

Shropshire Organic Gardeners

Newsletter 42 - Autumn 2020



**This year's harvest of Crown Prince Squash hardening up ready for
Storing/Eating**

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 mostly held in St Chad's church hall, Shrewsbury, usually 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. We are regularly involved in putting on displays at Green Days and at Shrewsbury Flower Show. See the programme on the back pages.

Subscription rates: £8 single; £10 Couple at same address.
Visitors £1 per indoor meeting and member garden visits.

Website: www.shropshireorganicgardeners.org.uk

Facebook: Shropshire Organic Gardeners - SOGs

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**We keep in touch via emails or phone and in some cases
'snail mail'**

Keep calm, keep fit and carry on gardening!



Front Cover Photo - Rachel's Squash

Chairman's Report

A last word from Peter

It occurred to me, as I looked at my goats, that we, like they, are creatures of habit. Give us a routine; things that have to be done regularly, and we know where we are and what is expected of us. This sounds to me like a good description of gardening. Until now it has also been a good description of SOGs.

For many a year we have had the routine of our summer visits and our winter indoor meetings. It is disconcerting not to have this routine but what we do have is gardening. The doing of it, the planning of it, the remembering of it, the reading about it, the watching the TV of it and just the plain thinking about it; or go in to a Zen state of mind, do neither of the above, and just be the garden. Dwell on the thought "the handleless hold the hoe"; and if you can make sense of that then you are not doing Zen.

Which leads, illogically, to the SOGs change of chairman, have you noticed? (What you will notice, over time, is that the chairman's reports will be less rambling.) We have not been able to have a normal AGM but there is a de-facto change of chairman (chairwoman/chair person/ chair/chair human???ahh! I know...chair gardener.)

Whatever happens I am certain of one thing and that is that SOGs will go on from strength to strength.

Peter

Rachel's first word

I first met a certain Peter Anderson in about 2004/5 (I'm sure he doesn't remember but I do), at an event being held at the Shropshire Wildlife Trust. Myself promoting all things energy efficiency/energy saving, Peter, naturally promoting organic gardening and the chance to join SOGs and become a member of a rapidly growing local organisation.

To be fair Peter did his best to get me to join SOGs, but I had just moved down from Cheshire, started a new all engrossing job in Shrewsbury and taken on a new 1/3rd acre garden in the Shropshire hills, which at the time was like the proverbial Lost Gardens of Heligan, compared with what members have now seen on recent garden visits.

Little did I know then that I would have the honour (really!), pleasure (I hope so), of taking on the role from Peter. But, here we are in 2020 in what has been the strangest year in decades, and I somehow found myself taking over the chair from Peter. Perhaps no-one else was mad enough to do so. I blame Potato Day, that's where it all happened!

The year started off really well. We had a hugely enjoyable January meeting with Wolfgang Schaefer talking about the creation of wildflower meadows at his home Cwm Weeg.

February, and we faced the first hiccup with Richard Rawlings having to pull out of his talk due to illness (happily well recovered and raring to go next February), but the gap was gamely filled at short notice by local Plant Pathologist John Scrace, who gave us an equally fascinating talk on Bugs, Slugs, Spots and Rots.

March saw the rapid-fire presentation from Mick Poultney over from the Midlands to talk about no-dig gardening in raised beds and composting.

Then of course everything went slightly pear-shaped. No AGM in April, and potentially not much to look forward to in the way of summer visits.

Peter got in touch regards my taking over from him, and in the course of his email asked me what I was going to be called. Mmm. I hadn't put any thought in to that to be honest and having been out of mainstream work for some years I didn't know what women called themselves these days when they head up a group.

I know, I'll ask my friend who is involved with the WI. What do they call themselves I asked? Ah well she said, it's like this:

National federation uses chair
County federation says chairman
And local branches have presidents!
Congratulations on becoming.....whatever.....head honcho perhaps.

Blimey, and I thought this was going to be easy. Presidents have too much of a bad rap these days so that's out, and head honcho sounds a bit South American druggy! I'll use Chair for the time being, but the name is Rachel, Rachel Strivens.

So, April came and went, the May visit had to be cancelled for the time being, though rescheduled into 2021.

June was looming and Barbara Davis and I agreed we mustn't cancel the planned visit to her garden. In hindsight we could have allowed more members, it is a large garden, but we stuck to the rules and had 10 on each afternoon. A great visit for the selected few.

July came and we were on tenterhooks. Would Wales open for business to allow our visit to Cwm Weeg? Wolfgang and Kingsley desperately wanted us to visit them. Finally, just a couple of days before the border opened and we piled over. 45 members arrived on a bright sunny day, and what a lovely day it was. Packed lunches on the new entertaining platform and plenty of time to potter around their wonderful tucked away creation.

August and a further visit had to be rescheduled for 2021, so I opened my garden again. Rather a wet day, though it dried out by late afternoon and the time slots more or less worked. Plenty of new members took the chance to come as well.

September and Tom Adams agreed to fit us in on a Saturday morning in place of a very wet Wednesday afternoon. A visit to follow up on his talk in November

2019, and lovely to hear his plans for the new sustainable, organic fruit nursery and orchard.

So, not quite what I expected when I agreed to take over from Peter, but all things considered, I think collectively SOGs has managed to take the change of routine in its stride.

I've had to bombard you with emails to keep in touch, and I've not yet met some of the new members, but I hope we can soon, even if only via Zoom for the upcoming Gardeners' Question Time in November.

Potato Day remains a knotty problem, but we are determined to go ahead somehow. After all, pandemic or not, what everyone will still need next year is to grow vegetables, especially potatoes, and to take solace in their gardens.

Both Frank Oldaker and Maggie Anderson also decided in March to step down from their respective Potato Day roles leaving a massive gap. We definitely need to replace them both in due course (hint, hint!) to ensure future Potato Days.

