
6. Scale up agroforestry
7. Baseline monitoring using data for whole farm plans
8. Fairer supply chains-fair trade and tariffs, improve regional food infrastructures
9. Stronger governance of carbon and natural capital to boost nature based solutions
10. Invest in right technology, infrastructure and renewables which are aligned with Agroecological principles NOT just "silver bullets"

It relates that the organic food market is booming again. Support Lauriston veg and meat, Sarah Green's organic veg boxes and maybe also Odd Box to reduce waste and wonky veg saving.

<https://www.soilassociation.org/blogs/2026/february/16/no-drought-about-it-farming-agroecologically-for-climate-resilience/>

Modern Garden-From Care, not Capital. An initiative part organised by John Little at Hilltop. Also workshops: Observation as the ground of care 16 May; Weaving as habitat 6 June.
<https://www.carenotcapital.org/>

The Orchard Project update for winter
<https://www.theorchardproject.org.uk/about-us/>

- Support for urban fruit harvesting- 3 groups in London picked 5+ tonnes 2025.
- A certificate in Community Orchardling at Wisley. / Ron and Ane

4. Saturday 18 April: “There won’t be any countryside left in this area!” If you like getting out and about in the countryside—walking, visiting garden centres and the like, yes, and working, too—we urge you to join the Community Planning Alliance’s Day of Action for nature, parks and green spaces. There are so many planning applications flooding into Rochford that the Green Belt and farmland around Rochford and adjoining Southend will soon be decimated! The lanes will be no-go areas!

The Facebook group Hockley & Neighbouring Villages GreenBelters are busily organising its own local event, details of which we’ll be forwarding to everyone very soon. The group, which started with Hockley Parish, has now grown to cover information for all villages and towns within the Rochford district, a place where the community can share relevant news from out of county on how other areas are tackling this unsustainable development storm. Somewhere where information is shared to both educate and inform. These groups are needed!
https://communityplanningalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/260219_Day-of-Action_Campaign-Pack_Feb26.pdf

5. The National Emergency Briefing is the result of leading experts and concerned citizens joining forces to encourage UK decision-makers to step up their response to the escalating climate and nature crisis. We have already registered our interest in getting involved with screening their documentary now in production:
<https://www.nebriefing.org/>
info@nebriefing.org

6. Mike and Jackie Bliss are restarting work on their project that is gradually introducing a wider range of trees, shrubs and wildflowers to St. Mary's Green in North Shoebury. They will soon be planting a number of apple trees (primarily varieties with east of England origin): Cytisus, Holly and Walnut.

Related projects are: A restoration of St. Mary’s Nature Reserve (including some dredging of accumulated leaf litter and plant debris from the ponds). Discussion with SCC (as landowner) and a potential grant provider are ongoing.

Assisting with creation of a community tree nursery in conjunction with Southend City Council. Where possible, they are using seeds/cuttings from local trees. Otherwise, trees/shrubs are being sourced from various schemes that provide free whips to local authorities/community groups. Anyone interested in helping them along the way is always welcome: mikebliss01@hotmail.com / cc to jackiebliss@hotmail.com

7. We’ve neglected the power of carbon-sucking fungi. Meet the scientist determined to change that. Dr Toby Kiers has won the 2026 Tyler Prize award after shedding light on “overlooked” fungi that can offset huge amounts of CO₂. An “invisible” key to tackling the climate crisis has taken centre stage after evolutionary biologist Dr Toby Kiers was named the winner of the 2026 Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement.
<https://www.euronews.com/green/2026/01/15/weve-neglected-the-power-of-carbon-sucking-fungi-meet-the-scientist-determined-to-change-t>

8. 'Crazy Englishman' growing olives the Italian way

A farmer says the changing climate has allowed him to grow and harvest what is believed to be Lincolnshire's first commercial crop of olives. David Hoyles, whose family has farmed the Fens for more than 200 years, has grown the fruit on 25-acres (10-hectares) of land at Long Sutton. "We were seeing climate change making it sometimes difficult for some of our conventional crops, we're getting warmer, drier periods," he said. The olives have been hand-harvested and crushed to extract oil which has been bottled for public sale. Mr Hoyles' windswept grove is one of the world's most northerly commercial olive farms. He has spent the last five years researching the specialist techniques needed for a successful harvest.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvg14zxdxr1o>

