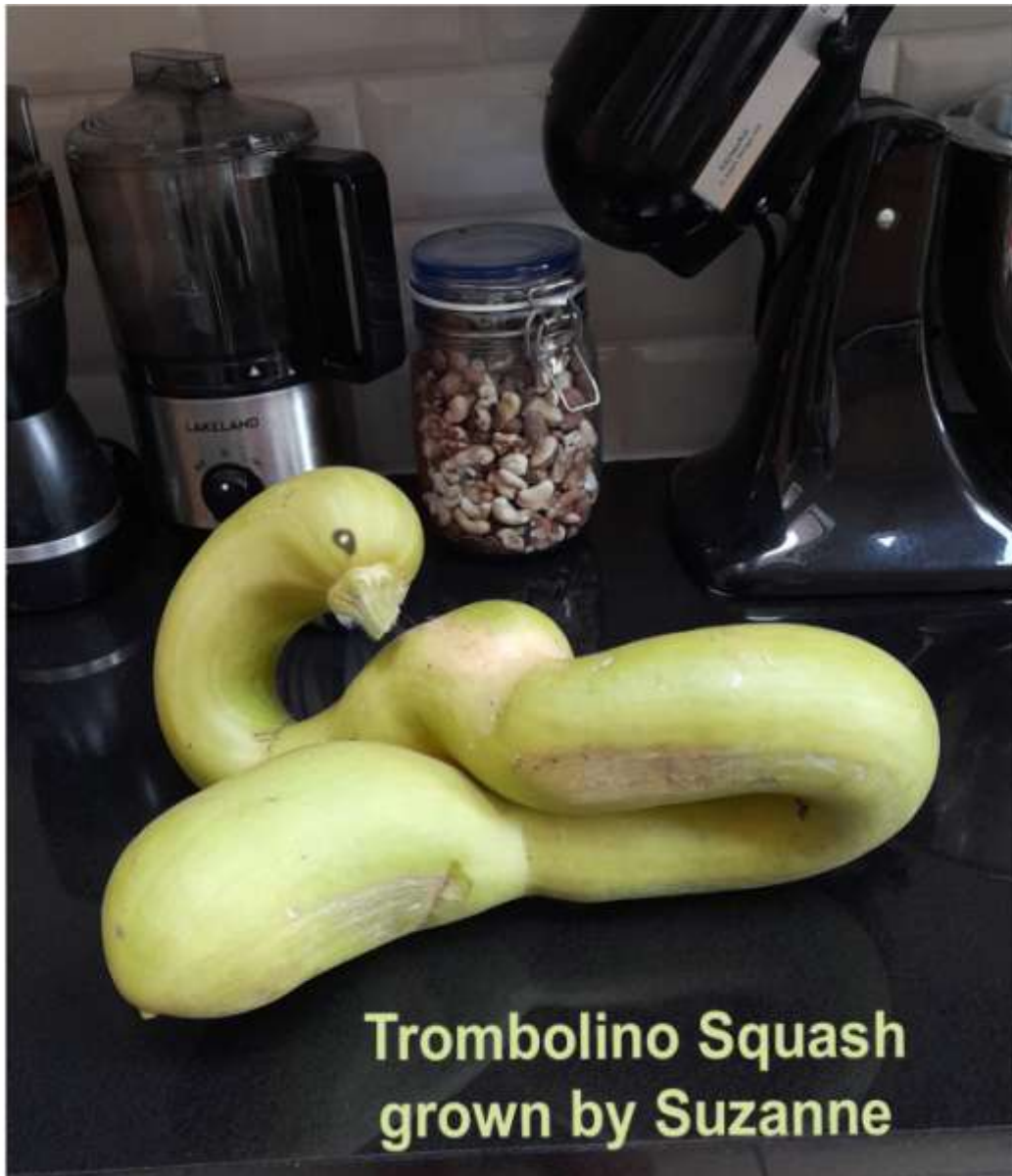


SHROPSHIRE ORGANIC GARDENERS

Autumn 2023

Newsletter 48



For gardeners, allotment holders, window box owners, who wish to grow without chemicals and meet with others.

LET YOUR GARDEN GO!

From Chrissy.



A few Nasturtium seeds sown in our raised bed have totally taken over. They are really really vigorous, the peas in the next section were totally overwhelmed. But they are pretty and I have loads of seeds which I'll bring to the seed swap in December. A good idea if you want some unstoppable ground cover.

SHROPSHIRE ORGANIC GARDENERS

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

Winter meetings on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.
Summer meetings from May to October are usually at weekends, and consist of visits to members' gardens, outings, practical workshops, demonstrations etc.

See the programme on the back pages.

We are regularly involved in putting on displays at green days/climate events/local and sustainable food events.

Subscription rates: £12 per person per year
Visitors: £3

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SHROPSHIRE ORGANIC
GARDENERS- SOGS

Members only group;

Soggies Surviving
Join the Conversation.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRWOMAN

Hello everyone and welcome to our Autumn 2023 newsletter, and a packed one it is with lots of input from yourselves.

Autumn is definitely here with the first frost, but not withstanding the torrential rain in the second week of October, we had a wonderfully warm sunny Sunday afternoon for our final garden visit of the year to Madeley Community Orchard organised by member Carola Adams, and the cohort of volunteers who help keep the orchard and veg beds going. We donated the visitor payments to the group and will follow on with some further funding in due course.

We had a great start to the summer visits with 30+ members heading to Greenacres Farm at Walford Heath. Our guide for the afternoon was Linda Price, also a SOGs member, and who had come for the first time to Potato Day with their stall of goodies. A very enjoyable and informative visit with the added bonus of a delivery of wool fleeces from a Welsh farming couple. More about the use of the fleeces further on.

The visit in June was to Pili-Pala Farm over in Wales, started by Tom Edwards and his family just two years ago. What a stunning place and what a turn-out of members. What Tom has achieved is inspiring, and he was over the moon by the visit and everyone's enthusiasm for what they're doing. Read more about this visit further on. We're going to follow their progress and make a return visit soon.

Unfortunately, July turned out to be wet and windy, and our intended visit to Elen Sentier's Re-Wilding Garden on the side of the Long Mynd was cancelled. Sadly at too short notice to arrange anything else, but never mind. We hope to rearrange this visit in future.