In the meantime, Peter has stepped in to oversee the ordering and help steer the way. I'll undertake with your help, the promotion. SOGs is not just me as your Chair but all of us, and I hope that even if you don't feel safe in taking part on the day, whatever that will look like, that come the time you can help get the word out to all your friends and networks and help promote it in the way Frank has always done.

Our huge thanks go to Peter, who has chaired SOGs for so many years and can now sit back and relax a bit (only a bit). Also to Frank who has done so much to ensure SOGs Potato Day is the best and biggest in the county and wider, and not forgetting his techie presence at each meeting, and finally but not least Maggie who, among other things, ensures the kitchen on Potato Day runs smoothly and makes sure we are all well fed. Thank you.

Thank you also to all members who have contributed to this copy of our newsletter. The Lockdown Stories are wonderful.

As Charles Darwin quoted "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change".

I reckon us gardeners fit the bill!

Rachel
Chair

ps. we will have a celebration meeting soon.

From Rachel

Our February talk was due to be Five Centuries of Women and Gardens by Richard Rallings of Mynd Hardy Plants. However, due to illness he had to cancel, and John Scrace valiantly stepped in at the last minute and gave a fascinating presentation, so our thanks to John. Richard will return in February 2021.

International Year of Plant Health

For those not in the know, The United Nations has designated 2020 as the International Year of Plant Health. With the continual increase in global movement of plants across borders, the pests and disease they harbour is a real concern for the UK. The aim of this year and onwards is to promote and educate gardeners and the wider public about plant health, such as *Xylella fastidiosa*, oak processionary moth, ash dieback, and box tree moth caterpillar which was first found in private UK gardens in 2011 and has hit hard, with people such as Monty Don having to remove box hedges.

Gerard Glover, RHS head of Plant Health, said “..the importance of the Year of Plant Health lies in its focus on reducing the spread of weeds, pests and diseases into new areas, especially through international trade. As with human health, prevent is better than cure”. (*taken from RHS The Garden magazine January 2020*) <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/plant-health-in-gardens>

5th February 2020 Talk- Bugs & Slugs, Spots & Rots by John Scrace

Bearing in mind the above article, it was a very timely talk in February that John Scrace gave to SOGs. John is a Shrewsbury based Freelance Plant Pathologist and also works for the RHS Advisory Team so has a huge amount of experience with all things determined to spoil our gardening. John gave us an illuminating and entertaining talk and slide show on the top Bugs & Slugs and Spots & Rots.

Lily Beetle - appeared in the UK in the C19th so it's been with us for a long time. It has a red stretched body with no spots and is rather colourful but boy can it devastate our garden lilies. Eggs are laid in a row, red/orange going to brown when ready to hatch. They're a wily beast so you need to use two hands, one to shake the plant and one to catch them as they fall. They have a neat trick of turning upside down in flight, landing on the soil with their brown belly uppermost making them almost impossible to see once landed. Best way to get rid of them organically is hand picking and squishing, but Neem oil can be used as a spray.

Viburnum Leaf Beetle - actually native to the UK, the population has exploded in the last 10 years – possibly due to climate changes. The larvae leave brown patches and holes on leaves; the beetle is small, dirty brown/black but becomes yellow with black dots or stripes. Generally won't kill the shrub but try and pick off the larvae. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=556>

Blight- Anyone who grows tomatoes and potatoes will probably be very familiar with this one. A fungus, cross-infection can take place between both plants. It spreads via airborne spores in warm, wet, humid conditions – white spores and black patches on leaves and on tubers. Hand pick the leaves as soon as you see them with it and with luck a hot dry spell should stop the spread. However, keep

infected leaves and tubers out of your compost heaps, instead use the council green waste bin for disposal (gets heated to a very high temperature), or bury the waste very deeply. A new strain of very resilient spore type has been identified. There are quite a number of blight resistant potatoes varieties available now, which of course we sell at our annual Potato Festival, but there are no resistant tomatoes, just blight tolerant ones, so hygiene is key, especially in greenhouses. Ensuring potatoes are well trenched up helps and grass clippings can be used for this too.

Vine Weevil - the white C-shaped larvae (with a brown head) do all the damage by feeding on roots of plants, particularly those in pots – at least they are highly visible! There are only females of the species and produce some 1,000 eggs at a time. They are good climbers and attack a wide range of plants, eg Cyclamen, Begonia's, Heuchera, climbing Hydrangea, Rhododendron. Treat in Aug/Sept when the larvae are small using a baited biological nematode trap under the pot.

Causing our Own Problems

There are plenty of problems lurking abroad.

The Harlequin Ladybird is found in Asia and started as a biological control in the USA and Holland to control aphids on crops, but since 2004 has been in the UK causing real problems for the native ladybird. Harlequins have many colour forms, unfortunately some very similar to our native ladybird. They are voracious eaters, out competing and also eating native ladybird larvae. However, it is not recommended to kill them as the loss of a few adults will make little difference to their numbers and as they are not easy to identify you run the risk of killing a rare native one by mistake.

Horse Chestnut Leaf Mining Moth - first appeared in London in c2001-2002. The moth caterpillar tunnels through the leaves removing the cholorophyll and turning the leaves brown and mottled. The miner doesn't kill the tree and the trees do survive and recover the following year, though conkers might be smaller.

However, at the same time a bleeding canker arrived in the UK which is bacterial and attacks the bark causing weeping lesions. This will kill even a large tree as it works its way around the trunk. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=533>

The Number 1 Disease - Honey Fungus

It attacks the root system of apples, prunus, privet, birch and others. If you take a section of bark off you can see the white fungal growth which smells strongly of mushrooms. It is a bootlace fungus growing out from the root Rhizomorphs and honey fungus produces brown edible mushrooms. It's great for rotting fallen branches but you don't really want it killing off your trees. It also glows in the dark and is the biggest organ in the world being over a 1,000 years old.

