

## CORONA-YOUR-OWN

Helping you to get organic growing despite the disruption  
**e-Newsletter 8      22 May 2020**

### Welcome

Well, so much for the promised rain/showers – haven't seen a drop!

### Tried, tested, recycled and free garden ideas *from Gillie*

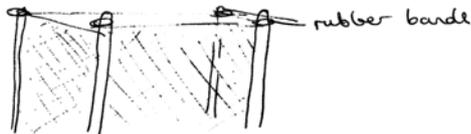
#### Plastic bottles

Sink a plastic bottle, cut in half and upside down, into the soil, pointing to the roots of a tree or bush (mini bottles are good for bushes). Put a few stones in the bottom of the pre-dug hole to help drainage and prevent soil clogging up the bottle neck. Water down the bottle rather than on surrounding soil so that water goes directly to the roots, especially good in dry weather and when water is short.



#### Hanging baskets

Use upturned hanging baskets (chains removed) to protect small plants from cats and pigeons. Secure with sticks or tent pegs (10 for £1 in Poundland).

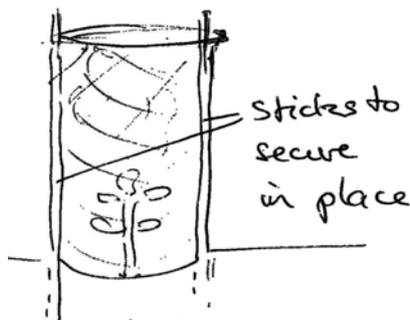
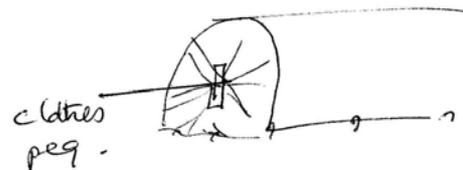


#### Rubber bands

Use rubber bands to secure netting or other material covering beds. They might need replacing once during the season. Obtainable from your local postman.

#### Clothes pegs

- Keep netting and fleece together at the end of clothes.
- Clip to the end of a flat stick and use as plant labels  
(courtesy Waitrose newspaper)



#### Chicken wire

Chicken wire cylinders protect plants from birds and cats (free from skips!). I made mine about 12" diameter and 18" high to go round broad bean plants.

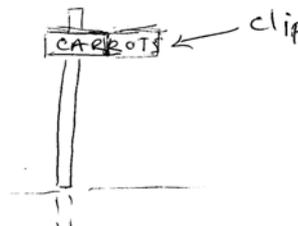
#### Hamster cage

If you have an old hamster cage turn it into a productive bed for salad crops and spinach.



#### Clothes peg plant label on a stick

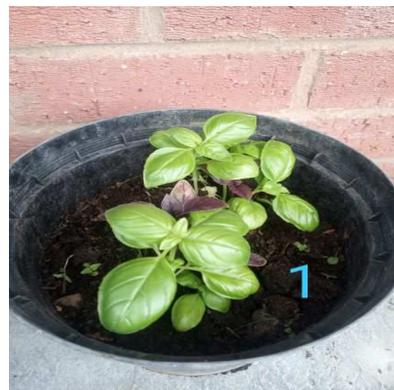
Drawings by Gillie Carrington. If you have any money saving tips, send them in to [enews@heog.org.uk](mailto:enews@heog.org.uk).



## Grow your own flavourings!

Early summer is a good time to sow seeds of annual herbs which should yield plants for wonderful additions to summer dishes and liven up meals using left-overs.

**1) Basil:** An annual herb whose origins favour hot, dry conditions, often not the essence of a British summer! With this in mind, multi sow seeds in groups of 6 - 8 in a large pot of sowing compost not covering the seeds. Photo 1 shows two of these little groups sown in a 7" pot. Allow to germinate in a warm place then move on to a warm, light and sheltered aspect. Growing in pots enables you to move the plants around in the event of cooler conditions so often a feature of our slow transition from spring to summer. 'Ne'r cast a clout 'til May be out'. To harvest even when quite small, pinch out the top four leaves to help stimulate a tired palette jaded by winter dishes. The nodes remaining will rapidly bush out, producing further harvests. Keep your basil plants happy and they will reward with abundance until the cooler weather of autumn sets in.



**2) Coriander:** A hardier annual herb than basil, this can be grown all year round with winter protection. Its added bonus is the ability to set seed in one season in our climate with the potential to produce both leaves and seeds. Like basil, this plant can be grown in pots or can also be sown directly into the ground. I like to begin the growing season by sowing in autumn in pots then transplanting to polytunnel raised beds before winter sets in but coriander seeds can be sown at any time of the year. Photo 2 shows a patch of coriander which has grown over the past few months from broadcasted seed and is used as a cutting herb for garnishing. Wider spacing is necessary to produce plants for higher yield and seed production. Unlike basil which likes it dry don't let coriander go short of water. Particularly welcome sprinkled fresh onto a meal made with left-overs!



