

## CORONA-YOUR-OWN

Helping you to get organic growing despite the disruption  
**e-Newsletter 6    8 May 2020**

### Welcome

This week we are going to start off with minimum effort, maximum gain, because that is my sort of gardening.

### Cheap, cheerful and minimum effort

My house came with a front garden covered in gravel, over weed proof membrane, over heavy, compacted clay. As the weeds seemed to have no problems growing in it, I thought it was worth a try sprinkling seeds over the gravel and waiting for the rain (as it turned out, this was 2018 and it was 2 months before it rained again). The seeds were mixed wildflower seeds and California poppies, both from Wilkos. I also planted out hyssop and lavender, also grown from seed. In a container bordering the footpath I had harebells (a British native) and campanula, both of which soon seeded themselves into the gravel.



This photo was taken on 6 May this year. The poppies should be annuals, but as we had no hard frosts, the plants overwintered and have been in full flower for a few weeks. I will take another photo next month, when all the blues (cornflowers, lavender, hyssop, harebells, campanula – all grown from seed) should be in flower. *nb. We tried the same approach with my brother's garden, a wilderness which he cleared at the end of 2018, before laying slate chippings over weed proof membrane, and it worked equally well – passers by stop to admire it and he is **not** a gardener!*

### Ross's raspberry cane wigwam

"I was inspired by Katie's apple branches (Corona-Your-Own #3) so when Karen asked me to erect a wigwam to plant out our mangetout seedlings I looked around for a source of wood. Behind the shed I found a bundle of raspberry canes, some new, some old, and here's the finished product. It's the first year of a no-dig plot so getting the canes into dry ground in the recent hot weather was hard going. Some were only cut recently so let's see if we have autumn raspberries as a bonus!"



## Julia and Tony's new chickens

Four 14-week old pullets arrived on Good Friday. Spending the next 3 days familiarising themselves within their new des res so that the henhouse imprints on the hens as their new home and safe retreat. On their first evening we introduced them to their stairway to bed with perches.

After Day 1 they took themselves to bed at sundown. Our job then is to close the pop-hole, check the hen house is secure and ensure the hens' garden perimeter electric fence is 'live'. Night-night hens. A breakfast-time chorus pre-empted tucking in to layers pellets and fresh water primed with unfiltered cider vinegar. Look closely, notice their combs and wattles are immature so we don't expect eggs for some weeks yet.

Day 3 and the outer door is open for them to explore their garden.

*Here is a short video of the chickens being encouraged to explore their new home – the conversation was a little one sided!* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHz442e0-uw>



## Julia's greenhouse diary

The strawberries flowered early but did not develop fruit. They are now sending out runners which will need trimming soon. Seedlings of early salads are appearing.

The huge self-set borage continues to flower and is attracting large numbers of pollinators. The tomato seedlings destined for the greenhouse, currently in the potting shed seem to be multiplying uncontrollably. If anyone would like young plants let us know.



## Easy Seed Saving! From Susie

Early summer is the ideal time to view the plants growing in your plot or window box with an eye to saving seeds for next year.

- 1)** Loose leaf lettuce, Salad Bowl, planted last year in late summer is preparing to go to seed. Instead of composting the plant, allow it to grow on into its second year when it will readily grow flower spikes which later develop into seeds to harvest and save.
- 2)** A winter purslane plant (also know as miners lettuce or Claytonia) is already beginning to flower in readiness for seed production in the autumn. This amazingly winter hardy and nutritious plant can be harvested all year round and remains sweet and delicious to eat even when in flower.
- 3)** Here, winter purslane has self-seeded into a sheltered trough and will be ready to harvest leaves from in a few months time, growing throughout the winter.
- 4)** A flat leaved parsley plant going into its second year should produce many seeds in the autumn enabling you to harvest plenty to give away and swap at HEOG's increasingly popular Potato Day and Seed Swap every year at the beginning of February.



Think 'seed saving' this year! It is an interesting and fun way to look at plants which are going to seed and have the potential of producing seeds that can be collected for sowing the following year. Parsley seeds are more viable if sown fresh and can easily be left to fall and germinate around the parent plant in the autumn. This method was recommended to me years ago by our HEOG guru, John Sargent, and can produce a huge number of tiny plants. Be warned; slugs love this delicacy as much as we do so protect your young plants.

Garden Organic Heritage Seed Library is the place to find comprehensive seed saving instructions:  
<https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/hsl>

A few points to remember:

- Only save seed from open pollinated varieties (non-F1)
- Save seed when fully ripe, dry well and store in paper bags or envelopes in a dry, cool place.
- Remember to label harvested seed with type, variety (if known) and year.

Enjoy an important if tiny, step towards seed security.

## Questions and Answers

### In response to Chris's problem with black spot on a quince tree

*From Lily*

"I only have one rambler rose which has always been susceptible to black spot until I started feeding it heavily with equine animal manure about 5 years ago. The manure is piled around the base during the autumn and rots down nicely come spring. Do you remember tales of gardeners running out to the street to pick up horse poo for their roses? Strengthening the plant not topically treating seems to be a good solution. I'm not sure what conditions a quince tree requires - proceed with caution!"

*From Diana*

"I don't know about quinces but have found that Black Spot on roses is reduced by mulching the soil in spring or laying matting around the plant which I presume has the effect of trapping the fungus in the soil."

## WATCH

### Ron Finley: A guerrilla gardener in South Central LA | TED Talk

A man who is passionate about taking action to improve the health and well being of his neighbours in LA, which he does by engaging with volunteers to use empty urban spaces to grow free fruit and veg for local people – of even more relevance now due to the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on poorer communities.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/ron\\_finley\\_a\\_guerrilla\\_gardener\\_in\\_south\\_central\\_la](https://www.ted.com/talks/ron_finley_a_guerrilla_gardener_in_south_central_la)

## LISTEN

Themes explored during this conversation with John Humphrys include – why John believes only a catastrophe will persuade people to pay more for sustainable food, how supermarkets have performed during the Covid emergency, where John Humphrys does his food shopping and whether policy makers will introduce the polluter pays principle. Over the course of the conversation they debate whether the sustainable food movement has been successful along with how the food system has coped with coronavirus and what it will take for people to question where their food comes from more rigorously.

<https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/podcast/episode-six-john-humphrys/>

## COOK-YOUR-OWN

*Two more excellent recipes from Julia*

- **Rhubarb fool**
- **Elderflower champagne**

both are on the Resources page of the website

## POSTSCRIPT

Feedback from our readers is important, so if you have ideas, news or tips you would like to share, please let us know.

If you have any questions related to organic growing which you think our members might be able to answer, let us know and we will try to include the questions and replies in our newsletters.

You can contact us at [enews@heog.org.uk](mailto:enews@heog.org.uk) .

*Gillian McGivern*