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## CORONA-YOUR-OWN

Helping you to get organic growing despite the disruption  
**e-Newsletter 22 16 February 2021**

### Welcome

We start with a motivational piece by Susie to get the growing season going.

### Turning winter lockdown blues into springtime optimism from Susie

Normally the turn of the year into January sees a stirring of impulses to get out into the garden to prepare for the first plantings of the season. Maybe lockdown has affected the communal consciousness by inducing apathy or maybe that's just my excuse. Whatever the reason, a firm hand is needed to take the first steps into the delights of the coming growing season.

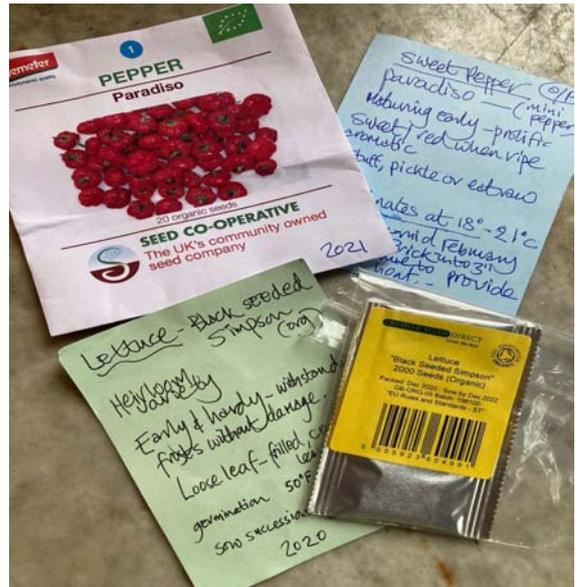


Sort out those seeds by being ruthless with out of date stock, especially the vegetable seeds with a short viability window such as parsnip and parsley. Don't risk the disappointment of poor germination or reduced crop vigour. Organise seed packets using the method that makes sense to you and not by one that you've seen on social media but has never really felt right. My method is by grouping seeds into their types according to biodynamic growing principles: Fruit, leaf, root and flower. Then sub-dividing and clipping seed packets together to pull out as a group for sowing.

An example of this is to clip all Brussels Sprouts varieties together under the leaf group. Store seeds in a cool, dark and dry atmosphere – a pantry or food cupboard used for flour and oats is just about right. Some folk store in the fridge – have others done this?

I've always found seed packet information inconsistent and often lacking in vital detail. Last year I began a system of making variety notes on separate pieces of card which are tucked into the relevant clips alongside the seed packets. Variety, whether early, mid or late planting and harvesting, vertical and horizontal measurements of mature plants and personal notes as an aide memoire help to ensure that each variety has its optimal growing conditions.

The Seed Coop have introduced pared down opening times for internet orders as a result of increased demand again this year. Try to order composts and seeds sooner rather than later. Try to be as self-reliant in your patch as possible this year by reusing, swapping or generally thinking creatively around what you have at home or in your garden that can be put to good use. Simple packaging without plastic labels and tapes is an excellent weed suppressing mulch, conserving water and encouraging worm and micro-organism activity. Re-use plastic products year after year by taking care of them and storing well when not in use. I was particularly encouraged by Stuart's method of creating the holes in plastic mulch material, that he uses for planting squash and onions through, by applying heat. The neat hole that is created allows the sheeting to be used for many seasons.



No-matter what size your garden and preparation area ensure that relevant tools and materials are near at hand and, if it helps to motivate on a dark, damp day make the area look as pleasing as possible – maybe a pot of flowering bulbs on the tidied potting bench and a little stool to perch on to enjoy your cuppa is all that it takes to lift the spirits and think of the growing season that is just around the corner – I'm just off with my mug and hyacinth to follow my own advice!

Thanks to Leigh and Stuart for their excellent tips on all aspects squash growing – much appreciated.

## Allotment Winter Wonderland from Ross

Mid-winter used to be a quiet time on the allotment in the days we used to do a full dig. Our plot, on the Odibourne site in Kenilworth, is in the flood plain of the Finham Brook and saturates easily – making it far too wet to turn over at this time of year. This year we are trying to use the weekends to mulch the 1.2m wide beds with either manure or compost, depending on next year's crop. You can mulch in any weather!

There's enough to do to pass an hour or so – before your toes and fingers turn blue. Grass is a big problem for us on the allotment as the grass borders seem to be able to process just a glimpse of sunshine to invade the plots! Our crop of grass was so successful last year we could dig it out as turf from some corners. We have this stacked upside down in an old wooden frame which we'll open when it gets warm – I'm expecting to open a wonderful box of crumbly top soil as an Easter gift! This winter we are using this quiet time to weed the grass out rather than turn it over, advice given by Charles Dowding.

We've found another advantage of mulching over digging is that it doesn't disrupt the over-wintering crops. We're managing to pull giant parsnips (what a year they had!) and are still managing a nice haul of winter veg – kale, radicchio, salsify, turnips, cabbage and from under the enviromesh leeks, land cress and mustard leaves.

## **Potato Sale** from Ross

We first met to plan our annual Potato Day last September and it was already obvious that the event was unlikely. By November we had decided to take it online and at our final meeting in January, with the UK at the depth of the third wave, it looked as though even an online sale might be cancelled. With risk assessments completed we knew it could be done safely and we called Skea Organics in Dundeehire to send our sacks down. Steve and Susie had organised everything at their farm brilliantly to allow the order pickers to progress quickly and safely through over 250 individual orders. Kath and Paul joined Karen and I for the first round. We panicked when we saw the size of some of the seed which meant the 25kg sacks had far fewer than the 300 tubers we were expecting. The task was made harder as we all struggled to read the orders with our spectacles steamed up by our PPE! (we are of a certain age). Stuart and Imgard arrived with grandson to relieve us and complete the job.



Apologies to those of you who got unexpected substitutions, and especially to those of you who have had to wait for more stock to arrive. As people collected their orders safely later that day everyone seemed happy. Let's hope that we all have a successful year growing – and that next year we can meet in style to pick our own orders and share ideas. Thanks to Steve and Susie for their planning and facilities, to our pickers and everyone who helped organise, and also everyone who supported the sale with orders.

In 'Corona-Your-Own' spirit we beat the pandemic and the event gets stronger every year!

### **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*