

CORONA-YOUR-OWN

Helping you to get organic growing despite the disruption
e-Newsletter 10 12 June 2020

Welcome

Whitnash must be in a rain shadow, though from what I have no idea. Drove through Kenilworth Wednesday – water, water everywhere. Got home – dry as a bone. Soil in garden and on allotment is seriously parched. On a more positive note, Stuart dropped off some honey yesterday and we had a lovely chat. He also admired my Hot Lips! – if we ever get enough rain to dampen the soil, I'll try to dig up a rooted piece for him. He also took home a Vietnamese coriander – a plant that it is very easy to root cuttings from in water, otherwise I wouldn't have parted with my spare plant!



No-Dig Potatoes from Ross

It's our first year with no-dig potatoes and even the master Charles Dowding warns that they are prone to struggle in hard ground. In the photo we have our Colleen and Charlotte rows from the seed we bought at Potato Day. Planted shallow and mulched, we've added more mulch to earth them up so that the tubers have room to crop. The mulch is a mix of our own compost, some of last year's spent compost from pots around the house together with some horse manure. Knowing how hard the ground is we've been watering much more heavily than we used to on our double-dig crops. The earth is full of life and despite some minor frost damage on the tips of leaves the plants are looking healthy.



Potatoes/Hens/Bees update from Stuart

First new potatoes from polytunnel harvested 9 June - early variety Bambino (6.5 kg from 9 roots). Could have left them a bit longer if outside but I cleared from tunnel early to avoid blight and make room for next crop. Skins just flake off - looking forward to tasting them tomorrow.

Multi coloured eggs from free range hens in garden - assorted size and colour from different hen breeds. It is the breed that sets the colour, not the feed.

Collecting a swarm in the garden all looks easy, but I put them in a hive and they flew back to same stop 3 times, so changed hive at fourth attempt and they went straight in. They did not like first hive I was using. They have now raised a new queen, who is laying well and will make a new colony for next year. Also took off the first honey of 2020 from 3 sites - all different tastes and colours, even though they are less than a mile apart. Local flora dictates what is flowering and weather what they can collect. Rain and cold - no honey, when sunny, honey comes in quickly.



Propagating

Following on from Susie's piece on propagating basil cuttings in water, the same can be done with tomatoes. If, like me, you find large side shoots which have been hiding, these can easily be rooted in water and will extend your tomato season when planted up (its probably best to stop these late tomatoes at fewer trusses than tomatoes planted earlier in the season). With a reference back to seed saving in previous newsletters, my Garnet, Rosella and Tumbling Tom tomatoes are all from seed saved last year (first time I've tried saving tomato seed). I also have chillies (helpfully labelled "large chillies"!) and peppers from saved seed growing in the greenhouse.

RIP Crystal Lemons



I overwatered them just as the weather turned cloudy and colder, and the base of the stems rotted, and they were the last of my seed.

Qs and As

Question: Preventing rust on garlic

Answer: from Lea

(and yes, we welcome input from all our readers, not just HEOG members)

I grow garlic every year and in previous years they have suffered badly from rust. The Isle of Wight Garlic Farm suggest spraying with sulphur compounds or to hoe sulphate of potash round plants from February.

Although I don't use or like the idea of spraying with anything, the past couple years I have regularly given them fish, blood and bone from late February onwards and it seems to have helped a lot. They have never been completely clear of rust but don't seem to suffer as much as in previous years. aybe it helps give them a boost so they fight it off more?

I will definitely try this. My previous technique of planting the cloves in the autumn, and then abandoning them, apart from watering, until harvest is perhaps not the ideal – they will get more TLC next year.

BREW-YOUR-OWN

I thought I'd be clever and use my black elder (present from eldest son many moons and house moves ago) flowers, which are pink, to make elderflower gin and vodka. Really disappointingly, they have made the alcohol brown and not pink, though as a friend pointed out, maybe that is better than what the yellow colour would be reminiscent of if I'd used the normal white flowers?

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 .

Gillian McGivern