

CORONA-YOUR-OWN

Helping you to get organic growing despite the disruption
e-Newsletter 11 19 June 2020

Welcome

Rain, at last!

Basil and more basil from Susie (with apologies, this should have been in an earlier newsletter)

As summer sets in with its higher temperatures and increased sunshine, it is a good time of year to be taking basil cuttings from established plants. Last summer provided a bumper crop for the kitchen with enough abundance to freeze as pesto to liven up winter dishes. Steve's request to grow as much basil as possible has resulted in experiments with this beautiful sun-loving herb that likes to be protected against the unpredictability of our maritime climate.

1. Pinch out a basil shoot from an established plant and pop into water in a warm and sunny position. A jam jar is perfect for this but here, a late winter birthday present adds a bit of interest.
2. Less than two weeks later the most impressive root system emerged from a "seam" down the length of the stem: I was only expecting node roots.
3. Time to pot up the rooted cuttings into a light, peat-free compost - the basil equivalent of slipping on a soft woollen jumper.

Notes: Basil does like to be planted up in little groups and not by itself. As the cuttings grow larger transplant carefully into 7 - 9 inch pots and thoroughly water from a watering can that has warmed in the summer heat. Provide protection and water sparingly from time to time. To harvest, pinch out the top few leaves between finger and thumb just above a node, which will then branch out to become two shoots growing at 45 degrees from the main stem.

Most importantly, keep picking the leaves to enjoy this delicate herb all summer long.



New arrivals from Stuart

We have had 2 new arrivals this week on the hen front, mum is looking after them and she is really protective if you go near them and will give us a nip if we do not move quickly.

Benefits of letting plants go to seed

Apart from the obvious one of seed saving, I have noticed that goldfinches love the seed heads on the cornflowers in the front gravel garden. Prior to seeing them do this, I had never seen them in either the front or back garden. When I Googled them, they are apparently supposed to love dandelion and thistle seeds, so I'm a bit miffed they didn't tuck into the rampant thistle flowers which flourished along the back garden border with next door last summer (nice 6 ft fence now, courtesy of neighbours, to keep the thistles at bay).



Back to seed saving, and how it helps with seed diversity and adapting seed to local conditions, in contrast to the frightening global monopoly on seed by a handful of companies - listen to BBC Radio 4 Food Programme - Seed Stories from the Lockdown. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000k1c8>

Protecting cherries with apologies from Judy for not sending this in earlier

Ever since I lost my first crop of Stella cherries to birds I've been covering the branches in home made 'cherry sleeves'. It may be that everyone does this, but if not this simple method has been ensuring I get a reasonable crop of cherries for the past 12 years at least, so I thought it would be worth sharing. I should probably send it to Garden Organic too. I was going to patent the idea, but I think you can now buy them.

The sleeves are simply threaded over the branches, and with practice you can get several small branches compressed into one sleeve without hurting either branches or cherries. Last year we tried netting the whole tree, but it was a disaster as not only could we not protect the cherries, but it took forever to get on and take off. This year I'm going as high as I can with sleeves and leaving the birds to feast on the topmost branches. I believe the tree is on a Gisela rootstock, so doesn't get very tall and I prune the top branches after harvest to keep it as small as is possible.

They can be as simple as vegetable nets, or can be hand tacked sleeves of old but serviceable bits of fleece or mesh. No need for Sewing Bee standard here. I just tie them on with twine [top and bottom if it's a home made sleeve as it saves sewing up the end]. That's it until the cherries are ripe. Beware though - wasps can often still find a way in.

Timing is pretty important - you need to keep an eye open and cover the cherries before they are ripe as the birds don't seem to mind eating them when they have even a little colour in their cheeks.



Qs and As

Questions: from Ann

Failed seedling development

Every year I sow peppers in January. Fresh, home saved seed from organic peppers I've bought. Parsnip & celery follow a few weeks later. Now admittedly the parsnip was old seed as I forgot to order new, and the celery was from a seed swap. In all cases germination was normal, but then they just sat there. Nothing. No new growth. The peppers never developed past the seed leaves, and the others only a couple of true leaves. I used Melcourt compost, and nothing was different from any other years. All other crops are just fine, growing and developing as they should. Ideas anyone??

Woody root veg

I would love to grow carrots, beetroot, radish & turnip. Random germination, small roots, and what does bulb up is woody, like it is when they are grown too slowly. I've tried in the ground, increasing organic matter, adding grit or sand to improve drainage, copious watering and different varieties. Help!!

As an experienced gardener, these are just downright embarrassing!

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