

Shropshire Organic Gardeners

Newsletter 39

Spring 2019



*Inviting footpath by the moat at the Albrighton Trust,
Moat and and Gardens*

SHROPSHIRE ORGANIC GARDENERS

We are a group of growers of fruit, vegetables and flowers with gardens, allotments or smallholdings in various places in Shropshire.

Our winter meetings are held in St Chad's church hall, Shrewsbury, usually on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm. Summer meetings from about May to October are usually at weekends, and consist of visits to members' gardens, outings, practical workshops, demonstrations etc. We are regularly involved in putting on displays at Green Days and at Shrewsbury Flower Show.
 Subscription rates: £8 single; £10 Couple at same address.
 Visitors £1 per meeting.

Website: www.shropshireorganicgardeners.org.uk

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Potatofest Caption Competition:- Sue B. is kindly donating a prize!

Photo by Chrissy:-Potatofest 2019



From Peter: Chairman's report.

Parsnips have been around in this country for far longer than potatoes so why do we have a potato day but not a parsnip day?...discuss.
We have had, as usual, a winter of excellent Sogs events, have we not?...discuss.

Let me refresh your memory, Nov. The Seed Co-op. Sogs is now a shareholder. Dec. Xmas bash at the extra large Wattlesborough village hall. (The hall was too big for a cosy Sogs feast but was hardly big enough for a superlative pot day.) Jan. Fair Trade, I never realised that there was so much to this, or that it had such a positive effect on producers. Feb. Self Sufficiency, Sam made it look simple enough, but I suspect that there is a lot of work, planning and investment in such a venture. Mar. Food Bank and poetry, what a brilliant approach to both subjects that Michael presented us with.

In addition to the above there were a couple of supernumerary events; the Christmas tree decoration in St Chad's church and something else...it slips my mind for the moment..Oh Yes!..Potato Day. Were you there? If you were then no explanation is necessary; if you were not then no explanation will be sufficient! But I will have a go (pause for deep breath) it was super, extraordinary, brilliant, wonderful, exciting, rewarding, satisfying, gratifying, terrifying, exhausting, stimulating, expected in an unexpected kind of way, fulfilling, emptying (the potato trays) overwhelming, overbearing, overwrought (that was the chairman) overblown (this wittering) and sundry other expostulations; I will leave a space here for yours.

Really!? I'm glad that you enjoyed it as much as I did. It took several days to get the smile off my face. Shall we do it again? I will if you will.

Now there are summer events to look forward to and the supernumeraries. See the lists that follow.

Here is a list of events that SOGS is invited to, so far, this year. This is in addition to the excellent programme of visits that Siobhan organises for us.

The suggestion is that one or two or a few SOGS members should turn up at these events with the SOGS display and generally have a good time enjoying the event in general and engaging with the SOGS adoring public in particular. (This is easy, just smile a lot and be a good listener when said adoring public talks about its garden.) Different SOGS members could do each event, or whatever suits whoever. Please do not be backward in coming forward and volunteering.

GROW LOCAL, Greenwood Centre, Coalbrookdale, 5th May. Really good food in the cafe.

THE MOAT, Albrighton, 12th May. Grow some veg seedlings etc, sell them here, the money supports this important project. See below.

SPRING IN TO THE GARDEN, 16th May, Pontesbury Public Hall, 7.30pm. This is a unique gardening club, this is its only meeting of the year yet there are 100's of members. Turn up to find out how it is done! Note; free food and drink!

(From Pauline Stoppard, Secretary. We offer a FREE stall/stand provided by us – all we ask is that you bring a suitable covering for your table on the above date. The hall is open to set up from 6.00pm and the members / general public come in at 7.30pm. Entry is FREE and anything that you gain is all yours. Feel free to bring any leaflets or information that you would like to promote. Other stalls will include plants, jams & chutneys, misc etc. All garden related).

PLANT FAIR, British Ironworks, near Oswestry. 28 July. A very interesting place to visit as well as the plant fair.

SHREWSBURY FLOWER SHOW, 9th and 10th August
Volunteer to person the stall and get free entry to the show.
(We're taking a rest from putting on a large display this year).