August's visit made up for July with a long awaited return to the garden of members Maggie and Mel out near Kinnerley, and an all time high of 60 members making the trip out there in bright sunshine. For those who had not been, like myself, it was absolutely wonderful. What a haven of peace and tranquillity, but also industrious gardening. How do they do it, with both running other businesses - that was the question on many people's lips. The party atmosphere and incredible selection of cakes, led one member to ask me whether it wouldn't be a good idea to have a regular summer party/get together! Let me know what you think of that idea please.

Sadly, I missed the visit to Peter Aspin's Hollies Agroforestry Farm but I gather there was a good turn out and it proved to be extremely interesting. I shall read the write up with interest.

Now of course we head into November and our winter programme of meetings which I hope you will enjoy. Check them out on the back pages, but by popular demand we start off on 1st November with Richard Cave from Melcourt Industries returning to continue his talk about Peat Free compost.

Don't forget to let me know if there is a particular subject you'd like to hear a talk on. Always open to new ideas, but I need to know early in the summer in order to find a suitable speaker.

Also by popular demand, we'll be doing a bulk order of Melcourt Composts again in 2023. A little later this time, on Friday 23rd February. Angela Cattermole has offered to take over the ordering side for me and delivery will again be down at Jan and Nick Gibb's place at Ford Heath. More on this later in December/early January.



Following on from the Spring Planning Group meeting, SOGs has made two charitable donations so far: £400 to the Shrewsbury Street Allotment Group and £200 to the Albert Howard Society in Bishop's Castle for an Albert Howard Memorial Plaque, celebrating his lifetime of work studying soil health and crop production, and sustainable organic farming. A further three donations are still to be made which I'll report on at the November meeting. All recipients of funding have agreed to come to the April meeting to give us a short update on their projects and how the money has helped them.

Street Allotment volunteers hard at work!

Planning for Potato Day is well underway following the recent Autumn Planning meeting, but next year it's our 20th anniversary event, so we'll need plenty of members to help out. We'll be giving an update at the November meeting.

We might be starting the process of putting our gardens to bed for the winter, but don't forget Maralyn's tips in the Spring newsletter (p.3), and not to be too hasty in cutting everything back.

Also, don't forget, we have the Christmas Bring and Share and our Big Seed and Garden Paraphernalia Swap, so if you have seeds and garden items you want to pass on, put them on one side for December.

Maralyn was recently asked why SOGs doesn't have a logo! Good question. It was discussed a few years ago then forgotten, but actually having a logo for use on our website and other websites is a good idea. So we are asking you all to have a go at designing a logo for SOGs. You'll have already received this information by email prior to this newsletter publication, but you'll find the detail again on Page 19.

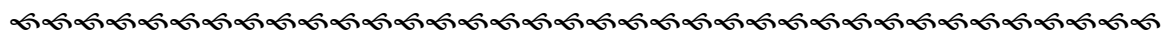
Please do get your arty/design hats on and come along to the Christmas meeting with your design for the judging.

Finally, I would like to thank Maralyn for gamely stepping in from her original deputy editor role, to producing the last four SOGs newsletters for us. She has done a sterling job but as you know, Maralyn is having to step down, so we do need a new member to take this role on. Just email me if you're ready to take up the challenge!

I do hope though that Maralyn will continue to contribute articles, jokes and vignettes as and when she can.

Enjoy the coming 'quiet' season.

Rachel



I stood in the garden wondering where the sun had gone.



Then it dawned on me.....

FROM THE (retiring) EDITOR

Many thanks to all of you who, in true SOGGY style, turned up trumps with turnips, potatoes and so much more. And thanks to Suzanne Webb-Thomas for her photo of the snake-like trombolino squash on the front cover. It really did have an eye, but, as this may be my last newsletter, I couldn't resist doing a bit of photoshop. It makes the job of editor so interesting previewing it all. I do hope that I have got it all in – though I may have kept some for the next time. Or I may have lost it as computer filing is not my thing! Apologies if yours didn't make it.

I look forward to chatting to one of you at a meeting who maybe is thinking – is Editor for me? Who knew I would be one – though this isn't my first, Marian helping me with one before. If you are conversant with WORD and are good at downloading and filing submissions from SOGs then you CAN do it! I am happy to help where I can. And maybe even give another vegetable the eye.

Thanks also to the photographers who have helped make this newsletter what it is



Spinning fleece from Dolwen Farm

TOP TIP from Carola Adams

Brassica learning point:

This year we left wildflower/weed strips between the rows of brassicas and in May went on a 3 week holiday. Needless to say we came back to tremendous growth with tiny kale and cabbage plants hidden amongst a tall flower/weed wonderland!! I removed some of the flower/weeds and left the plot alone. Lo and behold this month I noticed that the brassicas have done well and there has been hardly any Pigeon damage. Usually they are devastated by the pigeons.

Horatio's Garden

5th April 2023

By by Alex Law, Head Gardener – Horatio's
Garden Midlands – Oswestry

SOGS members will no doubt have known something about the "Horatio's Garden" charity before Alex gave his talk but everyone no doubt found out much more. The first clue to the way the gardens are run to give maximum benefit for patients was Alex was accompanied by Sharon Davies-Culham who introduced herself as "Garden Administrator ?". at Oswestry.

Alex went through the history of the charity, set up by the parents of Horatio Chapple from Salisbury, who was tragically killed by a polar bear while on a group expedition to Svalbard (Spitzbergen) in 2011. Horatio had realised that a garden at the hospital in Salisbury, where he volunteered, would benefit spinal injury patients and had done research with the patients as to what should be included. This research has been used since to influence the design of the gardens. There are about 2500 people per year in the UK who suffer spinal injuries leading to a total of 50000 who have to live with their life changing condition. The average time people stay in a spinal injuries unit is 6 months so their environment is important to them. This is why the provision of the gardens, designed sympathetically and meticulously to meet patients needs and with associated activities, is so beneficial.