9. ITV 6.30pm news (27/2/26) on the censored Joint Intelligence Chiefs report on climate and ecological collapse. There's a longer version on YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59DZiPdsOc8>

10. **Dirty Business....**As many of you will have seen, Dirty Business premiered this week on Channel 4. The series powerfully highlights the vital role of local River Guardians Ash Smith & Peter Hammond in uncovering harm to our waterways and holding polluters to account. Following this, Lawyers for Nature are hosting a live panel Q&A on Tuesday 3 March, 7.00 – 8.00pm, online (Google Meet). The panel will include the hugely respected and long-standing River Guardian Paul Powlesland, to talk about the message behind Dirty Business; why River Guardianship is so important right now; how individuals and communities can turn concern into meaningful action; what comes next after watching the film. This session is for anyone who watched the series and felt angry, motivated, or ready to do something — but wants clarity on how to make that action count. Please do share with anyone who cares about rivers, accountability, and protecting our waterways.
Google Meet <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdrMj0xrH2I-ZV-afwAE69-o3rZoIEjK-h1hBYvQ7qlanCO3w/viewform?usp=header>

11. Heart of Eden composts. Rocket Grow composts

There here seem to be more makes of compost than ever before, and a great deal of competition to have 'the best' of eco/environmental/sustainability/ethical credentials. The pros and cons of 'peat free' mixes, and the alternatives offered, are being hotly debated, compared and shared throughout gardening and allotment communities. And it is really useful to have those inputs and recommendations. Please let us know yours!

For me, there are two issues: is it a successful growing medium? Is it the most eco/ethical I can buy? Because I'm not a dedicated or consistent grower, like most of you are, and probably don't buy as much compost as you do either, I tend to buy the most eco/ethical varieties, but only after careful investigation. I'm very aware of 'green-washing', and I hate being misled, especially for making a profit.

A SEEEOG member drew our attention to a 'new' make of compost being sold locally, Heart of Eden, 'all purpose natural compost absolutely no peat' it says on the bag. So, I checked the website, all seemed fine, but Carole mentioned it looked like it was mainly wood-based compost. So, I emailed Heart of Eden to ask what exactly their composts are made from, where the ingredients come from and where the composts are made. I explained about SEEEOG and that these issues are important to us and guide our purchasing choices.
<https://heartofeden.co.uk/>

Will, from **Heart of Eden** phoned me an hour later, and was keen to explain all the products and processes they use:-

They have never used peat. The ingredients they use in their products come from four sources:-

1. New/virgin coir, grown overseas, compressed and shipped efficiently. Coir is a water absorbent base, holding 8-10 times its own weight in water. Composted at high temperature.
2. Recycled 'spent' coir from the soft-fruit industry (I'm not sure where this comes from, possibly UK). Composted at high temperature.
3. FSC approved fine composted bark 0-8mm size. Composted for 10 weeks minimum. No wood fibre at all. No nitrogen draw down.
4. Energy crop digestates, anaerobically broken down. The energy crop contains no pesticides or herbicides. Processed carefully at their own site. The digester creates three products: 1. Gas, which goes into the national grid (is there a national gas grid? or via fuelling electricity?); 2. Liquid plant feed (BabyBio for example); 3. Solid residue, not smelly, rich in micro-nutrients.

In March this year, they'll be adding a Soil Association approved amendment, of 150g, which helps plants mineralise nutrients. Tested last summer with petunia plug-plants, showing the length of time that good foliage and flowers were produced was significant.

Also this year, an Ericaceous peat free compost will be available. Composed of pine bark fines. And a multi-use fruit and vegetable planter, thicker and chunkier bag size than a usual grow-bag.