ACTON SCOTT WORKING FARM MUSEUM, Tuesday 29th October (half term), this is also their apple day, lots of interesting things to see.

The basic idea of SOGS being at these events is to spread the organic gardening word and to advertise that SOGS exists and welcomes new members. Don't expect to be overwhelmed with new members on the day but the drip-drip effect of being out there keeps SOGS membership numbers up. At the last count there are 116 of us! How brilliant is that!?

As usual Carol is asking us to sow a few extra seeds and grow on for the Moat – Vegetables, tomatoes, cuttings, herbs etc. She can arrange collection if you can't attend. Here is her photo of what a section of the stall looked like last year:



Sogs' Christmas Tree at St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury.



A new experience for SOGs. We were invited to sponsor and decorate a tree, which would be part of the display of 60 trees upstairs and downstairs in this beautiful round church. Members contributed whatever they thought might be ornamental and organic, and apart from a string of fairy lights, just about everything on the finished tree was from members' gardens. There were seed heads of honesty, sea holly, fluffy clematis tangutica, artichoke and so on; and berries, fir cones, twiggy ornaments and bright red chilli peppers all distributed around the branches by a team of intrepid helpers, some of whom had to perch on a stepladder. The final result was most decorative and colourful. The trees were on display for two and a half weeks over Christmas and New Year.



Maggie at work on Sog's tree

February 6th meeting:

We were treated to a lively and helpful talk on self-sufficiency by Sam Davies, with images of his smallholding. He made it clear that you cannot hope to be completely self-sufficient, so the aim should be simply to become more self-sufficient. This can be daunting, but Sam recommends finding someone mad enough to share the plot, and to get visitors to do the work.

There are ample rewards, of course, as Sam demonstrated. To start his project he sought out a small, south-facing house with enough land. It is fitted with solar panels. On arrival they found a welcome heap of seven year old horse muck, just what was needed for the future fertility of the land.

Grown in raised beds, and with cloches and cold frames to extend the season, winter and summer alike they have plenty of vegetables either fresh, dried or preserved in some way. Beans and peas give crops for eating fresh and for drying, and Sam uses a dehydrator for both vegetables and fruit. Carrots and beetroot are stored in sand.

Mulching is important, and Sam uses spent hops, obtained gratis. Green manures keep soil covered too, and provide winter salads, e.g. self-sown claytonia. Of course, composting is on a big scale, and the hens are allowed to forage on the heap. Geese as well as hens provide eggs, and the geese also act as lawn mowers. A goat provides milk to make cheese, bees provide honey.

There is more bounty: Sam and his wife make their own beeswax polish, soap, hand cream and lip balm. And they are very much into pickling and alcohol production, making wine, sauerkraut and the on trend Kefir and Kambucha, which are currently popular as health-giving fermented foods/drinks.

From Rachel: Potato Day – a view from the Master Composters, and Plastics Pots in Gardening

This was the first time in a number of years that the Master Composter network attended Potato Day, and what a day we had. There was significant interest in ‘the art, or should it be the science, of composting’ and whilst we spoke to many people who already enthusiastically compost, equally we had beginners quizzing us too. Our role is to help people understand why composting is such a great thing to do in the garden, but also to demystify it, give people the confidence to just give it a go. You can be as fanatical as you want or totally laid back and let the wildlife to their job, as long as you start composting in your own garden. Talking of wildlife, RATS do seem to worry many people, but I can safely say that in the 40 odd years I’ve been composting (on and off), I’ve never had rats, but then I don’t put cooked food in my heaps or anything that’s likely to attract them.

A further key issue is the use of peat in gardening and encouraging people to give it a miss and use compost, or at the very least peat free composts. We had an excellent day and my thanks go to Caroline Pond, James Smith and Valerie Morris for their unstinting help on the day.