The Number 1 Pest - Slugs and Snails

Every gardeners' nemesis! Biological Nemaslug can be used but it is often too cool in the UK in late spring to be really effective, plus it's expensive. The most reliable ways for dealing with slugs seem to be beer traps (make sure they are set

just above soil level to avoid the good beetles falling in) and for the non-squeamish a night time patrol with a knife/tent peg or a bucket of salt water.

Encouraging wildlife in to your garden is probably the most organic. Blackbirds love snails so put some flat stones in sheltered spots around the garden for birds to use as anvils.

A question from the audience about flat worms and are they damaging. Johns answer: overall, flat worms are not as damaging as people think. They have a role to play in the breakdown of organic matter.

No Dig Gardening by Mick Poultnay a.k.a The Compost King - 4th March 2020 - From Rachel

A force to be reckoned with, Mick has spent many years perfecting no-dig gardening in raised beds and getting compost that works after 3 weeks.

Much of it has been done by trial and error over the years, but he believes that no-dig gardening is working with nature; you let the worms do the hard work for you, and if you don't dig, the soil doesn't get compacted and they also remain relatively weed free.

All the raised beds are at the allotment and are 26ft long x 4ft wide with pathways at 18 inches wide. The new raised beds now have galvanised mesh in the base to prevent moles migrating in for the tasty goodies, and he wraps all the wood in Horticultural Plastic which stays supple and helps extend the life of the wood. It costs c£90/roll. Not the prettiest sight, but it does a good job and wood is expensive these days.

Mick fills the beds with anything he can get hold of in quantity, starting with wood chips/wood shavings on the base, then: spent mushroom compost, leaf mould, spent hops and malt from local breweries, horse/stable straw. He uses straw to mulch every bed and doesn't bother to use cardboard, instead uses carpet to cover the beds not in use.

Once a crop is cleared and the space empty every 10 days to 2 weeks, he covers it with compost ready for planting again.

He also makes good use of Seaweed meal and Basalt Rock Dust, the latter being rich in micronutrients such as magnesium, iron, calcium and manganese. It helps increase root growth and boosts crop yield. Basalt also contains soluble silicon which helps with resistance to pests and diseases through strength building. Another source of nutrients is worm castings which are available on the internet to buy without having to keep a wormery. Worm castings have a high concentration of nutrients and are diluted by the other contents of the bed. Comfrey and nettle liquid feed is a must and easily made.

Producing the Compost

Mick uses 'dalek' style plastic composters; each bin is layered with a good carbon/nitrogen mix before being watered then topped off with a piece of carpet and finally dated on the lid. During the winter he wraps the bins in fabric, hessian, carpet, anything to keep them warm and working. The bins get a moisture check every 3 weeks and watered if dry. He keeps the compost bins on bare ground which allows the movement of worms and other necessary beasties and bugs to help the breakdown process.

Top Tips

Whilst watching television, tear up cardboard and paper ready to put in a container of water to soak before adding to the compost bins.

The best top soil is made from mole hill excavations! So maybe we should all relax and not get so het up about moles destroying our lovely lawns, but instead harvest the spoil for mixing with our potting compost.

Mick has found the best way to cover the raised beds with micromesh is to secure canes along the top of the hoops to stop the fleece or mesh sinking in between. This stops any cabbage whitefly coming into contact with brassicas through the covering.

Get on line and find sources of spent hops and malt from your local breweries as they need to get rid of this waste and it's still full of nutrients. Likewise for spent mushroom compost from mushroom farms.

Check out Mick's website for more information
<http://www.dian nemanning.co.uk/mick-poultn ey/>

If you want to compare different ways of no-dig gardening then it is worth visiting Charles Dowding's website as he does things slightly differently.
<https://charlesdowding.co.uk/>

Your Lockdown Gardening Stories

Carol Goodhew

Lockdown and much more time at home gave me the opportunity to experiment. Hampered by little suitable border space in my garden, I decided to dismantle the no-longer-used wormery and use the three plastic containers to grow vegetables.

Each container is about 17 cm / 7" deep and has plenty of holes in the bottom for drainage. These have worked a treat and provided us with kale, chard, radishes and lettuce leaves. One container sits on an old woollen jumper as an experiment to see if the wool would deter slugs but this year we've had hardly any. This may be because last autumn I made a minuscule pond which has attracted frogs.

Graham Patient

Lockdown at Berrington Hall turned out to be a blessing for the gardens...

We had a household of 21 people, including three WWOOFers who came for a fortnight and were (happily) marooned for 3 months. Most of us enjoy a bit of time in the garden. We had three months of glorious weather. The gardens have never been so well cared for or productive.

Now we just have the welcome challenge of eating it all. A recent community meal featured 23 different home-grown vegetables, nine home-grown herbs and even a home-grown spice (paprika).

Two of the marooned WWOOFers were a young French couple, film students taking a break from studies, who made their own 20 minute film of lockdown here. It is posted on YouTube at the following link if anyone is interested:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_tUER16iQw

It hasn't all been so enjoyable or easy - but there was certainly a great big silver lining.

Carol Edwards

What a miserable wet month February & March was! Little did we know it was going to get even more miserable with the arrival of Covid-19, it is something we can't see or hear, like a buzzing bee.

I had already started sowing tomatoes and various other seeds for the Moat plant sale, this came to an abrupt end. I had about 60 tomato plants coming on nicely, had a chat with Sandie, from the Moat, we decided that as she had also lots of plants for the sale that we should carry on and try and sell them from home. I raised in excess of £100 without much effort mostly to neighbours and their friends. (see p.15 for Moat Update)

I was installing raised beds with the help of my husband Rex, my friend Jenni and my brother Graham. We managed to get 3 up and running before the lockdown took us by storm!

Fortunately we have enough garden to keep us occupied, so proceeded to install another two; firstly we were unable to get the wood, the building supplier my brother uses locked down, my brother self isolated and my friend also, we carried on preparing the ground.

