



www.heog.org.uk

CORONA-YOUR-OWN

Helping you to get organic growing despite the disruption
e-Newsletter 2 3 April 2020

Welcome

This is probably the busiest time of year for gardeners, so one positive from most of us being in lockdown is that we have more time than we otherwise would have to sow, divide, replant, mulch, weed, plan.

GROWING YOUR OWN

Have you started growing your own food?



National groups including the Royal Horticultural Society and National Vegetable Society have reported a substantial increase in people starting to grow their own veg for the first time. Will food supply fears see a rise in home-grown veg?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-52009161>

Do you want to be a TV star?

The Sustainable Food Trust would love anybody who has decided to start growing their own food to share your story with them through short film clips! Please send them a short video of what you are doing and why (please shoot in landscape) and they will share the best of them through their channels and maybe even with ITV, who are putting together a programme about the impact of Covid-19 on food security and who would like to feature new growers! Get in touch by emailing megan@sustainablefoodtrust.org

Heirloom plants: Saving the nation's seeds from extinction

This article from the BBC is all about seed diversity, heritage varieties and how saving our own seed has led to plants being uniquely adapted to the locations they are growing in. The photo is of angel beans from Germany mentioned in the article – not local, but more photogenic than most seeds! A note for new growers – saving seed from F1 varieties (seed produced by cross pollinating two different parent plants) does not work. They might not germinate, and if they do, they will not be the same as the plant you saved the seed from. If there is a non-F1 equivalent of whatever seed you are thinking of buying, always go for that.

Not really a seed, but my old allotment had several Warwickshire Drooper plum trees – yellow, sweet fruit and love the name!

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-51315237>



What to do now

This is Garden Organic's very useful page for March (I know its April, but it has been cold and the advice is still current) <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/what-do-march>
Ordering seeds - don't panic!

After the first newsletter went out, I checked a few of the websites I've ordered seed from in the past, to find that they have been overwhelmed by the unprecedented demand for seed. They are smaller companies and are struggling to fulfil orders, so have temporarily stopped accepting new orders. If you are trying to order seed, keep checking to see when orders are being accepted. I couldn't even get on to Chase Organics website on Saturday but it looks like they are now back up and running, with understandable delays in getting orders out. Most plants will eventually catch up, even if sown a little later than the recommended sowing time.

EDIBLES

Potatoes

Growing your own remotely!

You would think that you would have to be physically in the same place as your seed potatoes to plant them – but not necessarily One of the attendees at our Potato Day in February is currently stranded in New Zealand for at least a month and has asked friends back here to plant out the spuds for him.

Plant out early potatoes once they have chitted (sprouted) and the soil has warmed up (looks like it will be much warmer from Sunday onwards, but give it a few days to get into the soil.). Follow this link to see our centenarian President's excellent guide to growing potatoes

<http://rps.gn.apc.org/organic/resources/JohnsPotatoLeafletA5.pdf>

They can also be grown successfully in containers, specialist potato sacks or old compost sacks with drainage holes pierced at the bottom. In containers they will need more attention in terms of feeding and watering, especially as they near maturity.

Salad leaves

Sow every couple of weeks for a continuous supply. Mustard and cress is a good one for children – it will grow on damp kitchen paper on a window sill and will be ready in a couple of weeks.

Peppers, chillies, tomatoes

Maybe think about sowing these from next week onwards – the 10 day forecast is much warmer, but they will still need heat to germinate and to grow on. New growers: note that chillies and peppers really do much better under some sort of cover (dwarf chillies can be grown on a sunny windowsill). Even in a good summer you will get an earlier and heavier crop under cover – in open ground in a bad summer you might not get a crop at all. If you are growing tomatoes outdoors, look for a blight resistant variety and check the description to ensure they are suitable for growing outside. Seed labelling is important, particularly when potting on. I managed to Freecycle ALL my small chilli plants last year after mixing up the labels between the chillies and the peppers when potting on – I had a glut of peppers and absolutely no chillies – not what I was aiming for.

Herbs

Divide established chive plants.

Soft fruit

Divide established strawberry plants (if they are a variety which doesn't produce runners), or detach rooted runners, and replant or pot up with the crown of the plant just above soil level. I grow mine in pots, just because it is easier to protect them from slugs and birds, but they grow quite happily in the soil.

ORNAMENTALS

At about this time 2 years ago I sprinkled a couple of packets of wild flower seeds over my front garden (when I moved in it was gravel on top of "weed proof" membrane on top of heavy clay) - then it didn't rain for 2 months, so nothing germinated. However, after it started raining again, things started to germinate. Now in summer the gravel is a mass of flowers and bees. The annuals seed themselves, so they come up year after year without having to do anything – my kind of gardening! I didn't have the foresight to photograph the garden in full flower, but I've just taken a photo of our native heartsease (wild pansy) growing in one of the containers – its been flowering all winter. I also have wild violets growing in my lawn ("lawn" is a very loose term – I let all the patches of clover flower last year and the bees really appreciated it). They are sweet violets and have a lovely, ethereal scent – unlike the much commoner, scentless dog violet.



COOK-YOUR-OWN

In addition to the ability to talk about all things relating to "growing your own" ad infinitum, many of our members are also great cooks, as you will know if you have attended any of our Harvest Suppers or AGMs. So if any of you, members or not, have a favourite tried and tested recipe, using either seasonal produce or store cupboard ingredients, let us know (doesn't have to be vegetarian) and we will put them on the Resources page on our website for you all to use <https://rps.gn.apc.org/organic/resources.htm> (*disclaimer: we won't have personally tested all the recipes, so treat them as you would any other recipe you find online*). We've started things off with the leaflet from HEOG member Susie's inspirational bread making demo a few years back and an quick and easy recipe for store cupboard dhal soup.

Take a walk on the wild side

I've just experimented by adding some sauteed young nettle tops (use only tips, wash well, wilting destroys the sting) to my scrambled eggs – a pleasant savoury taste. Another member has suggested adding nettle tops to stews and casseroles. Obviously, don't pick them from anywhere they could be growing in or had something unpleasant land on them.

GENERAL INTEREST

Some reflections on the implications of where we are now and how we could use that to change the way we do things moving into the future from YouTuber Herbal Jedi, which one of our members has found of particular resonance. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKMwxTnfdTI&feature=youtu.be>

Music from HEOG member Keith's folk project Greengrass at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoDufyRdkwiozbwxQs-AvVQ>

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 next newsletter.

You can contact us at enews@heog.org.uk .

Gillian McGivern