Plastics in Gardening and Paper Pot Making at Potatofest

Plastics waste in our oceans became **THE HOT TOPIC of 2017/18**, and the use of plastics in horticulture is just one source of waste. As a result, the horticultural trade bodies and others such as the RHS have been pushing for changes in the trade to get rid of black plastic pots. We are constantly being told that we can't put black plastic in the recycling boxes in Shropshire because it can't be recycled. This is not strictly true. They can be, depending on which plastic they are made from, but black plastic is the end of the line. Its colour can't be changed with dye like lighter plastics, therefore you have to find an end product that can make use of black, which isn't easy.

Unfortunately, most plants roots don't like light, therefore dark pots are generally used in horticulture. However, there has been a concerted effort trialling different colours, and word on the grapevine is that taupe coloured pots have proved successful.

In the meantime, Jean B (our Treasurer) came up with the idea of having a stall demonstrating making paper pots and how to start reducing the use of plastic pots in the garden and making better use of re-using plastic pots. I think Soggie's are probably all very good at reusing plant pots, trays and other plastics, such as yoghurt pots, from the kitchen, but clearly our many potato day visitors found inspiration from the stand. The paper pot making generated a lot of interest. Many people already use the cardboard inners from loo rolls and kitchen rolls, but few people had come across the art of making pots from newspapers, though a few people admitted that they've had the paper pot making moulds for some time but never used them! This was their chance to learn.

Other ideas include:

Take a big bowl to the garden centre and put the plants you are buying in it and give the plastic pots back to the nursery/garden centre for re-use.

Use empty dosette boxes (pill dispenser boxes) as individual seed propagators. Put a small hole in the bottom of each compartment with a skewer or needle, fill with compost, put the seed in, water, then close the lid to create a mini-greenhouse. Dosette boxes also make very good ice-trays for the freezer, so get out the G&T and enjoy.

Again, we had an excellent day on this stand and my thanks to Caroline for helping out with the pot making.



Potato Fest café by Chrissy

March 6th: Michael Carding, Shrewsbury Food Hub

Michael introduced himself and gave a little information about his life as a teacher of mathematics and head teacher at Malpas High School before retirement. He is also bell ringing lead and tower captain at Moele Brace church. In his spare time, he leads walks for HF holidays! His wife is a keen gardener. Michael is also a poet.

Michael then went on to explain the difference between food banks and food hubs. Food banks are for struggling families and they have to be referred by health officials or social services. Food Hubs (FH) distribute foods to worthwhile causes directly. The Shrewsbury FH started at Easter, 2016 but why is it necessary? 50% of food waste is from home, 10% is from supermarkets, but to be able to save some of that 10% is worth it. The remainder waste is from restaurants and similar. By saving this surplus from landfill, CO² is prevented from entering the system. Land the size of Wales is needed to grow the food that is wasted!

Sometimes the supermarkets have little choice to throw food out because it may be past its ‘sell by’ date, new stock is coming in or as in a recent problem with Storm Gareth, a consignment of mushrooms due to be ferried to the Isle of Man could not be transported. The Co-op knew where they could be still be made use of.

At the crack of dawn on his designated day of the week (or fortnight) Michael and several other of the 60 volunteers (some are SOGS members) put on their hi-viz jackets and arrive at their designated supermarkets ready to receive the goods that they can’t sell and need to be rid of. Sometimes there is nothing, but often there are trays of bread, rolls and fruit such as bananas; plentiful because of the fickleness of the buying public to blemishes on their bananas. Michael’s dedicated supermarkets are Sainsburys, M and S, Little Sainsbury and Bookers, but there are many other volunteers collecting from others such as Lidl, Waitrose and the Co-op. Whatever he has collected he then takes over to the Centurion Business Park where the FH is located in a rent-free unit courtesy of Morris Property, the owners.

Here the hub co-ordinator has laid out tables with trays labelled with the recipients’ names and guidance as to what is suitable for them or not. For instance, school breakfast clubs want lots of bread or similar. The Severn Hospice need wholesome fresh vegetables. Other beneficiaries are Mind, Age UK, the Ark, Day Centres and more. Deliveries to schools never

contain nuts or bread with nuts on. The Hospice had achieved a 30% reduction in its food bill.

