



Heart of England
Organic Group

www.heog.org.uk

CORONA-YOUR-OWN

Helping you to get organic growing despite the disruption
e-Newsletter 4 17 April 2020

Welcome

Another warm, dry, sunny week and with lockdown now officially set to continue for at least another 3 weeks - time to sow, weed, water (where necessary) and compost, not to mention baking. I've reverted to making all my own bread, although finding bread flour and yeast on my fortnightly visit to the supermarket has met with zero success so far. I have made loads of cakes – for the family as well as myself – so I'm hoping not to put on too much weight

Grow your own phenomenon

Gardening journalist, Kim Stoddart examines the grow your own phenomenon that has emerged as a result of fears around food security since the pandemic lockdown.



https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/articles/the-self-sufficiency-surge/?utm_source=SFT+Newsletter&utm_campaign=4bdbf1df3c-Newsletter+214_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_bf20bccf24-4bdbf1df3c-105180033

Water, water everywhere

Well, it was in the winter, when we didn't need it – now we do, and not a drop in sight. I'm on a water meter, so I save as much as I can over the winter, but with no rain in weeks and hardly any forecast, it is rapidly running out. A few ideas on how to cut down on water use:

Greenhouses

Shading paint – it comes as a powder, mix it with water and paint it on (you rub it off with a dry cloth when you need to remove it)

Shade

Move anything portable which doesn't need full sun into the shade

Watering

- when you do need to water, it is better to give plants a good soak every few days, rather than giving less more frequently
- use "grey" water, such as bath water, when you run out of rainwater

Containers

- group together so individual containers don't heat up as much
- add water retaining gel crystals to compost for containers and hanging baskets
- line porous containers, eg. terracotta, with plastic (old compost sacks?) before filling with compost

Seed sowing

Now is the time to start thinking about sowing runner and french beans, courgettes and squash under cover, but bear in mind they will need some protection (we've had overnight frosts here this week) until late May/early June.

Watch Susie's brilliant master class in starting off seedlings – in this case, lettuce.

<https://youtu.be/4VTI5sf55s0>

Happy – salsola! 😊

I am so happy that my salsola seeds have germinated, as they have a notoriously low germination rate. The seed packet recommended soaking in water for 24 hours – I forgot about them for 72 hours. I grew salsola once a long time ago (it is apparently very fashionable now). I love it – salty and crunchy, like samphire.

Interest in home composting soars during UK lockdown

One consequence of the lockdown in the UK has been a surge of interest in home composting. The Royal Horticultural Society says views of the relevant pages on its website were up nearly 500% in the last nine days of March compared with the whole of 2019. This comes as more than a third of councils in England have stopped collecting garden waste (this includes Warwick District Council, at least for April). The RHS said there was a similar increase in page views on its advice of how to divide perennials. Garden Organic have a very useful composting guide on their website <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/compost>

Sad - compost! 😞

My remaining 4 sacks of SylvaGrow organic growing medium are now covering the grass seed in the garden of my son's new house. There was no lawn, so he dug up 2 flower beds and scattered grass seed, but the soil was too compacted for him to rake it in properly. He wanted compost to cover the seeds (couldn't go out and buy any) so he had mine. We tried for ages over Easter to find a supplier, with stock, who would deliver replacement sacks in small quantities – the only 2 we found were charging more than double what I paid for them, with delivery on top, so we left it.

Recycling garden waste during the lockdown (from Katie, one of our younger members)

With lockdown in place and many local councils unable to collect green bins, some gardeners may find themselves wondering what they are going to do with their garden waste. Much of the waste can of course be composted, while larger twigs and branches can be used to create a mulch, but this often needs a fairly powerful shredder. Here we suggest a few alternative uses for some of the branches left over from winter pruning, in our case from reshaping a large apple tree. (*photo 1 – branches upright*)

Sustainable seed markers

For those of us who prefer not to use white plastic markers, one alternative is to create rustic markers using twigs or branches. Once the markers are cut to length with secateurs or loppers the top quarter of the bark is removed from one side with a sharp knife, to create a flat surface to write on. The markers can also be re-used by whittling off a sliver of this wood to create a fresh surface to write on. (*photo 2 – seed markers with knife, photo 3 – seed marker in raised bed*)

Frames and supports for beans and peas

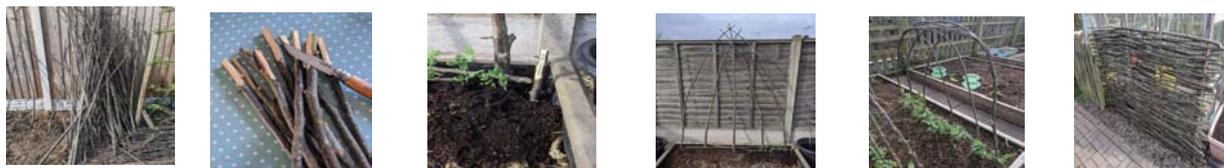
Longer branches can be used to make frames to support tall and climbing plants like beans and peas. Green branches are more flexible than garden canes and can be tied with string or wire into decorative arches. First the branches are selected for size allowing enough length for some of the branch to be pushed into the ground. It is important to anchor them so that they resist the wind, support the weight of the plant and also to counter the natural spring of the branch that tends to force them apart at the base. For a simple arch, start by pushing the thicker end into the ground (around 20cm depth should be fine) and then bend the thinner ends towards each other, twisting them together before using string to secure them. Wider frames can include additional vertical branches woven in at the top of the arch. For more inspiration on the design of these frames, online channels like Pinterest can be helpful. (*photo 4 – climbing pea arch, photo 5 – mangetout arch*)

Rustic woven fence panels

While branches are fresh and green they can be woven between posts to create low fences, wind breaks or porous barriers for raised beds. By alternating the weave on either side of the post, the opposing tension of the branches creates a surprisingly strong and rigid structure that locks together the posts into a single panel. (*photo 6 – woven fence*)

Kindling for winter fires

Smaller twigs and off-cuts can be cut to size and dried to create tied bundles of kindling for wood burning stoves. When properly dried they create a very effective fire starter. One of the great things about using branches in the garden is that eventually everything can be burnt as firewood at the end of its useful life. This avoids any residual waste going to landfill.



For larger images see <https://rps.gn.apc.org/organic/resources/RecyclingGardenWaste.pdf>

Let us know how else you use your garden waste

We hope that this has provided some inspiration but you may have ideas of your own. We would love to hear about them: enews@heog.org.uk

Food security

This is a hot topic at the moment - the link below is from Farming Today on 9 April – Patrick Holden is 7 minutes in. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000h1nc>

COOK-YOUR-OWN

Continue to send in your seasonal/store cupboard recipes and we will add them to the Resources page on our website for you all to use <https://rps.gn.apc.org/organic/resources.htm>.

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 .

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