We have been here for 40 years and have built up the veg patch to about 5/6" above the level it was when we moved in. I was a bit reluctant to put these raised beds on top so dug out the soil for about 6", put the frame in, then filled up with whatever was around like the beginning of the Hugelbed that Sylvi and Mike have done. All the cups and plates from the potato day went in along with any prunings that I had saved, our neighbours had some garden furniture delivered the cardboard it came in also went in and their old Christmas tree. You name it, apart from the kitchen sink, it went in followed by the soil we dug out, then the chicken run soil, this was 12" of wood chip that had nicely broken down over the 4/5 years since it was put in there, and then a layer of home-made compost on top. I should tell you that these beds are 10' X 4' X 21" and took some filling.



Carol Edwards

My brother helped on what I think was the hottest day, in May; he came to dig out the chicken run, I did feel sorry for him so kept him hydrated and fed. I did say to him at one point "if you've had enough just say" , he said I've had enough but bless him he carried on regardless.



Carol Edwards

I had plants growing in pots ready to be put in the new beds but I had a big problem trying to keep them going in the hottest May on record.

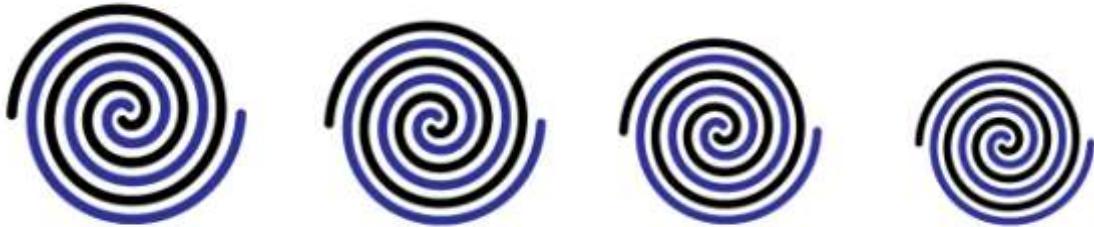
ps from Chair

For those interested further in Hugelkultur, obviously first port of call is to have a chat with Sylvi and Mike but check out the links below too. Fascinating!

<https://deepgreenpermaculture.com/diy-instructions/hugelkultur-bed-construction/>

<https://www.permaculture.co.uk/articles/many-benefits-hugelkultur>

Frank Oldaker - Ever Decreasing Circles - Crop Rotation in a Small Garden



My experience of gardening has ranged from having allotments to only small spaces to grow veg, fruit etc. With only small areas to play with, planning rotations becomes tricky. A big help is to have separate beds because that avoids the issue of soil getting mixed up if there is only a single growing area – which if it happens rather defeats the whole objective.

We all know it is important to have a plan - from farmers to horticultural scale growers and down to us leisure gardeners. Actually farmers can be penalised if they don't grow at least 2 or 3 crops so even for non organic agriculture one crop farming is deterred. Some larger organic places will implement a 7 year cycle but in general it is accepted that a 3 year plan is the minimum to give real benefit - but longer is better. My last allotment had lots of separate beds so it was easy to do 4-5 year plans but now Maralyn and I have 4 small raised beds and a separate area for fruit bushes.

Of the raised beds one has rhubarb and comfrey covering half and the rest is strawberries - so we are down to 3 beds for everything else. Before thinking about the rotating of the crops decisions have to be made about what to grow. This starts easily because we cross off the list anything we aren't that bothered about. Then it's on to what is good value from the max yield - min space point of view (maybe occasionally overruled by "got to have") and succession - two crops for the price of one space. Only then do I think how to fit in as much as possible with a rotation arrangement too.

Crop rotation can have three main benefits - control of pests and diseases, weed control (leafy crops smother weeds eg potatoes) and improving soil fertility (eg legumes fix nitrogen for the next crop). The first is important for everyone but for small scale growing we can deal with weeds and also can afford to keep soil fertility up with fertilizers composts etc. So when looking at our three little beds it is only pests and diseases that I think about. Next thought is to remember which crops are really important to move around from year to year.

These are potatoes - mainly to avoid cyst eel worm whose eggs can last 10 years in the soil, onions to avoid white rot because the fungi that is the problem can survive 15 years and brassicas because of club root where the guilty fungi can last 20 years. If you get these building up in your garden then it is serious. There are cultivation "tricks" that can help somewhat with eelworm and clubroot but all alliums would be a no- no for the 15 years in soil where onion white rot developed. As an aside - sourcing seed and plants is worth care - potatoes and alliums are

usually from certified sources but those cabbage plants from a friend may come with the added ingredient of clubroot.

Anyway this first decision causes a dilemma because I love potatoes but they take up space and with no compromise about rotation they can squeeze out other things we want. It's a sacrifice, but by not growing them every year we gain extra flexibility in the rotation planning. Onions can be dealt with similarly if necessary but they aren't so greedy for space and we limit the area of brassicas. This means it becomes possible to do a 3 year rotation. Gaps we fill with the crops that don't build up problems in the soil like salads. I confess that leeks tend to be used as late fillers after an early crop is gone - often means they are late going in but by early spring are of a usable size. Keeping a record is even more important when having little in-fills like this to avoid popping the same thing into the same place as last year.

Having sorted rotation one can then finalise ideas about maximising the yields by maybe planting closer together and growing two or more crops in the same space (sweetcorn, courgettes in between and climbing beans up the sweetcorn -“the 3 famous sisters”). Also planting “catch crops” - fast growers between rows of slow growers and also using climbers and tall plants like the perennial African Kale that obviously have a smaller “footprint”.

This and also expanding into containers are really separate subjects so enough of that for now.

Our way of doing things seems to work - sometimes it isn't perfect but we have few problems and for most of the year there is at least a little of something fresh to be found.