Sixty groups have and still are benefitting from this enterprise since it started. Many of the volunteers have food safety qualifications and manual handling certificates; courses arranged by the FH. During the summer holidays other schemes for children such as Crossbar Coaching's clubs will use the food. Food Banks are also recipients of donated food. Tinned items and anything similar that doesn't need to be used so quickly are sent there.

The FH will take surplus produce from allotments but as the collection is all done by volunteers, donors are encouraged to deliver to the FH themselves. Bowbrook Allotments send a box of surplus produce to the hospice every week and sometimes to the hub. There followed quite a discussion from the audience about farm waste, and whether gardens such as Attingham should be donating food. It was quite obvious though that as a voluntary organisation their hands are tied.

For more much more information and interesting facts visit the website <https://www.shrewsburyfoodhub.org.uk/> or find them on Facebook.

Michael read some of his poems during his talk, and finished with:

Food Hub

*First light every morning we're at the back door
 Of food stores, like Oliver asking for more:
 Oranges, carrots, bananas and bread
 Day to day miracles, thousands are fed.*

*Hospice to playgroup, the Ark and youth club,
 Uniting food surplus with need through the hub;
 Best By date gone but still in good taste . . .
 . . . like this last line of verse, too precious to waste.*

From Peter: PARSNIP COMPETITION!!!

At the March Sogs meeting we were given a large bag of parsnip seed saved by Sue Stickland. She is an expert at saving seeds so they should be good. So, it was decided, by unanimous acclamation, to have a Sogs parsnip growing competition. Judging to take place at the Sogs Christmas feast. There will be prizes for the best and for the smallest and for the fanciest/rudest. That is 3 prizes. No one has an excuse not to participate; no matter how rubbish your ground is at growing roots you can produce for one of these categories. If you did not get any saved seed just buy a packet. We are accepting no excuses for non participation, this is going to be fun and could be the start of something great! (Such as curried parsnip soup).

From Maddy: The Real Seed Collection

They produce open pollinated, non hybrid seeds from varieties suitable for the small scale grower. Many are heirloom varieties but they also offer modern strains that they have trialed and found to do well and have a good flavour. As all their seeds are non hybrids (and non genetically modified) they can be saved each year and the company has an extremely informative web site giving free instructions for seed saving, and is encouraging the formation of seed circles where growers save a specified variety each and then swap seeds.

Seed orders come with printed instructions (on growing and seed saving) and observations (including cooking ideas for more unusual varieties) for each variety ordered.

Many of the vegetable seeds supplied are not on the ‘approved list’ of varieties so cannot be sold to the public, therefore when you order seeds you get charged 1 penny for a years membership to the Real Seed Club.
[Www.realseeds.co.uk](http://www.realseeds.co.uk)

01239 821107 P.O. Box 18, Newport, Pembrokeshire, SA65 0AA

From Jean: Exhibiting at the local flower & produce show:

If, like me, you live in Shrewsbury then perhaps your local flower & produce show takes place around mid-August - in the Quarry!

Yes, exhibiting at "The Flower Show" may seem outrageous or daunting but actually it's very simple, cheap and can even be good fun!

Several of my family have entered a mixture of categories over several years with a few prizes too!

My white hydrangeas won 2nd prize a few years ago & I enjoyed spending the £10!

The schedule will be available from Quarry Lodge by the main gate soon and entry forms must be submitted around mid-July.

Part of the fun is speculating what might be ready at the right time this year. Will it be courgettes or runner beans? I think herbs are usually a safe bet!

Cost recently has been £8 for 5 categories, which are to be taken into the marquee on Thursday or Friday morning before 6am!!

In return, entrants are given an exhibitor's ticket for both days of the show.

It certainly adds another dimension to visiting the show, & getting organic produce on show there would be brilliant.

Good luck!

Springtime News from Plantlife:

Shropshire also has a spring in its step! Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project is being set up by local verge volunteer groups and environmental organisations, in collaboration with Shropshire Council and Highways department, to ensure verges are managed for wildlife. In the coming months, keep an eye on our road verges website for case studies showcasing these and other road verge initiatives to give you inspiration for your local area.