There are 11 spinal injury units in the UK and progress has been steady towards providing a garden for each. Seven now exist and the eighth was built on the main avenue at Chelsea Flower Show 2023 --- before being moved to Sheffield. All the gardens have been designed by well known designers and the Oswestry design was drawn up by Bunny Guinness. As Oswestry is "his" Alex went through in some detail the design concepts, the planting through the seasons and the challenges. Basic requirements for all gardens are specified so there are carefully created "private corners" where wheelchair patients can have private time with relatives or use it when they want a bit of time alone. Also each has a greenhouse and a garden room where creative

activities can be enjoyed. For patients interested in gardening they can get involved.

At Oswestry there have been all sorts of events as well including live music of all genres, a Christmas Fayre and barbecues. Alex and Sharon are the only employees – part time – so the work of volunteers is vital. Oswestry has 33 and about 25 turn up each week to help in various ways with whatever may be going on. Of these about 1/3 are experienced gardeners. The volunteer input is vital.

Dwelling on Alex's talk afterwards and thinking about the implications of the work of Horatio's Gardens it was impossible not to feel emotional. From the tragic beginning has grown a series of gardens with activities that help people through the process of facing their new lives – a very hard and emotional journey for each. We all understand the wellbeing that gardens can provide but Horatio's Gardens are in a league of their own.

TOP INFO: From Jan Gibbs

Researchers from Bristol University found that *Mycobacterium vaccae* – a common bacteria in soil – activates the brain neurons that produce serotonin, the feel good chemical and that eating food straight from the soil benefits your guts microbiome keeping it healthy.....but we SOGs all knew that already!



Compost at Pila Pila farm.

BTO EARTHWORM RESEARCH

25 YEARS OF DECLINING EARTHWORMS. <https://tinyurl.com/2s3rx7m7>

GREENACRES FARM

14TH May, 2023

This was a visit I was really looking forward to, and I was not disappointed. The 16 acre farm is run by Shropshire Council and provides placements for adults with learning difficulties. There are opportunities to learn horticultural skills, animal management, other craft activities and in the café, so something for everyone. However, Linda pointed out that some just wanted the space and the peace to wander round and watch the world go by. I can go with that!



Linda and Jesse, a volunteer

Linda is a part time Community Support worker at the farm, having honed her skills at Severndale School, then volunteering at Attingham walled garden – multi-talented. She led us round the farm, starting with the reed beds and settling tank. The tank oxygenates the sludge before moving to the reed beds and on to the lagoon.



Then past the array of solar panels to the chickens. The panels were funded by EU grants and the Council. It was good to see the effort that has gone into sustainability by the Council.

The house, which was the original base for the day service users, is being renovated to give respite to families, and has raised vegetable beds nearby, where the potatoes donated from Potato day were growing well.

But this isn't the only growing space as there was more round the site. On a far side of the site, a new 8 unit residential house will be built so that those needing permanent residential placements can be kept within county. Whilst this will take up land, it will be a wonderful place for people to live and explore.

Moving on, we passed the kune kune pigs, who refused to be photographed, sheep, and an area of small cages with lop eared rabbits, and then round the wildlife area. I saw my first red admiral of the year. Of course we had to stop at the Hen litter Winrows – a must for SOGGIES! There are 2 chicken units but, after bird flu, only one is operational with the other being renovated, but there is great demand for eggs, which go to Preston Montford, shops and cafes so hopefully they will have more soon.



The polytunnels had some interesting plants getting ready to be planted out in the raised beds. Two raised planters ensured that wheelchair users could participate, and there are plans for higher raised beds too.

It was evident, that, after nearly coming out of Council ownership a few years ago, it hadn't been forgotten and was constantly improving with new ideas and facilities in the future.

Maralyn

NOTE: The shop at the entrance is open Monday to Friday. I bought more plant labels, as I gave away the ones I bought at Potato Day, and also some honey. Was tempted with a concrete fish for our pond

PILI-PALA FARM

nr Llanfyllin

10TH JUNE Rachel Strivens



Pili-Pala *n.* (plural pilipalod or pilipalas) = Butterfly (in Welsh)
June saw SOGs return to Wales with a visit to Pili-Pala Farm, Smithy, Cwm Nant Y Meichiaid and thanks to Sue Bosson for recommending this one.

Tom Edwards and family moved to the house and land just a couple of years ago and have worked wonders on this stunning south facing hillside which allows maximum solar gain, (and by golly we felt it - a perfect hot sunny day, but sheltered from the north by an ancient woodland.

The site is approx 4.5 acres of pasture, with an acre under cultivation as a regenerative market garden, specialising in soft fruit and veg with some flowers. Although not 'certified organic', they are completely chemical free and use a 'no-dig' approach, meaning a humungous amount of green waste compost is employed on the 80cm wide beds with 40cm stepover paths.

Tom (and his nephew Charlie) try to be as intensive as possible with planting, often multi-sowing, they aim to get crops per bed per year. Tom rarely direct sows preferring to sow in modules in the polytunnel, then plant out. They heavily utilise mesh and netting as the main means of pest control, but also focus on soil health, feeding and improving soil life to encourage strong healthy plants that can cope with/reduce pests and diseases.

All the work is done with hand tools, tractors and other mechanised tilling systems are not employed, and irrigation is done by gravity. A row of IBC's sit at the top of the site, which are fed by a natural spring. Water trickles down the site through irrigation pipes. If you have the space at home, IBC's are brilliant for rain water collection.



They run a farm shop from the site and a veg box scheme and hope to increase the local sales as time goes by.

They had already been picking strawberries for 2 weeks prior to our visit, using traditional British crops for June/July but have replaced every other bed with Californian Day Neutral plants which give the same yield but over a longer period, until the first frost. Albion and Monterey varieties last 2 years then need to be replanted.

They have a superb flavour and Tom has promised that if he can get enough runners to root he'll be happy to sell some to members who'd like to try them next year. Watch this space.

Interestingly, Tom doesn't do a planned crop rotation process. Recent research is showing that crop rotation is not needed. There are lots of trials going on and Charles Dowding in particular has been growing some crops 7 years running in the same place with no problems.

I've put all the useful bits of information Tom imparted as we toured around the site below to make it easier to pick out what you want to try yourselves.

I admire anyone starting out in market gardening in the UK. It's a tough call but Tom was so enthusiastic and keen. I think all of us who made this visit felt something really great is happening and Tom would love SOGs to follow their progress so if you missed this visit there will be other opportunities to come.