Ooops - As I was writing this I realised that my perennial African Kale has now been in the same place for 3 years. So I have been growing a brassica in the same spot for that long which really doesn't fit with rotation principles. Upon checking I found the recommended period is 3 years so I'll grow it in a different bed next year. It's interesting that it is ok to bend the rules for this crop. Always something to think about even in a small veg garden.

Jan and Nick Gibb - Random Musings from Coppice House

I bought 'Cultivated Rocket' seeds from www.realseeds.co.uk. They grew fantastically well in the greenhouse from a September sowing. Lots of lovely leaves and no flea beetles around. It is a really nice business to support too.

I was advised (by our friend Ian) to spread Agralan Insect Barrier Glue (thickly and pushed well into the cracks of the bark) on our apple trees in the 3rd week of October. This is when the female winter moth is wending her way up the trunk to meet the males who fly. It worked fantastically well and the fruit trees had lovely clean leaves in Spring and hardly any sign of Winter Moth damage.

Growing peas and living with German Wirehaired Pointers is not compatible! We have managed to eat about 10 pods; also they are always after Purple Top Milan turnips.

Growing Redcurrant Bushes and living with Moorhens is not compatible either! We did manage a harvest but every morning a herd of Moorhens marched up from the pond for their daily dose of Vitamin C!

I read that the Japanese have a philosophy they call Wabi-Sabi. This encourages you to accept the transience of nature and enjoy its imperfections. I think this sounds like a good idea. Some of my gardening efforts this year have been successful, others less so, but I just love being out there anyway, as we all do, especially this year!!

Barbara Davis - My Lockdown “wildflower meadow”

Having been inspired by Wolfgang I decided to create a wildflower meadow on one of my lawns. I had a chat with Rachel and thought ‘just go for it’. So I didn’t cut the lawn all year.

Cor this is easy I said and doesn’t the grass look lovely waving in the breeze. Then came August - ah grass cutting time, well what about September then? The grass was long, very long, too much for the mower. So we persuaded Dave to strim and ably helped by Rachel we got it down to where we could use the Hover mower.

Well how do we get rid of all this grass??? And there was lots of it too. Fortunately my farmer friend allowed me to put it in the field for the cows. But what was this? The dreaded moss thatch. Oh No. what now? Well dear reader I used weed killer. Sorry.

So now it’s October and it looks awful and I’m asking myself is it worth it, well yes. I’m still inspired by Wolfgang and have bought seeds and plugs and am now looking forward to sowing and planting if it dries out a bit.

On reflection: my wildflower meadow is work in progress and probably will be for a few years to come but I will take photos to remind me of what it took to get to hopefully a colourful part of the garden.

THE GARDENER

By Jan Reynolds (Maralyn's sister)

The lettuce has bolted, the broccoli shrunk.
My crumbly soil now comes as a chunk.
My runner beans ran, goodness knows where.
I've dropped my trowel someplace and I haven't a spare.

The beautiful berries, all eaten by birds.
I don't mind sharing but that's just absurd.
The kale and the cabbage, protected by nets
Have caterpillars chomping, that's as bad as it gets.

The broad beans are broad but there's just not enough.
The mangetout have grown but they seem to be tough.

I go in the garden and I can't help but sneeze.
But what I do have to show is a trug full of peas!

One helping of peas contains as much vitamin C as two large apples, more fibre than a slice of wholemeal bread and more thiamine than a pint of whole milk?



Maralyn Hepworth

Weeds Don't Do Lockdown - Tales from the Trowel

What a year! First we had a horribly wet start, then just when things start coming out of hibernation, we went back in to hibernation on a grand scale; everything shut up shop including the thousands of plant nurseries and garden centres and suppliers of all things gardening. The rain disappeared and the weeds started growing big time.

Then the phone calls started as they do in March/April. You are going to continue working aren't you? You can still come and help me keep on top of the gardening can't you? I can do without many things but my garden can't be left to do its own thing!

Turns out gardening really is the ultimate job during a lockdown, and having one of the hottest April and May's for a long time made it doubly lovely.

It's easy to keep a social distance from clients in the fresh air but still hold a conversation, discuss garden plans and of course have a laugh. Lack of contact for some meant I could take a little cheer with me each week to help keep their spirits up.

Oh the bliss of practically no other vehicles on the roads (how selfish is that I ask myself); it really was quite surreal counting just five or six vehicles on the A5 driving to the furthest garden one day. No queues on roundabouts, no accidents.

No squished badgers or hedgehogs or flattened birds of prey, (sadly now returned to normality on this front).

Gardens in Shrewsbury were incredibly peaceful. It was absolute silence on many days, just the birds enjoying themselves and keeping me company along with the plants – yes, I do talk to the plants, doesn't every gardener?

Inevitably, a number of clients were forced to properly hibernate (so much nicer than shielding), so I've missed seeing them and their gardens this year. But, we've kept in touch via email and happily they've all kept well and enjoyed their gardens without me.

For a time it was very difficult getting hold of plants and compost for people, but eventually that sorted itself out. It amazed me how all the nurseries rapidly changed direction, getting their websites sorted out for on-line selling when they hadn't done much of it before, and the bigger on-line plant sellers were inundated with orders as the population took to gardening like never before.

It has definitely not been an enjoyable experience for many people and it makes one grateful for what we have in Shropshire and Wales. Silver linings don't come better!

As it's now November I hope the weeds stick to the rules and stop moving but you never can tell with our weather, as we gardeners know!

Update on The Moat from Carol Edwards

The Moat have been approved to be in the schedule of open gardens with NGS for 2021 and propose to sell plants on these days(dates to be arranged possibly 3 days in the year).

Plants would still be required and if SOG members would like to grow and donate, this would be appreciated; we could perhaps put a label in the pots, showing that they were grown and donated by "Shropshire Organic Gardeners", just as a bit of publicity for us.