Carola's pic – Jean at the payment counter, Potatofest

From Graham: **Garden-friendly Mechanical Cow**

At Berrington Hall we have a mechanical cow. It is properly called an "Anaerobic Bio-Digester" but in essence a mechanical cow is what it is. We provide it with kitchen waste - which we chop up a bit because it doesn't have any teeth. We feed it into the stomach where digestion takes place. The mechanical cow then farts

methane and excretes slurry - just like a real live animal cow. We capture the methane in a small gasometer to burn in the kitchen, and we collect the nutrient-rich slurry for use in the gardens. We have wood-fired central heating, solar thermal water heating and photovoltaic electricity - but our mechanical cow is the most sustainable energy supplier. This little pet is on trial. We have plans to use a much bigger one to power hot water and heating in the refurbished stable block; work in progress.

There are some caveats. The cow needs to be kept warm-ish. But some heat could be recycled into an insulated shelter to minimise that. It can seem fairly labour intensive. We will find ways to make it less so on a larger scale. An automatic feed is an obvious first step (for now feeding involves a very long rubber glove). We can supply all the raw material to keep it running continuously from our own kitchen. We could just feed it grass - but it prefers a mixed diet. Finding a way to connect food waste on a greater scale from other sources with our future needs is potentially a very positive scheme.

For now, the methane produced runs a single burner in the kitchen. The bigger one will run an Aga to cook and heat. The slurry is very rich fertiliser. We mix it with biochar from our wood-fired central heating boiler, then add it to compost/ dig into beds and hope to produce our own animal-free manure with straw to build a hot bed.

It's all very experimental at the moment - but it is all based on a well tried and tested process - a cow's digestive one.

Note: I am a layman where this technology is concerned. The technical experts tell me it's not quite so simple.

A recipe from Maggie:

We have just had a very good Wwoofer volunteering here. Some of you will have met her at the last SOG's meeting. She came from Llangollen and was keen to do some cooking for us. She made a very good Butternut Squash Dahl. Here is the recipe.

1 large or two small butternut squash, cut into bite size pieces

3 tablespoons oil

1 onion, chopped

2 cloves garlic, chopped,

1 tablespoon turmeric

1 tablespoon cumin

1 tablespoon coriander

A thumb-sized piece ginger, grated

1 mug red lentils (or green or brown)

1 litre vegetable stock

2 tablespoons tomato puree

Fry the onion and garlic in the oil until softened. Add the ginger and spices and fry for a few minutes. Add the squash and stir round in the spices until coated. Stir in the stock and the lentils and the tomato puree. Cook for 30 minutes until the squash is tender. Serve with plain boiled rice.

Wwoofer's parting gift - made from broken pots and bits & pieces.

From Ian:

Vegan Gardening?

Vegan food has become more popular in recent years. And now, a new book* has been published to promote vegan gardening, defined as “essentially a super-organic method that avoids any animal input – from manure to fertiliser”.

The book (reviewed in the Guardian) says that animal manures used to help grow plants can be contaminated with infectious diseases such as E coli and listeria, as well as persistent herbicides. It recommends making your own compost, which many of us already do of course (and mentions in passing that whilst using peat is vegan, it is not environmentally sustainable). The use of many commercial composts and fertilisers is not recommended in the book, as they can contain blood, fish and bones; vegan alternatives are comfrey-based liquid fertilisers, or growing green manure cover crops such as clover, mustard, phacelia and buckwheat.

Other ‘vegan’ garden practices listed are crop rotation, no-dig, and soil-covering, and planting to attract beneficial insects and predators, even planting sacrificial plants for the slugs.

So it looks like many of us organic gardeners might be vegan gardeners already.

*The Super Organic Gardener: Everything You Need To Know About A Vegan Garden, by Matthew Appleby.

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust has upgraded its Bee Kind tool. This enables gardeners to assess their plants and raise their garden's bee-friendliness score, and can give personalised planting advice.

