

CORONA-YOUR-OWN

Helping you to get organic growing despite the disruption
e-Newsletter 16 7 August 2020

Welcome

I am writing this from the desert formerly known as Whitnash. It would be really interesting to hear about your spectacular successes/failures so far during this extraordinary, globally warmed, pandemic year enews@heog.org.uk.

Update on growing season so far from Stuart

Onions

The onions grown with plastic mulch cover and individual holes for onions has worked really well and I am pleased with the crop. The mulch really helped with minimum weeding required. I only pulled out small weeds twice, and it also kept dampness in soil. Now using to dry out onions, then I will put away until next year.

Have had an unusual pest on onions - the hens have been getting heads through netting and eating the onion leaves with only small stalk remaining - not seen this before.

Pumpkins

The pumpkins are also using same mulch material, with holes at wider spacing, and are really growing well with quite a few fruits. We will see later how it all works out when they die off.



Beans, peas and potatoes update from John and Katie

We've had a good year growing, perhaps due in part to the additional time in the garden at the beginning of lockdown. We've had success from all the bean family, particularly mangetout, dwarf French beans and broad beans. The French beans were damaged from the late frosts and cold winds early on, but have since produced well.

Broad beans are another success this year. The children have really enjoyed eating them which has been a surprise and also enjoyed picking and podding them. We've also come to the conclusion that they are better

eaten early when the beans are fairly small and need very little cooking; literally a few minutes of boiling/steaming in a very shallow saucepan of water, then adding butter and pepper. However, In the last month or so, the broad beans have started to suffer from a rust-like condition affecting the pods and the leaves. Online research suggests that this is a fungal disease that gets worse as the ambient temperature rises in the mid-late summer. Although the young plants grew well in a sheltered bed we have with fences on two sides, the density of the planting and lack of air movement may have made this worse.

The no-dig potatoes, using the seed potatoes from HEOG's potato day in February, were a huge success, with lots of lovely clean tubers grown in just 4" - 6" of compost. The second-early variety Charlotte were particularly delicious, boiled with a few mint leaves. Yum!

Lessons for next year:

More successional sowing to extend season. We missed a couple of slots for successional growing of lettuce and mangetout, when in hindsight we realised that the weather was too warm for them to germinate successfully.

In relation to the rust on the broad beans, we plan to space the plants further apart to reduce transmission and improve air circulation. We may try a bicarbonate of soda spray suggested online consisting of 2 litres of water, a few drops of vegetable oil and of washing up liquid and 4 teaspoons of bicarbonate of soda. The theory is that the alkaline solution helps to prevent development of the fungal spores. The oil is probably intended to help the mix coat the leaves and the soap to emulsify the oil to help it mix with the water. Other interesting treatments I have seen is one using aspirin in water! **It would be interesting to hear other ideas.**

Susie's growing season so far

As the season slips from mid-summer into early autumn, so does the gardener's inspiration and time availability. The start of lockdown neatly coincided with the start of our temperate climate's growing season, bringing with it a flying chance of success to those new to the growing experience. The division between those who were still fully occupied with their work lives and those who suddenly found themselves confined at home was noticeable. But common to both was the motivation to become a little more self-sufficient in food supply.

Four months hence we can look back on our successes and perceived failures with either a feeling of achievement or disappointment. After many decades of gardening I have trained myself to look positively on the gardening year knowing that each failed expectation brings with it the joy of gathering knowledge, sharing experiences with others and the purposeful pursuit of eating as our ancestors did; close to the land and close to home. For us organic growers we have the added satisfaction of working in harmony with nature.

Early August, left to right:

Under Enviromesh, parsnip and beetroot well tended in first two months but neglected since. Large roots for winter eating. Parsnips will remain in the ground with beetroot harvested and stored. Although beetroot is hardy enough to stay put all winter, the slugs can't leave it alone.

In foreground the carefully tended garden edges of the first few months have grown annual weeds, giving an unkempt appearance. Autumn mulching will transform edges to well kept once more.

Dried pea haulms ready to harvest by removing remaining dried pods to store for winter stews and next year's seed. The haulms can be used for composting, feeding larger animals or laying down close to the bed as material for compost 'paths' for use next year as bed compost.



The tight hairnet of mesh over the sprout plot will stay put until early winter. Since planting out, the sprouts have had just one weeding and mulching.

Around and beyond the sprouts the spuds are nearly ready to harvest, after which the soil will be temporarily covered with card board or rough compost. I'm keeping a lookout for blight.

Runner beans are suffering from lack of water but had a good start to life in a wet period, so will just have to wait for the skies to open again.

Looking at this picture of untidiness, I choose to see abundance knowing that nature is happy, there will be food to eat all winter and once again the cycle will begin with the promise of new growing experiences to come.

Three sisters from Gillian

This is very roughly a three sisters bed on my former lawn in the back garden – climbing beans, runner beans and a Crystal Lemon cucumber growing up the canes, sweetcorn (don't know the variety as they were given to me) with the cobs beginning to form, and an under storey of courgettes and squash. All are suffering from a lack of moisture – any showers in the general area keep missing Whitnash, and I have long used up all the stored rainwater. They get watered by watering can every few days (don't have a hose). Having said that, I've had to resort to Freecycle courgettes and accosting random passers by to get rid of them (3 plants here and 3 more on the allotment). Squash, on the other hand are doing really badly, and I'm not sure why – they seem to be bonsai'd. **Too long in pots before planting out? Heavy clay soil too dry for them to spread their roots out?** The only one that is doing well is the Tromba d'Albenga on the allotment (middle photo), which is well on its way to spreading out back home to Italy.

I've included a photo of a Gatekeeper butterfly on the flowers at the bottom of the garden, because I can't remember seeing them in the garden before – you will need your magnifying glass to see it. There is hyssop nearby, which the bees love (Stuart told me they are honey bees) and Hot Lips in the background (Stuart is now the proud owner of his very own Hot Lips!). I also left the clover in the lawn to flower for the bees, so that saved cutting the lawn for quite a while. Just eaten a home grown salad of Little Gem lettuce, Rosella tomatoes, Marketmore cucumber and summer purslane (crunchy, with a lemony pea taste).



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