Pili-pala is a two-man band so giving up his precious Sunday afternoon was especially appreciated. As always we made a donation, in this case £100 and thanks also to Sarah, Tom's wife who helped supply the liquid refreshments.

I just want to share with you Tom's response to the donation made by SOGs.

'I have just noticed your generous donation. It's been a really tough few weeks, and this has been a massive help and really boosted me.

I just wanted to pass on my heart felt thanks to your amazing members. They really need to know how such a gesture can influence a small enterprise like this, and have such a positive impact.

I am truly grateful for your support, and will be investing the money in some more drip irrigation, that will save me some much valued watering time.'

**I would tell you about the strawberry jam –
But you might spread it!**

Nuggets in a Nutshell or Tom's Tips

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garlic - can be eaten green; it is becoming very popular. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sow beetroot and spring onions in modules, a few seeds per module. Easy to plant out and then harvest at just the right size.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you got gaps? - do lots of companion planting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lettuce - plant out and harvest the outer leaves. It seems to stop bolting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep using the same bed all through the season for a particular crop eg lettuce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sow leeks in clumps in module then transplant out as clumps. Make sure the soil is moist before gently harvesting the larger ones.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrots can be grown close – the first harvest will be small roots but the rest will be larger. Sow in February between garlic. Amsterdam and Nantes are both early maturing varieties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cauliflowers can take up a lot of space but 'Candid Charm' is more compact and can be grown closer together.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coriander is best grown in the shoulder season as it is a cool climate crop. Easily bolts in heat of summer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purple Sprouting Broccoli – Tom sows in polytunnel on 14th February, potted on in early March and planted out late March – early April. 'Summer Purple' is a British broccoli variety that has been specially bred for summer and autumn cropping seasons.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use black plastic sheeting to kill grass where you want beds, then remove and top off with cardboard, then compost. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaffold netting is readily available, cheap and comes in 50m width – great.

Visit to Maggie and Mel's Garden

Alison Hughes



When Maggie and Mel offered their garden for a SOGS visit they probably never imagined that 60+ soggies, some children, a couple of WOOFERs (one from 'Germany and one from France) would descend on them with enough savouries, cakes and biscuits to feed at least twice that number. Luckily there was more than enough space for us all. The most stylish entrance came from Peter and another Maggie in their open-topped 1970s triumph Herald.



We quickly learnt that the "Quabbs" in Quabbs Cottage is Anglo-Saxon for mud and we found out about the trials and tribulations of living on land that regularly floods - with having to build a house on stilts and being prepared for your even your heaviest outside belongings to float away.



The small-holding itself is a glorious jumble of cultivated and wild areas, with something for everyone including raised vegetable plots, a polytunnel, fruit trees and bushes, all sorts of containers, a stream and even a pond. So there were lots of interesting conversations and sharing of information: the best vegetable varieties, how this year's crop is different from last year's and my favourite - how to attract great crested newts

into your pond.

Weatherwise it was one of the best afternoons of the summer and so, by 4.00 we were all ready for tea and the valiant attempt to eat all that food.

My favourite bit of the afternoon though, is very personal. Apart from Maggie and Mel, Quabbs cottage has two other residents - a sheep and a pig. The massive pig, wallowing happily in its portion of the aforementioned mud, took me straight back to my uncle's garden. He was a pigman and there was always the runt of a litter being fed the kitchen scraps (it was back in the fifties) and the pig was always massive.



Somewhere we all wanted to chill out!

A Story of Trees and Cows!

A Visit to “The Hollies” Farm near Wem

Frank Oldaker

Holly maybe dominated once upon a time at “The Hollies” farm but the name doesn’t reveal what goes on there now. On the farm there are numerous exotic and rare trees as well as more familiar species - all chosen with research in mind by Peter Aspin who owns the place – more on that later. 30 members turned up to be given a tour of the farm by Peter. This is no ordinary farm but is the home of “The Shropshire Agroforestry Project”. Growing trees and practising agriculture in a mutually supportive way is not new and can be seen in other parts of the world particularly Asia. But it is not in use in the UK.



Over about 20 years Peter has established a system on 20 acres. The layout is rows of trees running due north to south, to equalise light received by each tree, with the rows being 20m apart and 5m between trees. Each “alley” between the rows has been created as permanent grazing because pregnant cows from an adjacent farm are looked after here until just before calving –

for which they go back to their owner. The cows are also browsing on the trees so improving their diet and electric fences keep them a little bit away from the trees, so they don't do unwanted damage. Unlike in big open fields these cows can easily find shade when they need it and protection when there is a storm. Exposure to temperature extremes is less severe both in summer and winter.



The reason Peter is growing a large variety of different trees from all over the world is to see how each fares in this country and as the climate changes. Many are nut trees and could provide significant quantities of food for us. Others produce valuable timber which if grown at scale in this country could help reduce the need for imports – which may not be available anyway due to worldwide shortages. It was clear that a lot of knowledge about the various species has been gained and as we walked around Peter freely talked about the successes and failures – don't try and grow a ginkgo tree unless in a very sheltered spot – it won't !!

There is much more to understand about the work going on at “the Hollies” which you can find on the website:

silvaspin.org.uk or just search “Shropshire Agroforestry Project”



From Chrissy – membership secretary:

This is a heritage variety of sweetcorn but I don't know its name. Apparently the purple sort was common hundreds of years ago. On first tasting it, it's really tough! We much prefer the modern ones. I remember at university studying genetics, we were given some of these heritage cobs. We had to count the number of each colour, calculate the ratio of each and work out the dominant and recessive genes. I couldn't do it now. Heaven knows how I did it then, but it was 50 years ago..

Potato Day 2023

Ian Thom

After two years of ‘hybrid’ Potato Days, we finally got back to something like normal this year. 2021 had to be operated as a click and collect only, from a barn in North Shropshire (a very welcoming one as it happens); 2022 was back at Wattlesborough Village Hall, but with a large element of click and collect still in place.

This year, we dropped the click and collect entirely, partly because it is a lot of extra work, but largely because we know from the feedback of visitors that people do like to come along to choose their seed potatoes, use the cafe and the tea and cake stall, and browse the other stalls.