<https://beekind.bumblebeeconservation.org/>

From Sue Bosson: Inspiration from Geoff Hamilton

I have recently obtained from a second-hand bookshop a fascinating little booklet commissioned by Clavering Organics called Herb Growing, The Organic Way, written by Lawrence D. Hills. It was first published in 1983, cost 65p and Geoff Hamilton wrote this foreword, copied below. **It was 35 years ago**, and I've always said that I owe my introduction to organic gardening to Geoff from that time. I know that most of our readers will know all this but it's nice to be reminded now and again.

"In some respects gardening and farming techniques have come full circle.

Time was, before the advent of 'artificial' fertilisers and pesticides, that gardeners and farmers relied for their plant nutrients and their pest control on purely organic compounds.

Farms were always mixed, with animals as well as food crops, so there was a plentiful supply of farmyard manure to recycle onto the fields. And there was always enough left over to supply local gardeners and allotments. Thus was provided a humus-rich soil structure and enough plant food to sustain quite acceptable yields of vegetables, grains and fruit.

Pest and disease control relied largely on natural predators and, because these enemies of plant pests were not themselves poisoned by chemicals, a balance was maintained.

Then science took a hand, first with the introduction of balanced artificial fertilisers, then with chemical pesticides and weed killers. Quite suddenly, farmers began to increase their yields dramatically and gardeners grew flowers and vegetable like they never had before.

Pests and diseases became less of a problem too. A regular spraying programme banished the common pests from field and garden. Certainly a few eventually found a resistance to the chemicals and survived , but newer, more powerful chemicals replaced the older ones just as quickly.

No further proof was needed that the organic age was dead.

It is only now that farmers, gardeners and yes scientists too, are beginning to realise the catastrophic effects of this wanton destruction of Nature's balance.

What we perhaps hadn't realised was that our soils were blessed with an inherent fertility arising from hundreds of years of careful husbandry. Since farming and horticulture began, we had always put back as much as or more than we took out. Only now is that fertility beginning to decrease. As recently as 1982 scientists at Luddington Research Station suddenly noticed that their soil was completely worm-free. With all the life-giving humus gone, plus the daily dose of chemical poisons, they could no longer survive to continue their vital work.

And pests and diseases are now on the increase too. It is a fact, that since the introduction of artificial pesticides, which have indiscriminately killed off natural predators as well as pests, the problems have never been greater. There is no doubt in my mind that you can only play around with Nature's balance for so long. I am convinced that the future of farming and gardening, to say nothing of our own health, depends upon a rapid return to more natural methods of husbandry.

Of course we must learn by our mistakes and we must use much of the valuable knowledge we have gained along the way. There is no reason, though, why we shouldn't feed our plants organically and naturally. Of course we must control pests and diseases, but if we do so at the expense of their natural predators we are laying up trouble for ourselves.

There is no doubt that enlightened farmers and gardeners are beginning to see the truth and it is with sincere enthusiasm that I welcome these books produced by the Henry Doubleday Research Association in conjunction with Clavering Organics. Read and digest well and help put a smile back on Mother Nature's face."

Geoff Hamilton

Remember this was written 35 years ago. More from this little book in the next edition (if space allows). *Yes please! Ed.*

From Sylvi:

You know how people talk about 'turning into your mother/father'? In truth, I think I've always kept useful bits of string and rubber bands (and nowadays those wire and plastic sealing twists). I've also been saving the strings from potato bags and oat and flour bags, each neatly wound round three fingers and secured with a flimsy plastic bag tie (finally found a use for those) A couple of years ago I used some in the garden and found they're incredibly strong and can be reused. But, oh dear, since they last and last does this mean they're not 100% natural fibre?

Also from Sylvi:

I've just seen an interesting article in The Guardian. The article is at :-
https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/14/city-bees-allotments-gardens-help-arrest-decline-study?utm_term=RWRpdG9yaWFsX0dyZWVuTGlnaHQtMTkwMTE4&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=GreenLight&CMP=greenlight_email

and refers back to this article:-

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-018-0769-y>

Here are three paragraphs:-

The results enabled them to work out the best ways to support a rich mix of pollinator species that will be resilient to climate change and other challenges. The best strategy is increasing the number of allotments, the report says. Planting preferred flowers in gardens also helps, as does mowing grass in public parks less frequently, allowing flowers to bloom.