As I don't know what state I will be in by then to do the usual collections and delivery, we might need members to either take their donations to The Moat themselves, or perhaps we could collect them together and get just a couple of members to do the deliver. To be decided nearer the time!

New Royal Mail Stamps

Consisting of six beautiful insects, a new set of '[Brilliant Bugs' stamps](#) has been released by the Royal Mail to celebrate our pollinators.

The stamps are illustrated by Richard Lewington, an acclaimed wildlife artist whose other recent work includes the illustrations for the *Field Guide to the Caterpillars of Great Britain and Ireland* and the RSPB Spotlight ID charts.

Common carder bee (*Bombus pascuorum*)

Marmalade hoverfly (*Episyrphus balteatus*)

Elephant hawk-moth (*Deilephila elpenor*)

Longhorn beetle (*Rutpela maculata*)
 Painted lady butterfly (*Vanessa cardui*)
 Ruby-tailed wasp (*Chrysis ignita* agg)

Keep your eyes open for them!



20th & 21st June Members' Garden Visit: Barbara and Nigel Davis (photo's by Dave Croker)

We might have missed out on our first summer visit in May but we were determined to offer members the chance to get out to a garden in June and to do so in line with social distancing.

Hence our visit to new member Barbara Davis and husband Nigel's garden not far from Minsterley and looking towards the iconic Stiperstones. A large garden, it allowed us to offer 10 places on each of the two afternoons and we had a wonderful few hours forgetting all that was happening in the wider world.

This garden has been evolving over the 16 years they have lived there. One of the first tasks was to plant a small shelter-belt coppice of trees, mainly birch along one boundary, then to plant lots of specimen trees in the expansive lawns which made up the bulk of the garden at the time.

The tour started with the sheltered, walled organic vegetable garden, made up of 6 raised beds, a very productive blackcurrant bush, rows of summer and autumn fruiting raspberries, plus a fruit cage for the blueberries and gooseberries.

One raised bed has the strawberries which remain there, whilst rotating the contents of the other beds. This year it was plenty of broad beans, peas, courgettes, onions and flowers. Also a new addition, a small wildlife pond which has settled in nicely.



Past the apple trees, rose garden and greenhouse and on to the 'pink' border, the first one they created, which has a nice mix of small trees, shrubs and herbaceous, including Peonies, a firm favourite, Acer, Japanese Anemones, Astrantia, Geranium, Spirea and much more.

The backdrop to the garden is open fields and the Stiperstones in the distance and this view is preserved; after all, you might as well borrow from the landscape if it's there!

Another new project over the last 18 months has been the creation of a large crescent border of a mainly white and purple theme, though Barbara couldn't resist a bit of yellow in there. Packed with Delphiniums, Salvia's, Verbena bonariensis, hardy Geraniums, Agastache, Asters and Cosmos, it was humming with bees and butterflies. A real success.



Having a Master Composter for their gardener, they weren't allowed to get away with no compost heaps for very long, so Nigel kindly did the honours and built a run of 3 New Zealand bins which will be suitably screened when the grasses decide they're going to grow after all.

At the entrance to their garden, on one side a 'hot border' of bright flowers has developed over a couple of years. Lots of Helenium's, Geum's, Achillea, Kniphofia, Helenianthemum's, Geraniums, Verbena bonariensis and rigida and plenty of bulbs.

On the other side of the gate, this year's project. Barbara was so inspired by Wolfgang's talk back in January, she resolved to find an area to create a wildflower meadow. Barbara has best described this project in Lockdown Tales, on p.13.



The new gravel border up by the house creates a peaceful place to just sit and gently rock in the arbour seat whilst contemplating the garden and its views.

Needless to say, lockdown did not stop the consumption of plenty of tea and cakes. Both afternoons were hugely enjoyable and different.

Thank you, Barbara and Nigel
Rachel Strivens



Cwm Weeg - Judy Crook

Cwm Weeg Visit - July 2020 from Sue Bosson (photo's by Sue Bosson)

This was to have been part of our coach trip this year but of course it could not take place. Instead everyone arrived in cars, many cars, because of course car-sharing in July was not allowed. Thankfully, Wolfgang and Kingsley, owners of the garden, have made plenty of space. I have been visiting Cwm Weeg for around 15 years and have seen it develop over this time. One of the last things to have been created is a stumpery and that was chosen as the spectacular entrance to the garden. Little would one know what was to come.

The grassy path down to the stumpery was lined with wild flowers, some unusual and probably created by the spoil from the car park landscaping. First thing to take our eye was wild chicory; a beautiful blue daisy and typical of poor, sandy soil. The roots of this plant are still used to make a caffeine coffee substitute and I remember it from my childhood days shortly after rationing ended.



The stumpery was quite a talking point and one to rival that of Prince Charles' garden although the two do not compare. I was taken with the Sedum 'Angelina'. The species name rupestris means rock and usually relates to plants found creeping over rocks. In this instance it was creeping beautifully around the stumps.



This path took us one way to the back of the house and an immaculate lawn. Kingsley's pride and joy! He cuts it every few days.



Following this path took us to the main area in front of the house where Wolfgang and Kingsley met us. The garden is built on sloping ground which gives lots of landscaping opportunities. Wolfgang went up onto one of these and looking down on us from a Portmeirion-like structure, gave us a potted history of Cwm Weeg.



Remembering the talk that we had in January, many of us were keen to see the meadow and this we did. It was full of all the usual meadow plants from the area. Knapweed, Scabious, Fox and Cubs and Campion.



The mown path takes you to the far end where you can rejoin the main garden and get a view one way out to the countryside which surrounds the garden but also a view back up to the house. Several paths led in different directions to view the many borders of colourful perennials and there was plenty of room to keep a safe distance while walking round and also to sit having our picnics.



I haven't mentioned the grotto, the statues, the new and yet unfinished entertaining platform, the rill, the concrete tree or the woodland walk. You have to go there next year and view yourself. You won't be disappointed. I think this last picture sums it up.