Given the crush we had in the main hall last year, particularly around the café tables, we decided to make more room in the hall for people to move around and to put most of the stalls in the side hall. Again, judging by the feedback from visitors and stall-holders, this seemed to be appreciated. We had invited a total of 10 stall-holders to use the side hall, although in the end we just had seven, because of some late withdrawals. However, those who did turn up, had busy days, including Master Composters and Right To Grow, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Greenacres Farm, Callum’s Herbs, Flamingo Paperie Cards, and of course Tools For Self-Reliance, who again did a roaring trade. Steve and Bill (“The Potato Men”) defied a sea of troubles to turn up and engage visitors with their amazing range of knowledge, compost from Melcourt Industries, following on from the bulk order for members

in the previous month and a very informative talk from Richard Cave. We will follow-up with another bulk order next year (again, this will be before Potato Day).

As for the potatoes themselves, this year we had 40 varieties (as opposed to last year’s 47), and most of them sold well, particularly Bambino, Carolus, Charlotte, Nicola, Pink Fir Apple, and Sarpo Mira. It was encouraging that most of the 13 organic varieties sold well. This year we tried five different varieties from Northern Ireland, which again seemed to go well; if those of you who bought some of these could let me know the results, I would be very

grateful. Our seed potato suppliers, Brighter Blooms, were again superb, and also attracted lots of people to their own stall.

The unsold potatoes again went to Maddocks Farm Shop for further sales, and we donated some to Seedy Saturday, Greenacres, and Oak Farm.

As ever, all the volunteers did sterling work again, from setting up tables, and offloading potatoes from van to trays on the Friday night, to stocking and running the kitchen and tea & cake stalls (both making healthy profits), to selling potatoes, raffle tickets (prize from Maddocks Fruit and Veg) and memberships, to managing the car park and the 'meet and greet', to finally dismantling everything, tidying away, and sweeping up. There was a little local difficulty on the parking front, but we'll sort that for next year; this was due to the sheer number of people turning up; at least 480, mostly between 10.00 and 1.00; even by official opening time, we had 'clicked' 103 visitors in the hall! Next year, we will have 'bouncers' to hold back the tide prior to an earlier opening.

And finally, thanks to Rachel for again holding it all together, and even finding time to be interviewed by Genevieve Tudor for Radio Shropshire (who is now a member).

Next year's event has already been booked at Wattlesborough, but make a note in your diary that it is on 10th February 2024, the second Saturday in February.

William' feedback:

William grew "Lily Rose, one of the Northern Irish varieties new to us (a Second Early). He says it was a good cropper and cooker. It is mottled when harvested, turns redder when cooked, and doesn't bleed into white potatoes when cooking. Firm to cut and eat

DESIGN A SOGS LOGO!!!

What is special about SOGS? Use your imagination!!!!

You may have noticed that there are a number of logos in this newsletter – and we need one to be on other websites.

Bring your ideas to the Christmas bring and share in paper form for SOGS to chose their favourite.

The prize is seeing YOUR logo everywhere!

SHROPSHIRE GOOD FOOD PARTNERSHIP

Their first ever Marches Conference in September proved to be a big success in a relaxed atmosphere when the expert speakers could meet and chat with attendees. This will give you an idea of who and what the Good Food Partnership is, and also gives opportunities for talks, visits and training. Keeping organic, local food is so important for our climate, soils and our own health, linking up our local food systems and providing opportunities for employment.



SOGS think small! Small holdings, Allotments, gardens, window boxes – or a pot on a windowsill. But we do like to support our commercial organic food growers and sellers for those products that we don't have outside our windows.

Check out their website, and join their email updates.

CH <https://www.shropshiregoodfood.org/>

Also listen to the

PODCASTS OF THE SHROPSHIRE GOOD FOOD TRAIL.



Best Flowers for pollinators from Jan Gibbs



Viper's Bugloss
I am saving seed for the Seed Swap

Phacelia
A good cover crop



Basil
Grown in the ground in the greenhouse

Tagetes linnaeus
Tall, fabulous colours, unaffected by any weather



The Gaia Seed Sovereignty Programme

Catherine Howell, Northern Region Coordinator

The Seed Sovereignty programme from the Gaia Foundation is an initiative that operates across the UK and Ireland. Aiming to increase the production and use of open pollinated and agroecological seed, the programme works with growers of all scales, supporting them through networking, training and mentoring and acting as an advocate making sure their views are heard in wider strategic discussions.

Did you know...

- 75% of the world's crop diversity has been lost since 1900?
- 60% of seed supplies are held by just four multinational, petrochemical companies?
- 80% of our organic vegetable seed is imported from outside the UK?

This means our seed supply and consequently our food supplies are vulnerable to changing climates, economic difficulties and the motivations of unethical and damaging businesses.

Thankfully, we can challenge this, even on an individual level. How?

- By choosing to buy open pollinated, non-F1, non-hybrid seeds. This will be marked on the packet.
- Buy from smaller, UK-based seed producers that prioritise regionally adapted and organically grown seeds and ethical working practices.
- Save your own seeds! Well done, this will save you money, give you better quality and more resilient crops and enable you to share with other growers.
- Become involved in the movement for Seed Sovereignty! The programme has training opportunities at various levels and to suit all budgets, we have events and celebratory events across the country.

One further action you could take is to join the Community Seed Forum. The Community Seed Forum is a peer-led online group that meets every other month. Topics respond to the current interests of the members; sometimes the chat is more general and informal. It's the perfect space for those who work within their local communities to save and share seed and all are

welcome! Use the Seed Sovereignty website below to find out more and sign up.

Also from Catherine: Seed saving does not need to be complex and if you're just starting out, there are a few varieties that are definitely 'low hanging fruit!'

There are, however, a few general rules of thumb: make sure your initial seed stock is an open pollinated variety (F1 or hybrid varieties will not produce seed that is 'true to type'); grow as many plants as you can reasonably manage in your space to ensure the genetic diversity of your crop is maximised; plan for a longer season – the cycle from seed to seed is longer than seed to crop and you will need to account for this in any crop plans. Perhaps most important is to choose to save something that resonates with you (and will therefore receive your attention!) This might be because you find it beautiful, productive, locally significant or it has a special story attached to it.

