

CORONA-YOUR-OWN

Helping you to get organic growing despite the disruption
e-Newsletter 15 24 July 2020

Welcome

A few words of encouragement to any new growers reading this – I think it has been a really difficult growing season to date, so don't be discouraged. Cold April, exceptionally dry and hot May, followed by unseasonably windy conditions, then a short, cold, wet spell. So, some plants have been bolting because of the dryness, some have been battered by the winds and some are doing ok. My courgettes and climbing beans are doing well, while the squash are sulking. If you have managed to grow anything this season, you are doing well.



Update from Stuart

Really glad it's getting a bit warmer and it's stopped raining but it's still cold at night. The weather does not stop the wild life getting on with things.

On a strip of nettles against the fence I have a great quantity of black caterpillars see photograph I had just left these to see what would arrive and feel privileged with result.

Got a call in week to collect a swarm of bees from next village up in a tree all very cold and wet as they must have been out in the rain for a few days. They are now thriving in a new home at 5 Acres farm.



Update from Gillie

The 'no-dig' interview was very interesting. I have been doing the same and had very good results, even on heavy clay. Crop rotation also helps as spuds really break up and clean the soil.

Regarding keep birds/cats off beds, I've used wire strung from one stake to another at about 6" above ground, completely round the bed. The criss-crossed wire/string at about another 6" across the top. So far, so good! Pea/bean netting also works well, as does chicken wire completely surrounding the bed. Cats, at least, seem to have got the message. It's been a wonderful season without them! Happy gardening.

Update from Julia

In the greenhouse

The Jungle has landed

A brilliant visit by the group to Guys Cliff Walled Garden last year was informative, enjoyable and gave us lots of food for thought as well as with a delicious food for tea. The guide who took our group round the garden was particularly keen to tell us about the special heritage Kenilworth King George tomato and also a modern large variety, Crimson Crush. After a conversation about saving seed our guide generously gave Tony one tomato of each variety. Crimson Crush produces earlier, KKG later. The Crimson Crush plants began flowering before reaching the height of varieties we usually grow. The leaves are large and grow in a more open fashion. These plants were flowering much lower down the plant and when the tomatoes arrived we could see why. Our first Crimson Crush tomato ripened 2 weeks ago weighing in at 5 1/2 ozs followed by a 6 1/2 ozthen a 7 1/2 oz tomato. We knew to expect large but this was unexpected. Of course the plants need to be well-supported as there may be 4 or 5 tomatoes, not all of the above weight, growing on the same truss. Tasting notes: the skin is a little chewy but the acidity-sweetness is in good balance. Quite delicious. The K King George has just begun forming along with other tomatoes grown from seed of tomato plants from HEOG member, David Searle.

I am on convulvulus duty in the greenhouse at this time of year. When we moved here in 1999 this end of the greenhouse was a mass of matted bindweed. Over the years I have looked for it early. If I see a sprig I know there will be 2 more nearby. I gently trace the root back in the soil usually 3 inches or so, to a trifurcation and gently pull out the root beyond. It seems to have reduced its R number and over the years its presence is much reduced. In a jungle like this sometimes one strand might get away and charge up a tomato plant. If I find one I trace it back as before. I find it easier to unfurl from lower down the stem than from the top.

The strawberries have raced away and I haven't been able to keep up, so they are now infiltrating the space for follow-on salad (3) and even made their way into the tomato jungle. Help!

In the tunnel - Chillies and loofahs

The loofahs are aiming for the sky. We have constructed a 'raft' which we have strung up near the roof hoping the plants' tendrils will find their way across. There are no flowers yet but there is a lot of lush growth. The chillies have been flowering for a few weeks and some are now developing long thin chillies. One of the chillies has grown into a Shoo-fly bush. How did that happen?



Hens

During these strange locked down times the hens have been a wonderful distraction. They have been growing not only in size and stature but also in developing their own personality. Their feathers are glossy, eyes bright and alert, combs bright and droppings are text book.

Buttercup is mother hen. Rosie Sussex will jump or fly at every opportunity and always first to choose her perching spot. Speckledy follows me closely hoping I will turn a stone or log where tasty things may be discovered. Lexie Bluebell is exotic and occasionally aloof. She is bossy at bedtime dictating who perches where. The morning routine remains the same: down the ramp for breakfast they come, then settle down for a couple of hours during which time eggs may be laid and perhaps a dust bath is taken (see video on website).

The hens are now laying 3-4 beautiful eggs with good, hard shells daily. There are two identical nesting boxes and so far the hens have laid every egg in the same nesting box. For the last three days where is Lexie Bluebell to be found? She has become broody and is sitting in the preferred nest box all day and night. Where will the laying hens lay their eggs? In the other nest box? No. It seems if they can't get into the chosen nest box they sidle up to it as close as they can and lay their egg right next to it.

The release into the orchard mid-morning is always greeted with excitement and energy, and off they go. Sometimes a dust bath is taken in the afternoon, in the old veg garden.

Jobs

The health of the hens is of course very important. We remain constantly observant of their appearance and demeanour. Daily cleaning of the henhouse: remove droppings and refresh/replace bedding. Look out for any bugs and in particular red mites which live in the nooks and crannies and perch ends. Check the fencing.

COOK-YOUR-OWN

Vegan dandelion honey

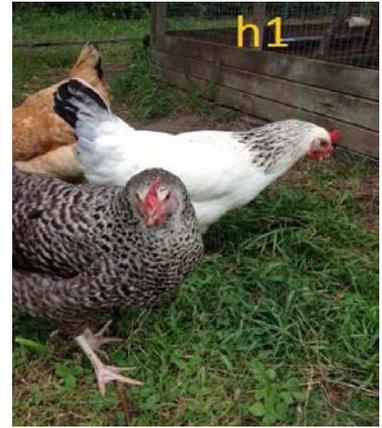
This recipe is via a friend of Julia's, whose opinion she trusts, and is on the Resources page of the website.

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 .



Gillian McGivern