

CORONA-YOUR-OWN

Helping you to get organic growing despite the disruption
e-Newsletter 9 29 May 2020

Welcome

I should have shaped some of my garden soil into oblongs a few weeks ago – I would now have very usable bricks! As it is, I now have a lot of large lumps that only a sledge hammer stands a chance of breaking up.

Update on the hens from Julia

Diary of the hens

After the first morning of adventure the young hens never looked back. They explored their garden and part of the orchard with apparent glee (1). The hens' garden runs partly through orchard, partly across an old vegetable plot and part grass. The hen house is sited to the west and is well-shaded by boundary trees. The garden has lots of sunlight in the morning but the hen house doesn't get excessively warm even during these exceptionally warm days in May.

The hens' garden is fenced by an electric flexible fence and a second 2-strand outer fence at ankle/shin height. We hope this level of protection will keep the hens safe from the fox. This type of fencing is easily moveable and means that we could reconfigure the hens' garden if necessary. So far there is no sign of desertification.

Daily routine

Sometime after dawn we let out the hens from their sleeping quarters for their breakfast of layers pellets with a sprinkling of corn and fresh water with a hint of raw cider vinegar. We know they have been dreaming of exploring the orchard and tell us they want to go straight out - we keep them in the house for an hour or so for two reasons. One is to make sure they have their pellets and water. The second reason is to train them into a routine of the day so that when they start to lay, usually mornings, they will naturally make their way into the quiet of the nesting box rather than lay outside somewhere mysterious. Once outside, excitement and fun prevail but no eggs as yet! Having fun scratching through a pile of weeds and leaf litter (2).

Afternoon siesta after the hard work of scratching around, sorting and eating (3).

Coming up to 20 weeks and no eggs, but wait! Buttercup's comb and wattles are looking handsome. Looking closely, Speckledy's comb and wattles are looking fine too..



Bedtime and the first time the sun's rays shine into the hen's sleeping quarters at sunset (4).

Next morning May 23rd - well done Buttercupand Speckledy? (5)



Making your own newspaper seed pots from Judy

We made newspaper pots with our grandchildren on Zoom for sowing sunflowers. I used the instructions from the Eden Project which seemed the easiest to follow. It's worth remembering that paper has a grain, so if you rip it in a certain way it will rip in straight lines. I have to report that the Courier is better than the Guardian, which doesn't seem to go straight!

I am not totally sure I've got the management right - I think they need to stand in a seed tray with damp compost around them - but they are OK. We have had a self-service plant sale - with strict instructions about observing social distancing - in the village so we needed lots of pots and I thought I'd give them a try.<https://www.edenproject.com/learn/for-everyone/make-your-own-newspaper-seed-pots>

Greenhouse update from Julia

The plan for tomatoes only has taken on a little twist. The biodynamic strawberry plants from the Hive in Birmingham are so vigorous, sending out so many runners we have decided to pot on as many as we can to build up a good showing. In this section are a few early salads, radish, lettuce and spring onions.

The rest of the green house has been turned over to a few varieties of tomatoes, which will be under planted with marigold and basil. The giant borage and chard which over-wintered amazingly in the greenhouse and was buzzing almost every day, we dug up, then raced over to pre-dug holes in the veg bed. We needn't have worried - we have armies of borage and chard self-set seedlings racing through the garden.



Seed saving

Referring back to Susie's seed saving article in CYO6, while I was randomly roaming the internet, I saw something which I think was from a domestic and commercial seed supplier in the States. They seem to have had the same explosion in growing your own and unprecedented demand for seeds that we have. He was saying that because their seed stocks had become so depleted by the current demand, they were anticipating shortages in supply in the next couple of years. All the more reason to try saving your own seed.

Exceptions are F1 varieties (these are produced from 2 different parent plants, so won't reliably come true from seed) and pumpkins, squash, marrows and courgettes. I didn't realise, until informed by Carrie in relation to our seed swap on Potato Day, that these are promiscuous and will cross pollinate with anything. This explains why the seed I saved from squash a few years ago produced some very attractive, and different, two tone green and yellow fruit, which were totally tasteless. For a good guide to seed saving across the board see <https://www.realseeds.co.uk/seedsavinginfo.html>

Question

Garlic rust

My garlic has horrible rust again this year - it is in an open, well ventilated spot, both on the allotment and in the garden, though it is worse on the allotment, where others are growing garlic nearby. It doesn't seem to make any difference which variety I grow, as I've tried a lot over the years. Its obviously too late for this year, but does anyone have any rust prevention tips? I don't know if it has any connection to climate change, but I don't remember this being a problem when I first started growing garlic decades ago.

COOK-YOUR-OWN

Thoughts on flowers in food at this time of year from Julia

Beautiful spring blossoms inspire and uplift us, not just with their beauty and scent but also the musical vibrations when we hear the pollinators and birds busy at work. Some flowers have an extra dimension: they taste good. So have a look around and get creative.

- Star-like borage flowers can uplift iced drinks or enhance a fruit salad. Take care to remove the hairy sepals at the back of the floret.
- Shades of yellow through to orange Calendula (pot marigold, not African marigold) has had medicinal and culinary use since ancient times. Sprinkle the petals on salads for decoration and flavour. Can be used in baking for seasoning and colour.
- Pretty little daisy and more complex bellis perennis, work very well in salads. Pick just before use so the small daisy flowers remain open for the salad.
- A quick shake of an elderflower blossom is all that's needed for the heady scent to enhance a fruit or savoury salad with confetti. Check your blossom is not full of little black beetles first.
- This time of year you can use rose petals, primrose, pansy, cowslip, violets, lavender, geraniums, nasturtium and many more.

Just take care to identify correctly, check with your reliable sources and turn regular dishes into poetry.

Drunken Beef from Julia

For the Omnivore - for a special occasion try this recipe.

For this dish the list of ingredients looks fairly routine, but when it is cooked something magical has happened. There is a synergy here which makes the final dish greater than the sum of its parts. The recipe is on the Resources page <https://rps.gn.apc.org/organic/resources.htm>

A Walk in the Woods

Not related to growing your own, but "A Walk in the Woods" is now also on the Resources page. This was submitted by Irene in March, but we held it over until lockdown rules were eased.

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 .

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