Peas, French beans, most tomatoes and lettuce are the crops that are least likely to cross with their neighbours and are the best for seed starters. Grow the crops as you would do normally, removing any plants that appear weak, susceptible to disease or don't show characteristics you want to preserve. Pea and bean pods should be left on the plants until they're dried (at which point they should be shelled and stored). Ripe tomatoes should be pulped and the slimy coating on the seed can be removed by fermenting, before drying and storing. Lettuce seeds can be collected by hand and the fluffy parts removed by winnowing in a light breeze. (There are links to more detailed guidance below).

Storage of seed is super important. Make sure your seeds are stored in cool, dry and well-ventilated conditions, away from potential vermin and labelled accurately. Paper bags or envelopes are ideal.

And when you have plenty, be sure to share! The gift of seed to another grower is the greatest.

For more information:

The Seed Sovereignty initiative (including a drop down tab for the Community Seed Forum) - <https://www.seedsovereignty.info/>

Shropshire Rural Seed Bank Network -

<https://www.shropshiregoodfood.org/grow-local>

Seed saving instructions (including a downloadable guide) from Real Seeds -

<https://www.realseeds.co.uk/index.html> (bottom left hand index bar)

Sue Stickland's book, 'Back Garden Seed Saving' for comprehensive, crop by crop instructions

Contact Catherine Howell: catherine@gaiagnet.org

STREET ALLOTMENT PROJECT

(by Maralyn for Casper – he is VERY busy!)

The Street Allotment Project has taken on yet another growing space – this time at Shrewsbury Catholic Cathedral Primary School. Casper and Fleur are now organising the growing space and volunteers. This is the 7th growing space in Shrewsbury, starting from a very small patch by a garage in lockdown and Casper being bored (?????) to Shrewsbury wide. Behind a pub, in Youth Clubs, schools – anywhere where there is earth to be made into delicious soil, they are there!

Shrewsbury Town Council is behind them, as is Garden Organic, Master Composters and also a lot of community support. Our own Pete and Maggie turned up with water containers, (see last newsletter) and now they have a cargo bike, sprayer for organic fertilizer (I am assured it is NOT FOR chemicals!) and many smaller items.

What fertilizer to use? Seaweed? Comfrey or nettle? Send your thoughts to Casper via their facebook page!

And get on your bike to go along to one of their Volunteer Sundays. They need all the help they can get.



Zero carbon transport

<https://www.streetallotmentproject.org/home>

HAPPY GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY!



**Organic Certification
celebrates its' 50th
anniversary this year.**

Tasty Turnips-Sue Stickland



You probably think of turnips as a dull and unappetising winter vegetable – but think again. They have been grown in the UK (and generally looked down upon) for hundreds of years – the large lumpy roots were fed to cattle and were used as a winter staple by the poor and the desperate in hard times. No wonder they have a poor image! In fact, however, they are a valuable garden crop, definitely worth considering afresh. Quick-growing cultivars are tender and succulent with a peppery sweetness, delicious eaten young – raw in salads, stir fried, or steamed whole. They can be one of the first vegetables harvested from spring sowings.

Turnips do best in an open spot with fairly rich moisture-retentive soils, but baby turnips can be successfully grown in large containers. They are also a useful polytunnel crop early and late in the season. Using appropriate varieties, they can be sown every few weeks from mid-March to mid-August and harvested for much of the year.

However, they are easiest to grow (and most appreciated) when sown in early spring or in late summer – in hot dry weather and long days, the roots readily become woody and bolt.

Sow direct into drills 23-30cm (9-12in) apart, thinning to 10-15cm (4-6in) apart, using the wider spacing for larger autumn roots. It is essential to thin seedlings promptly, keep the plants weed free and water frequently in dry weather. The thinnings can be used as greens. For early baby turnips, seed can also be multi-sown in modules and the seedlings planted as a bunch.

Quick-growing cultivars can be harvested in as little as 6-8 weeks when golf ball size, and early sowings of these may escape brassica pests such as flea

beetle and cabbage root fly. Later sowings usually need a protective cover of fine insect-proof mesh.

Recommended varieties – Nearly all the popular varieties such as ‘Oasis’ and ‘Tokyo Cross’ are F1 hybrids. If you want to avoid these try ‘White 40-day’ from Real Seeds or ‘White Globe’ from Tamar Organics.

Turnip Comments and tips from Rachel

Reading through one of my early season RHS magazines, I came across an article from our own Sue Stickland on the slightly forgotten vegetable, the turnip. (see above article) Right thought I, time to give turnip growing a go and so glad I did. Much more delicate in flavour than Swede, they are really lovely mashed with a bit of crème fraiche and plenty of black pepper. Goes very nicely with fish instead of potatoes.