Allotments are particularly good places for pollinators because they provide a mix of fruit and vegetable flowers, plus weedy corners full of native plants. “Allotments are incredibly important at a city level, despite

their small area,” said Katherine Baldock at the University of Bristol, who led the research. “They are a good place for pollinators to hang out and provide a win-win situation, as they are also good for food growing and for people’s health.”

The research, [published in the journal Nature Ecology and Evolution](#), found allotments and gardens often had 10 times more bees than parks, cemeteries and urban nature reserves. Baldock said nature reserves were important for other wildlife but were often less suitable for pollinators, being dominated by trees rather than meadows.

In response to my query as to how Sylvi and Mike’s **huegelkultur beds** were maturing Sylvi came up with:

We made them in March 2010.

Cut off turf to replace later upside down, dug out topsoil to replace later, layered with own compost, grass cuttings, turf, some ash.

Dug out a 'spit' of clay subsoil and barrowed it to a dry ditch.

The first layer was rotting wood, then twigs.

Then layers of replaced topsoil, own compost, leaf mould, grass cuttings, replaced turf, some ash.

We wish we had done them as raised beds and put down weed suppressant and wood chip paths but that came later.

At first the beds were mounds about 20-30cm high in the centre, and of course the soil slipped somewhat onto the paths.

Everything grew phenomenally well that year. From photos I see we used drip hoses but that was awkward because we had to reattach the hosepipe to each set of beds. Nowadays we try to water very little, if at all, using leaf mould as mulch. Summer 2018 was very dry and most crops suffered from lack of water.

I remember reading that hügelkultur beds should be rebuilt every seven years - hm, we're a year overdue. They have certainly flattened down to ground level, and have been enclosed with boards to produce raised beds, which we are still building up.

As I understand it, the advantages of huegelkultur are that the (often already rotting or rotten) wood at the bottom retains water which is

helpful for the plants to access during dry periods, the twiggy stuff above that has a lot of air pockets, which as advantageous for roots.

I've googled hügelkultur now and there is a great deal more useful information than I found eight years ago so for anyone who's interested there is a wealth of interesting information.

We first dug out an existing bed and made a hügel. I suppose this was as a trial. We actually wanted to add eight new beds about 5m by 1m. After doing the first new bed by hand we realised it would be a long and arduous job so hired a mini-digger for Easter weekend and I had great fun operating it. Poor Mike and a visiting son provided the muscle-power. The photos are still on Flickr - I think you have to go to <https://www.flickr.com/> and search for 'huegelkultur', which is my name on Flickr. If we can find time (and energy) I'd like to redo a couple of our beds with the huegelkultur method, to see if it makes any difference.

Sylvi's photo of bed in preparation

Spotted!

About hoverflies, wasps and bees:

28. 4. 2018 Ken Thompson in the Telegraph described a recent Dutch experiment to find which flowers hoverflies need to survive. Only very shallow flowers, less than 2mm deep are needed because of the hoverfly's short tongue. Umbellifers are excellent, as are buckwheat, borage, gypsophila and yarrow. Not all flowers that are good for bees are good for hoverflies: phacelia, cosmos and calendula have deeper flowers and so are inaccessible to hoverflies. Also we need to recognise and not destroy the larva – unattractive maggots – which perform useful work in sucking up aphids.

‘Respect our wasps!’ is the message from Sarah Knapton in the Telegraph, 19. 9. 2018. It would be fantastic if the concern about the decline of bees could be mirrored for wasps. They are crucial for pollination, and we should be tolerating wasps’ nests, and planting wasp friendly gardens with plenty of shelter and long grass.

And about slugs:

24.3.19 in the Sunday Telegraph. The RHS has warned that native British slugs are disappearing from the UK and urges gardeners to search for them and inform the RHS on its website.