Visit to Rachel Strivens and Dave Croker's garden, Pentirvin, Nr Minsterley, August 2020 (photo's by Sue Bosson)

Having been to Pentirvin in 2017 many of us were very pleased when Rachel said we could visit again as some of it had changed since then. Never quite know how we manage to find it too as it's definitely off the beaten track in the depths of Shropshire.

We'd had to stagger out visit times so as not to have too many gathering at any one time. I believe the early door visitors got wet but when my non-SOGS friend and I arrived in the afternoon it was dry. We gathered round for Rachel's group tour and the first call was the caged vegetable beds. Lots of lovely stuff in there. Down the steps to the drive and the other veg bed had envy making runner beans and squashes growing up beautifully constructed homemade frames. The beans make a tidy backdrop to the lawn on the other side.

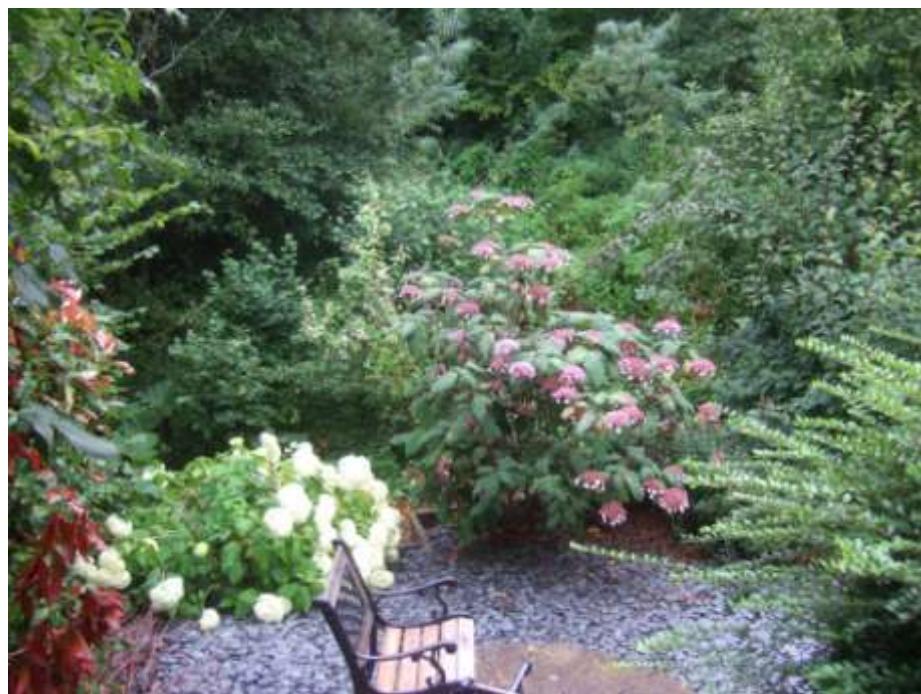
From there we saw something that had been changed. To accommodate a new septic tank, part of the garden had been dug away and to support the remaining bank Rachel and Dave had cleverly made landscape fabric walls supported by fence posts and chain link fencing wire. Some of this was planted with Ferns, Galium Odoratum, (sweet woodruff) and Vinca minor and will when matured hide all the engineering works.



Moving on and past the bridge like structure which this time was closed for our safety we admired the compost bins again.



Then up the steps and onto the lawn level again and overlooking the hydrangea bed. Annabel and a lovely lacecap, *Hydrangea aspera Villosa*.



The garden goes all the way round the cottage to a secret space for sitting out. And then back to the beginning. Here is a beautiful raised dividing bed painted a beautiful Mediterranean blue. Lots of the usual chat and cake, including a lovely Courgette and Lime cake and then we were off before the next group arrived.



Thank you, Rachel and Dave
Sue Bosson

Visit to Tom Adams' Fruit Farm - 12th September 2020 from Rachel (photo's by Rachel Strivens)

Following on from the very enlightening talk, and if you were lucky some apple tasting, back in November 2019, we finally got to visit Tom's fruit tree nursery just north of Oswestry, or at least the beginnings of the new site.

Tom purchased this new 6.5 acre, gently south facing site 2 years ago and like all good growers has been learning about the site and planning everything in detail in readiness to plant up hopefully starting in autumn 2020 but now more likely 2021.



Agroforestry or Alley Cropping System

For the fruit tree nursery, planting will be done in rows of 20 metres wide, with 10 metre wide biodiversity strips on either side with short rotation coppice material such as willow and native hardwood.

The Orchard tree rows will be 15 metres wide with 8 metre wide strips for coppice. Coppice acts as a windbreak, wildlife corridor and soil stabiliser. The coppice is cut, chipped and then used as a mulch around the orchard and nursery trees, thus keeping nutrients on site and recycling them to the benefit of all.

Trees will be grown in north-south rows on a 7 year rotation of planting which will help combat replant disease. A commercial dessert orchard will produce key crops for sale.

For the coppice willow, Tom is using Dinimar Super Willow and Salix Daphnoides, both of which have very high levels of salicylic acid which helps combat scab. Sweet chestnut is used for fencing and posts as it is very durable and a nice wood, which he gets from a local sustainable supplier based at Rhydycroesau Woodlands.



He will make use of green manures on spare land and pollinator strips at the end of rows and in pockets around the hedge boundaries (see what Tom uses for this in SOGs Newsletter 41, Spring 2020).

Tom is also hoping to set up a Community Supported Agricultural project, growing vegetables and involving different people from the area, a future Perry Pear Collection with hopefully the largest organic range of 35 varieties on a root stock and potentially a Forest Garden as well. One final long term aim is to create 3 ponds and use an on-site spring to supply the ponds. Tom has already made a start in determining the spring's location.