Being from the Brassica family, I really should have covered them in mesh, so the leaves got badly munched by caterpillars, but the roots were fine.

~~~~~

## **Barrels of fun, Jan Gibbs**

### **Growing Potatoes in Boxes**



After having quite a few scabby potatoes last year, I decided to grow my first and second earlies in black recycling boxes (which are now redundant in some places)

In the bottom of each box, I put 8” of homemade compost, then put 2 seed potatoes in each box. I then pushed them in firmly so they have about 6” of compost under them. If you have comfrey leaves available someone said to lay the potatoes on a few of those.

I filled the boxes right to the top with home-made compost and some well-rotted manure, I then

topped it off with some woodchip to keep the moisture in.

I forgot to say that the boxes, before being filled, were put on top of one of the compost heaps. (Very heavy if you don't!) This is a great place for them as they get warmth from the heap and any water you apply does not get wasted.



I averaged about 5lb of potatoes from each box, the best were Jazzy and Pink Fir Apple, all clean and very easy to harvest as you just tip the box on its side, and out they fall.... buried treasure!

Then the spent compost just goes back on the heap

### **Growing Strawberries in Barrel Tower**

The Strawberries in the converted molasses barrel were average but they would have done better in a Fruit Cage. I think I am going to grow strawberries in tubs in the greenhouse next year so if anyone wants to try the barrel, they are welcome to come and pick it up



contact .... Jan 07748 406 676



## **Madeley Orchard Garden 2023**

**Carola Adams orchard volunteer**



Madeley Orchard is situated in the middle of its local community. Its origins go back to 1863 when it was part of land conveyed in trust to the deserving poor of Madeley Parish (Telford). It is still to this day open all day for anyone to visit. It is a popular organically managed garden used by residents, schools, local clubs, families, and unemployed people. It is a place to play, relax and experience nature. The spring blossom, the bee borders buzzing, ripe currents and later the tree fruit are all available for the community to pick

and use. During Covid lockdowns the garden was barely visited except by dog walkers.

15 or so volunteers maintain the garden, but sadly none could do so during the Covid years. As a volunteer I desperately missed the company of our Tuesday work parties. I'm now remembering on return how low and withdrawn individuals had become, no one laughed, some of us talked a lot, and across each other, words tumbled out like from a boiled over kettle, others said nothing and looked at their feet.

There was a structured programme that held us together. Each Tuesday we started in a circle with each of us leading a warm-up or stretching exercise. We shared examples of the NHS 5 steps to mental wellbeing, then choose the day's tasks. Some of us liked to work alone others in small groups but always we all came together for 11.00 coffee break and we finish off with a final round of 'cool down' exercises.

Once back after Covid it took several weeks for the lockdown sadness to begin to work its way out. Gradually the jokes and laughter trickled through and we started being able to listen to each other again. We became less inward looking and more aware of our surroundings. Finally we became a proper group once more, shared wheelbarrows, fetched tools for each other, passed the biscuits round and heard the summer bees. We remarked to each other how the blossom was turning to tiny apples, pears and nuts. We discussed what was on TV tonight, how we nearly caught a big fish in the river Severn, and when our next doctor's appointment was.

Today in 2023, looking at the visiting families picnicking by the willow dome and the volunteers turning the compost, such normal collective activities, I realise that it's only now that we dare to look back on those awful lockdown times and the impact Covid had on our mental and physical wellbeing. On this sunny morning I'm reminded of how vital The Orchard is to our diverse little group of volunteers, and indeed how vital they are to it. I'm seeing so clearly how working together out in the garden for a common purpose is grounding and restorative to each and every one of us.



*SOGS visit in October –  
fantastic, relaxing afternoon.*

# Organic fleece from Dolwen Farm

Maralyn Hepworth

When Rachel sent out the email asking who would like organic fleeces to mulch their fruit trees, strawberries etc, I thought – No! As a spinner who is at last spinning the final fleece in the garage, I didn't want more. But, as spinners and gardeners will know, you can never have too many. It costs so much more to shear the sheep than you can get for the fleece, so helps the farmer. The fleeces were mostly Charolais.

Rachel heroically took a huge pile of fleece to the Greenacres farm visit and I was first to choose my fleece. I have different criteria for spinning!!! I ended up with two as Frank had also given Rachel £2 when I thought I was spent up in the shop. Back at home, these were “skirted” – the outer, and bottom areas removed, and then sorted for spinning. Unfortunately, as they weren't grown for yarn, the coloured spray was on the best bit – across the shoulders, but there was still plenty to go into the garage ready to amuse me in future. Something the farmer could take into consideration in the future.



Fleece in cutlery container

The skirted bits are now mulching the fruit trees, strawberries – though the birds keep pulling it out, and in an old cutlery tray for the birds to use as nesting. I also have a nut feeder with fleece. In the past I have also used it to line hanging baskets, and to cover the compost heap. Other members have mulched their blackberries, used it to slow down vinca major coming from next door, and to put in the bottom of pots before planting, which apparently works well. Thanks for all the tips.

A recent radio 4 programme was a new vineyard owner who wanted to be organic, buying fleece from the neighbouring sheep farm – thus paying for the shearing. He mulched 2 rows of grapevines, keeping the weeds down without having to use herbicides. A win win situation. The weeds were suppressed, the vines were fed as the fleece rotted down it created a wonderful soil. AND the grapes were sweeter, making better wine, apparently due to the sun being reflected up to the grapes.

Look out for me wearing my fleece next year



## What your Chairwoman tried this year

Following the visit a year back to Linley Hall and Kate Gatacre's recommendation for the Ananas noire Pineapple Tomato, I got hold of some seeds. Every seed germinated so some plants were given to Ian Southworth and Jan Gibb for trialling. And what whoppa's they are. Multi-coloured, they have a superb flavour, juicy and sweet.

I've saved plenty of seeds which will be available for members to try at the Christmas Bring and Share and Seed Swap evening in December.



I also took Kate's advice this year and stopped watering and feeding the tomatoes at the beginning of August and I heavily de-leaved to further help them ripen.

Next year I plan to try another of Kate's recommendations, the Ukrainian Pear Tomato.

~~~~~

From Jan Gibbs – I so agree. Ed.

: Every Spring I wish I had planted more bulbs so....