**3) Dill:** As my mate is rather partial to a dill pickled gherkin having a go at growing this herb, described as annual/biennial, seemed a good tiny step towards self-sufficiency in the garden. It seems that for the best results grow in situ as this lovely, feathery herb doesn't like root disturbance. I cheated with this group of plants by buying it from a local wholesale nursery that was doing kerbside deliveries at the start of lockdown. Transplanted into the tunnel all seems well so far and it has given a few fronds for the kitchen. My aim is to encourage the stock to go to seed and hopefully harvest lots of dill seed in the autumn for kitchen use and sowing next year.



*I would be grateful for growing tips from other gardeners and any dill pickle preserving recipes that do not use sugar! Susie Hammett.*

## What organic growing can teach children during the lockdown

With thousands of children still at home during the current government restrictions, it is an ideal time for them to learn more about their gardens and discover how their food is grown. Discovering more about growing, can also help to balance indoor studies with more active and practical learning.

### Food is valuable

Growing vegetables takes work and patience. This is not always obvious when we can just pick them up off a shelf and throw them in a trolley. When we experience what it takes to grow food, we are likely to appreciate it a lot more, along with the people who grow it for a living. We are also a lot less likely to waste it.

## Some 'bugs' are friendly

Microbes in general have understandably had a pretty bad time in the media recently. For people who are already concerned about hygiene, this can cause added anxiety. However not all bugs and microbes are out to get us. Without friendly bacteria we would be in big trouble. They help break down waste in the soil and fix nitrogen needed for plants to grow. They even live in our gut and help our bodies to digest food. Perhaps knowing this makes them seem slightly less scary.

## Food tastes better when you have grown it yourself

Taking responsibility for nurturing plants can also help us to value our food. There is nothing quite like eating something that you have grown and picked from your own garden. Many vegetables taste totally different to shop-bought food. Suddenly some of those 'yucky' or 'boring' vegetables might be worth another try.

## Dirt isn't 'dirty'

Dirt isn't just something we clean off our wellies. Soil is a living eco-system that is vital to grow our food. It is also good to get our hands dirty sometimes as scientists and health professionals now think exposure to microbes in soil helps to build our immunity.

## Vegetable waste isn't a problem, it is a valuable resource

Thanks to a compost heap, today's fruit and vegetable skins can be turned into next year's fertile soil. Knowing this can help change the perception of household waste from something to be disposed of to something that can feed the fertility of our garden.

## Bees and 'mini-beasts' aren't just pests, they are part of the process

Many of the creatures that live in our garden aren't something to swat away, they are actually a vital part of the process, helping with things like pollination. Worms help to break down organic matter in soil. Other creatures like ladybirds are useful predators, helping to control problem pests such as aphids.

## Science isn't just in the classroom, it happens in the garden too

From the water and nitrogen cycles to complex soil biology, growing food is a great example of science in action. Understanding that science is happening in your garden helps to bring it to life and shows how useful this knowledge can be when it is applied to something as vital as food production.

## Learning through all of our senses

Gardens are a perfect environment for learning using all of our senses; smell, taste, touch, hearing and sight. These sorts of hands-on experiences help to give more meaning to the learning and also make it motivating to find out more! Even as adults, getting our hands into the soil, smelling the scent of herbs as you brush past them or tasting a mangetout straight from the plant, is extremely enjoyable. Children learn and absorb more if they are getting sensory feedback from the experience.



## Here are some ways you can help your children to learn in the garden:

- Start a garden diary to practice writing
- Draw a plan of the garden showing the layout of vegetable beds
- Setting an alarm for tasks like watering as part of the daily routine
- Allow children to take ownership of their own bed or area of a bed and grow their own plants
- Look at the soil and insect life with a magnifying glass
- Spot bees and help youngsters to understand pollination
- Get your children to help feed the compost heap
- Hunting and collecting slugs and snails – a good way to earn pocket money!

*Katie and John Husbands*

### **Feedback** *from Chris*

"I'd very much like to thank Lily, Diana and Barry for all their help about the black spot problem here. I'm going to incorporate their ideas into the garden regime and I've already been down and mulched the roses nearby. It's hard to tell where the fungus starts each year.

I'd also like to say how much I've enjoyed looking at the Chiltern Seeds website. Every year I like to try out something unusual that I can cook with as well. Last year it was yams which were undemanding and quite productive. But I've never had any success with okra and have concluded that they need so much heat that it would compromise the other things in our little polytunnel. Thanks to Chiltern Seeds, I'm now experimenting with chickpeas, callaloo and another variety of tomatillo (I've tried this before) which apparently is happier outside than the last one. I'll keep you posted!

Thanks again everyone, very much!"

### **BREW-YOUR-OWN**

Two **elderflower cordial** recipes on the Resources page on the website – one using sugar and the other using honey. I've made the "with sugar" one many times, but I'm going to try the "with honey" one as soon as I've picked some elderflowers. To serve, the cordials are diluted like squash.

<https://rps.gn.apc.org/organic/resources.htm>

### **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*