The morning turned out to be wonderfully bright and sunny and an education in sustainable, organic fruit tree growing. Our thanks to Tom for giving up his weekend morning.



Recipe for Seed Compost from Peter and Maggie

For some years now we have successfully made our own seed compost. Seed compost should be low nutrient, fine and weed and disease free.

To achieve this we first make compost to grow tomatoes in, mixing equal parts of loam, well rotted FYM and leaf mould with a bit of lime. Use comfrey juice to grow the tomatoes.

When the crop is finished the compost will be spent and roughly equal to a John Innes Number One, which is seed compost. There is no reason why you should not use any spent organic compost.

Cook the compost to kill weed seeds and diseases such as damping-off. Put the compost in a cook pot, it needs to be somewhere between damp and wet, you could use a thermometer but we put a green leaf on the top and when that is cooked it is done.

The smell is not unpleasant and does not linger in the house. We have a solid fuel cooker which is on anyway but even if you use electric or gas the cost will only be pence per gallon.

Sieve and use; it never fails.

Three Easy Ways to Ripen your Tomatoes by James Wong-Gardening Advice, The Guardian
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/aug/30/james-wong-on-gardens-three-easy-ways-to-ripen-your-tomatoes#img-1>
 (sent in from Sylvi Greenfield)

They think they are still in the tropical Andean highlands, you have to talk them out of it.



Superfruit: tomatoes ripening on the vine in England. Photograph: Julie Fryer/Alamy

Ever since I can remember, I have had a passion for growing tomatoes. The diversity of colours and flavours of their fruit, the delicate ferny foliage of the young plants, even the resinous, green smell of the leaves, all bring me joy. However, there is one thing about these plants that is a constant source of frustration, particularly at this time of year: their infuriatingly slow ripening. As we edge towards the end of the growing season, here are a few tips and tricks to speed up their maturity.

Hailing from the eternal summer of the tropical Andean highlands, tomatoes have never evolved the chemical triggers to hasten ripening as days shorten and temperatures dip. This means that plants will continually attempt to kick out more flowers and fruit right until they are cut down by frost before they ripen.

Knowing this, gardeners need to step in and stage a horticultural intervention to stop this self-destructive behaviour. All you need to do is pinch out the top of your tomato plant once it has produced four trusses (bundles) of fruit, preventing it from growing any taller or bearing more flowers. If your plants are already significantly larger than this, pinch out their growing tip no matter the height and remove all green fruit that haven't reached their mature size.

Without their resources being wasted on producing fruit, the plants will be better able to focus their efforts on ripening what they have already produced. Another upside is that trials have repeatedly shown that reducing the number of fruit not only hastens the ripening of tomatoes, but also improves the flavour, size and nutrient content of the harvest. A perfect win-win.

Another way to channel the plants' energies into ripening fruit is to induce stress. Sensing their survival may be at stake, the plants will respond by speeding up the maturation of their fruit, to ensure the future of the next generation via their seeds. This can be done by gradually reducing the amount you water them. It is important to do this slowly to give the plants time to adapt, as erratic watering can cause harvest deformities such as split fruit (too much water) or blossom end rot (too little). The same thing goes for fertiliser, which is usually added to the irrigation water. The even better news is that this lower water and fertiliser regimen has also been shown by studies to improve fruit flavour.

Finally, as we get to the very end of the season, one sure-fire way to induce this stress is to hamper water absorption via root trimming. I usually do this in mid-September, but timing will vary depending on your local climate. Simply slice into the soil around the plant with a spade about 50cm away from the main stem, which will sever the outermost roots. Work your way round until you have a ring around each plant.

Faster ripening, less waste, better-flavoured fruit and even more nutritious harvests in exchange for just a little pruning and being lazier with the watering can is a pretty sweet deal. *Follow James on Twitter [@Botanygeek](#)*

Seasonal Recipe

Have you a glut of pears this year and plenty of blackberries too? Try this lovely moist and tasty cake from Maggie.

Pear and Blackberry Cake – Maggie Anderson

2 firm ripe pears	1 tsp lemon juice
1 piece stem ginger	150g softened butter
150g light muscovado sugar	3 free range eggs
200g self-raising flour	150g blackberries
Icing sugar to dust	

Method

1. Peel core and dice the pears. Toss in the lemon juice and set aside.
2. Finely chop the ginger and set aside.
3. Beat the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time and beat well after each addition, adding 1 tbsp of flour with the last egg.
4. Sift the remaining flour into the bowl and fold in. Add the diced pears and ginger and fold in.
5. Spoon into a greased 20cm deep round cake tin and level the top. Arrange the blackberries on top of the cake and gently push into the batter a little way.
6. Bake at 180 C/350 F/gas mark 4 for 50 to 60 minutes or until a skewer inserted into the centre of the cake comes out clean. Allow to cool in tin for 5 minutes. When cold dust with icing sugar. Can be served warm with custard.

YUM YUM!

SOGs WINTER PROGRAMME – 2020-2021

**All meetings are held in St. Chad's Church Hall, Town Walls,
Shrewsbury at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated.**

November 4th – SOGs Gardeners' Question Time via Zoom

December 2nd – This year's Christmas Bring and Share is cancelled.

January 8th - DATE & VENUE TBC Details of this meeting available nearer the date - '**Mistletoe: Fact, Myth and Legend**'- Dr Mike Jones will talk on all things about mystical Mistletoe.

February 3rd - Five Centuries of Women and Gardens - Richard Rallings of Mynd Hardy Plants (Delbury Hall Walled Garden) gives us a fascinating insight into the influence of women in gardening.

February 6th – Potato Day Venue and details to be confirmed but organic potatoes will be sold somehow.

March 3rd – The Invaders - John Scrace, our Shrewsbury resident Plant Pathologist returns to talk about the newest pest and disease invaders to the UK. There's always something to spoil our gardening!

April 7th - AGM + speaker/talk to be confirmed