

## **CORONA-YOUR-OWN**

Helping you to get organic growing despite the disruption  
**e-Newsletter 19      20 November 2020**

### **Welcome**

This is Gillie's strategy for lockdown, which I thought was an excellent way to start this newsletter.

"Keep busy, keep outdoors, have a list of no more than 7 items to work on each day or week, depending on weather and activities. Enjoy each task and don't multi task. Keep positive, say hello to everyone you meet on walks, get plenty of sleep and don't listen to the news more than once a day. Enjoy each moment of each day and be thankful for 3 things before you go to bed. Enjoy lockdown!"

### **Reflections on 2020** from Susie



As gardeners and growers we are used to unpredictable conditions thrown at us by volatile weather conditions and associated vagaries. The year of 2020 has been exacerbated by the uncertainty of the current pandemic, of which no more direct mention!

Decades ago I decided not to focus on the 'failures' in my garden, but to take the growing of vegetables and flowers to feed the body and soul as an overall picture encompassing the whole period that I have been working with nature to provide my family kitchen with local, organic and fresh produce. As this year draws to an end reflections on the season just fading into the background is a worthwhile occupation alongside ordering seeds and planning for an early start in 2021.

Food in our home-grown garden veg box is in abundance right now, as shown in the photo. For obvious reasons the failures are not there simply due to the vegetables not germinating or growing, rotting off or succumbing to external conditions, including mammals large and small. This year's leeks are abundant and pleasing which is fortunate as the onion sets succumbed to white root rot and simply got off to a bad start. **Action:** Bedfordshire Champion onion seeds are all ready to be multi-sown in trays early in the year, as recommended by Charles Dowding.

The cucurbits in general were disappointing, with cucumber plants suddenly telling me that they'd had enough quite early on. Courgettes did similarly, and only 4 winter squash resulted from 4 plants. Gratitude to my gardening mate, Gillian, for the beautiful squash - nicknamed 'Trombonicus Maximus' - to provide us with squash soup and curries for a while to come! (see edge of photo) **Action:** grow cucurbits in as large a variety of places and conditions as possible to spread the risk of reduced cropping.

Successional sowing of saladings benefited from the sudden release of time early in the season but became a victim of later pressures. **Action:** Make the beginning of each month a call to successional sowing along with regular 'must do's' such as reading the electricity meter.

The delight of our growing season has to be the root family, with top of the list a first for summer carrots all season long. Successional sowings in elevated pots to avoid carrot root fly proved to give 100% protection from damage. The variety, Amsterdam Forcing, was recommended to me by a gardening friend as an excellent cropper – spot on! Bottomless metal dustbins half filled with very rough compost, shredded cardboard and vegetable waste were topped by a layer of nutritious homemade compost. The 15cm space between compost and dustbin rim offered good protection for early sowings, the seeds being further protected by an upside down metal hanging basket securing a scrap of fleece. (See Gillie's tips in previous newsletters for wire basket use). The star of the root family has to be celeriac, producing sizeable vegetables resulting from early sowing in pots followed by early planting out into polytunnel beds regularly watered and cosseted for a number of weeks. Celeriac is a kitchen favourite grated into winter root salad along with carrot and beetroot topped with anything green – yum.

Whatever the scale of production, organic growers for the retail market deserve our respect and support. A failed or reduced garden crop may be disappointing to us but does not affect our livelihood. Vegetable growing, especially organically, is at the mercy of many factors making it a volatile business to be in. Seek out local, smaller organic food producers and use them whenever you can to supplement your own garden vegetable production. Spread the word to others and keep sharing your gardening stories with the ever-widening HEOG community.

## **Various** from Gillie

### **Cut and come again**

I had 6 (now 3) lovely greyhound cabbages and as I cut them I left the stalk in the ground, and, lo and behold, they have sprouted some lovely, tender leaves ready for eating.

### **Loganberries**

Mine had done nothing for over 2 years apart from growing tall and leggy without fruiting – because every year I cut them down to the ground. Silly me, that's why there was no fruit, because I cut off all the previous year's growth. Just before I read Pippa's article I had dug up said loganberries and thrown them in the bin in despair, replacing them with blackcurrant bushes. So, after reading the article, I got them out of the bin and trimmed off the old woody roots and put them in a bucket with water to recover before I replant them elsewhere. Next year I will only cut off the year's growth which has fruited (don't cut them down to the ground) and just trim off some of the height of the previous year's growth to help them to bush. So, Pippa, you may as well cut off this year's growth as you won't get fruit on it, or leave them to see what happens.

## Make your own compost

Using peat free compost is good but it dries out quickly. I find that mixing a third leaf mould, a third mole hills (or garden soil – not clay) and a third peat free compost, plus a little own compost, works well and enriches the soil in the veg boxes.

## A bumper crop of tomatillos! from Chris

I grew my verdelino tomatillo plants from the seed that I sent for from Chiltern Seeds. They germinated very quickly in late April in our little polytunnel, in fact much more quickly than this year's batch of Alicante. Outside they grew into great big, robust plants over three feet high and they straggled over an area of several feet. Two plants are needed for effective pollination and I put in three. This was perhaps a bit foolhardy as I ended up with a veritable tomatillo jungle, despite having planted them well apart. They were evidently very happy where they were, in full sun, although it can't have been



half as warm as Mexico, where tomatillos are a staple part of the diet. When the fresh ones are finished you can buy them there in tins. My plants went on fruiting well into October and have been very prolific. Tomatillos are far less sweet than tomatoes and more acidic, with a much denser interior. I've enjoyed making salsa verde, which seems to be the classic tomatillo dish. It's spicy and citrusy and goes well with all Mexican dishes. Yet to be tried are pickled tomatillos, and also tomatillo soup which looks a very robust dish using chicken, onions and various spices as well as the tomatillos. Once dehusked the verdelinos are a lovely glossy green. As you know, there are various varieties of tomatillo and some are quite sweet and fruity like the lovely little orange ones I grew in the polytunnel a couple of years' ago. I think they might have been Cape Gooseberries, which are native to Peru. It's been good fun growing and cooking tomatillos. All you seem to need is somewhere warm for them to germinate, a decent sized bit of fertile ground and a Mexican cookery book.

## ANSWER from Ann (in response to question re bitter courgettes from Bobbie)

We haven't had this problem, but we know several people who have. Mr Fothergills. Some were OK, it was the odd plant, and each got the 'lick' test before being used. They were still able to get a reasonable harvest.

## COOK-YOUR-OWN

### Horseradish from Irene

Dr H C Vogel, founder of the Bioforce range of products, describes horseradish as "one of the healthiest seasonings there is...rich in vitamin c...helps to overcome functional disorders of the pancreas...good for diabetics. It contains a considerable amount of antibiotic substances, including a kind of penicillin." The last could be useful right now. Not bad for a "weed", eh? I have mine grated raw instead of pepper over anything savoury (except curry).

## 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](mailto:enews@heog.org.uk).

*Gillian McGivern*