They have processing plants at both their sites, in Penrith, Cumbria and Northiam, Kent. They supply directly to allotments and groups, from a single pallet upwards. They do give talks, by their National Accounts Manager, Kaz Edwards. She has spoken at RHS venues, including Hampton Court.

But, when I was in local garden nursery Potash recently (on Potato Day) I picked up a product guide brochure from **RocketGro** Organic gardening products. I read through it, and went on their website. From them, I learnt why coir is bad, unethical. And if you read about them, you'll see why their eco and ethical standards are hard to beat.

Earth Cycle is another organic compost maker, but we haven't had time to check them out properly. <https://earthcycle.co.uk/collections/compost-and-soil-improvers>

So despite the above research, (and I'm glad I did it, it's been an education) I have to recommend RocketGro for my conscience. Maybe you wonderful dedicated growers can tell me whether you've used it, and is it a successful growing medium or not? / Jane
<https://rocketgro.co.uk/>

12. Our Gardens, Our Water | Online Campfire with Stephanie Hafferty: Tuesday 17 Mar 2026 18:30 – 20:00. Join us for an inspiring online event with Stephanie Hafferty, one of the UK's leading experts in sustainable organic gardening, permaculture and homesteading. She is perfect for ending our Spring season of Water, and bringing in the Summer of Soil, as an award-winning gardener and food writer, edible garden designer, public speaker and educator with over 30 years of practical experience in growing food year-round. Methods using wildlife-friendly no dig, no-less. Her flow-with-the-river approach and down-to-earth ideas help permaculturists at all levels use water effectively and nurture healthy soil to grow more veg and live more sustainably. We want to focus on all sizes of gardens and allotments, as well as tackle our current topic of water and bring in the next seasons topic of soil.
<https://www.permaculture.org.uk/noticeboard/event/our-gardens-our-water-online-campfire-stephanie-hafferty>

13. Do you know about this? Well, apparently the BBC needs your help. writes Roger Bolton in the Radio Times (28 February-6 March)! To present your submission to the Government Charter Review, fill in the online survey at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/emailing-a-response-to-the-bbc-charter-review>
The consultation ends on 10 March!

14. Lectures on Biodynamics at Lauriston Farm! Spencer is running a series of free lectures on biodynamics. Commencing 17 March, these online sessions will run from 7:30pm on Tuesday evenings for about an hour. Over the course of these six sessions, Spencer will go through the principles of biodynamics and how this influences their farm. Please email hattie@lauristonfarm.co.uk for links to these sessions.

- 17 March: The Farm Organism, history of the farm and the role of the farmer.
- 24 March: Earth Rhythms
- 7 April: Compost preparations
- 14 April: Celestial Rhythms and the planting calendar
- 21 April: Farm animals and bees
- 28 April: Social Farming

15. March and April Farm walks at Lauriston Farm: Friday 13 March and Friday 10 April, 11-1 Join us for our monthly guided walk around the farm with Spencer Christy. Suggested donation of £6. Optionally, stay on for a two-course vegetarian lunch with the farmers for £15. Are you a society or organisation that would like to make a group booking for a farm walk? If so please contact us to arrange! email enquiries@lauristonfarm.co.uk or call 01621 788348.

A date for your diary, Lauriston are trialling Leigh-on-Sea's new farmers market! These will be monthly and start on Saturday 30 May.

16. 'Tinderbox' UK may be one shock away from food riots, experts say | Food | The Guardian
Weakened food security could tip into unrest after a cyber-attack, extreme weather or conflict, analysis finds. <https://share.google/9fBaRdlrCiKHhvwWw>

News from Simon and Mary Wallace, SEE OG members (Gozo branch!)

1. Cemented locks and deflated diggers: the war over privately run allotments | Allotments | The Guardian <https://share.google/WRfa3mUvi3GFvTfat>

2. The Food Coop ushers in a new era for Malta's local food sector

The Malta Food Agency continues to build on its effort to create a tangible link between Malta's fresh produce and the people behind it.

<https://whoswho.mt/en/the-food-coop-ushers-in-a-new-era-for-malta-s-local-food-sector>

Thanks for all your contributions, and keep them coming!

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