The yellow cellar slug, which is useful for gardens as it feeds on decaying rather than live plant material, may be being usurped by the green cellar slug, which arrived in the 70’s from Ukraine. Both slugs have large, green-yellow patterned bodies. The ‘goody’ yellow cellar slug has a long yellow stripe along the centre of its tail. As slugs are nocturnal, people are asked to search after dark. They are asked to take photographs showing the top of each slug. They can use the ID guide on the RHS website to identify them. They need to note how long the search

took and how many slugs were found, which plant, if any, the slugs were found on, and to record the findings on the website.

If any Soggies dedicate themselves to nocturnal slug hunting, it would be interesting to hear about their experiences and whether they encounter goodies or baddies.

There is more. “Imogen Cavadino, research assistant at the RHS said:”Of the 44 species of slug known to exist in the UK only nine are serious pests. More are important composters and feed on fungi, lichens and algae. . . . There is even a man in Australia who keeps yellow cellar slugs in his bathroom to feed on the mould from the grout between his tiles”.

And from the leader column of the same issue: “The only redeeming feature of these naked Mollusca is they seem to understand how ugly they are, hence they have the decency to do their work at night”.

Dave finishing decorating near the top of the St Chad's Christmas tree.
The swifts you can see were on the nearby tree, by the Shropshire Swift Group.

*Fifteenth of May. Cherry blossom. The swifts
Materialize at the tip of a long scream
Of needle. "Look! They're back! Look! And they're gone
On a steep*

*Controlled scream of skid
Round the house-end and away under the cherries.
Gone.*

From a poem by Ted Hughes

Thank you to all who have contributed items and/or photos for the newsletter. We love to hear about your gardening achievements!

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Items for the next newsletter by Nov 23 2019, please.

From Maralyn: ODE TO INFLAMMATION (and apologies to Peter!)

Oh Soggies they love to eat CAKE!
 They use what they grow, and they bake –
 Courgettes and carrot, potato and swede.
 Add sugar and flour and where does it lead?

They do dig the garden, so do keep quite slim.
 Diabetes type 2? That's not for them.
 Arthritis, Alzheimers and those that don't rhyme
 Are all inflammation where sugar's the crime.

So bring along pickles and olives and nuts
 When out and about – it's good for your guts.
 Think outside the boxes of sugar and flour.
 Experiment, be creative, get tasty with sour.

You can do it! You're Soggies, you know what to do.
 Start a revolution – don't get in a stew!
 Think mayo, think pickles. See what you can make.
 Eat well, eat organic, but not always CAKE!

(many thanks to Peter and Maggie who brought dried apple slices!)

Sorry the page-numbering of this issue has gone haywire – Ed.

Summer Programme 2019

May 12th - 2.00pm - Visit to members garden, Janet and Nick Gibbs - Coppice House, Ford Heath, Nr Shrewsbury, SY5 9NS Tel 01742 860224. Approx 1 acre garden with orchard, raised veg beds, wildlife pond, fruit trees and a wetland area. Please bring cakes.

June 9th - (date to be confirmed) 2.00pm - Visit to member's garden, Siobhan's - Meadow House, Habberley, SY5 0TR Tel 01743 790179. Half an acre of slowly evolving garden but of more interest is a field which is being managed to increase wild flowers by green hay strewing and a new pond which now has 3 species of newts, frogs and toads. Please bring cakes.

July Summer Coach Trip July 21st – Morning visit to The Walled Garden, Will and Julia Scott's NGS garden in Worcester (approx 1.5hrs). (Will gave us a tool sharpening talk in 2017). Afternoon visit to be confirmed.

9th and 10th August – Shrewsbury Flower Show – Sogs' display stall. Volunteers needed.

September 29th - 2.00pm - Visit to Augernik Fruit Farm, Hopton Wafers, South Shropshire, DY14 0HH Tel: 07582 691085. Organic fruit farm on edge of Clee Hill which produces a wide variety of fruits and nuts almost all year round, all home grown and energy supplied from a wind turbine. See <https://augernikfruitfarm.weebly.com/>

October - date/time to be confirmed - Visit to Longden Road Cemetery Longden Road, Shrewsbury SY3 7HS. Guided tour of cemetery with someone from Caring for God's Acre, to look at the wildlife friendly management that is being carried out with advice from this charity and volunteers.