BUY MORE BULBS

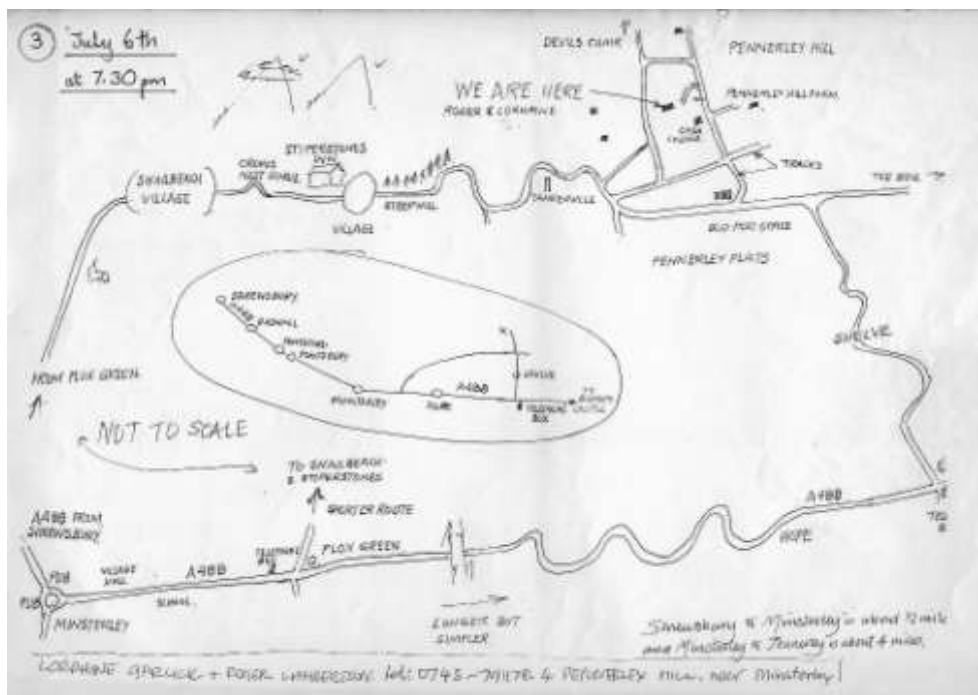
From The Archives

Ian Thom

After the formation of SOGS in 1990 and 1991, the Group continued to be very active in the 90s, with the established pattern of garden visits in the summer and evening meetings in the winter.

1991 had four visits, three to members' gardens, and one to Radbrook Horticultural College (now "Radbrook Village" housing development). The following year included another five visits, including Alison Ash's Market Garden at Berrington Hall.

A notable feature of these visits to members' gardens was the production and distribution of hand-drawn maps, some of them beautifully detailed. Prior to widespread mobile phone usage and map apps, it was a case of an A-Z Street Atlas, an OS Map, or these hand-drawn maps. I have reproduced (with Roger's permission), this particularly interesting map showing how to get to Pennerley for a visit to the garden of Lorraine Gawlik and Roger Lambertsen in the early 90s.



Meanwhile, the 1993 AGM was particularly notable for the election of officers; 11 posts were filled, including Chairperson/Keeper of Log Book (Ann Farquhar), Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, Planning/Speakers (3), Room Bookings, Publicity, Posters (2), AGM Minutes, Refreshments, Distribution of Leaflets, and HDRA Representative. Those were the days.

Gardening Isn't For Me

Marian Byrne

That is what I used to think, in my teens and early twenties. It just seemed like hard work. Our first house was an end of terrace in Liverpool, roomy and sunlit, and with a back yard. At the front was enough room between the bay window and the low wall for a privet hedge. Too much work! The hedge was taken out and concrete poured in.

Then improvements were made to the house interior. Built-in kitchen cupboards were fitted, and the Belfast sink taken out and dumped in the back yard. Rather than have it disposed of I made the fateful first step to becoming a gardener and decided to *grow stuff!* I made my first purchases – a little length of trellis and a clematis to grow up it. I was hooked. Things actually *grew!* I needed a garden, I needed soil. A little sink was not enough.

We moved to a bigger house, although that was incidental. There was a front garden and a walled back garden. The front one was mainly cobbled, shady and full of alchemilla mollis, so it didn't receive much attention from me. But the back garden was large enough for me to indulge in designing areas such as the 'lawn' big enough for two people to sunbathe, a nursery bed of sorts, and a couple of flower beds separated by a wide path (18 inches) and a narrow path (just wide enough to get through to the small shed) Yes, I was now a shed owner. I was however discovering that with my growing interest in plants and desire to grow vegetables, this garden was not big enough.

Ed: Marion then started the SOGS newsletter, which she edited for 24 years. As many SOGGIES know, Marian's Garden is now big enough to grow veg, have fruit trees, and host SOGS visits. We all send our love and hope that her garden continues to flourish – with help from others.

Let us know what inspired you to start gardening.



Thoughts from an Old Chair!

I have been given to reflect upon Sogs activities and numbers of members attending. For years I have thought that Sogs activities/visits/meetings could not get any better. Well...was I wrong? or was I wrong? on that one. SOGs goes from strength to strength and attracts more and more members and has tremendous meetings and visits. This is most gratifying. It does not happen by accident though, it is the result of hard work, commitment, and enthusiasm of our chair and volunteer officers, and the sheer joy of belonging to such an organisation (organism?) as SOGs.

I have said for years and years that SOGs either attracts the friendliest, most helpful, smiling, people or we turn them in to that wonderful state when they join.

This little maudlin diatribe (I am sober (at the moment!)) is by way of saying thank you to all of the SOGs volunteers because, I may have mentioned this before but, one volunteer is worth ten press-ganged persons...

Peter Anderson



CHEERS!

Peter and Mel proving that SOGS really is about sharing, our gardens, our beer and our friendship.

SOG'S AUTUMN/WINTER PROGRAMME 2023-2024

**Meetings will be held on the 1st Wednesday of the month in The Bradbury Room, Drapers Place, Horsefair, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury SY2 6BP unless otherwise stated.
7.30pm Start Time**

1st November

The Peat Debate and Responsible Sourcing of Alternatives - The Story Continues!

Richard Cave, Technical Sales Manager, Melcourt Industries Ltd
Richard returns to continue the second part of the talk he started back in February providing an introduction to the peat debate, then covering the Melcourt Responsible Sourcing Scheme and how materials are being assessed to compare against peat. The aim is to understand what we are replacing it with and ensure we're not using something more damaging.

6th December

Christmas Bring and Share and our Big Seed and Garden Paraphernalia Swap - SOGs Logo Competition Decision

January

**Date and Subject to be confirmed
On-line Zoom Meeting**

7th February

Final details for Potato Day followed by:
The History and Origin of Vegetables

Howard Goslyn

Shropshire-based, Howard will take us as far back as the Stone Age to see where our vegetables originated and includes poisonous plants and the Doctrine of Signatures

Saturday February 10th

Potato Day - Wattlesborough Village Hall

6th March

The Natural Gardener

Gardening with the Cycles of Nature

Shropshire-based Nancy Lowe will tell us about practical wildlife gardening, looking in more detail at ecological planting choices, growing techniques, garden features and enhancements that support local wildlife. This will be relevant to veg gardens, orchards or fruit growing and ornamental beds.

3rd April – AGM

Plus; Speakers from each of the Growing Projects that SOGs have donated funds to in the last 12 months to give us updates on how they used the money.

SOGS IS A MEMBER OF GARDEN ORGANIC