

CORONA-YOUR-OWN

Helping you to get organic growing despite the disruption
e-Newsletter 5 1 May 2020

Welcome

The weather has gone into reverse since last week, so the piece below, contributed by Susie, is particularly relevant this week.

Covering tender crops in unsettled weather conditions

The end of April and suddenly the weather conditions have spun round from prolonged hot, dry and sunny to cold, wet and windy and there are three Ambassador courgette plants in perfect condition and ready to be planted out into the garden. Here are some ideas for giving them some extra protection needed to avoid interfering with their growth and to provide the kitchen with delicious early courgettes.

- 1) Ambassador courgette with tiny courgettes already showing
 - 2) A re-purposed plastic tub with bottom removed providing a cosy microclimate and giving some protection from slugs
 - 3) Edges from a sheep fleece unsuitable for spinning but make use of any suitable re-purposed fabrics or materials to provide extra protection from wind and cold and to retain moisture when the weather turns dry. Old woollen sweaters and hessian sacks are also great for this but avoid synthetic fibre
 - 4) Top off with a final layer of crop cover. Here, an offcut of 20 year old Environmesh is good enough for the job. If night time frost is forecast, old newspapers or cardboard also offer added protection
- Siting the plantings in as sheltered situation as possible also adds to the chances of a delicious early crop!



Growing squash on a former lawn

April 2018: Lawn covered with damp proof membrane (soil is compacted, very heavy clay).

June 2018: Crosses cut in membrane, triangles folded back, hole dug out and spade full of manure put in bottom, then Candy Roaster squash planted on top (heritage seed from seed swap at Potato Day).

July 2018: Squash plants cover membrane. Membrane warms soil, suppresses weeds, reduces evaporation.

September 2018: One of the mature squash – there was no indication on seed packet of size – this one is about 70 cm long! (if you are new to growing squash, try either an acorn type or a pumpkin like Jack Be Little – smaller and easier to manage - I resorted to taking the squash below to a HEOG meeting and not letting people leave without a chunk).



Final word on squash – I grew Tromba d'Albenga (from Seeds of Italy) last year for the first time, and will again this year. They are dual purpose – use them young as courgettes, or leave/forget until they mature (skin becomes hard and yellowish) and they are squash with a reasonably long storage time.

Perennial/unusual veg

These are veg I'll be trying for the first time this year – I'll let you know how they do and if they live up to their descriptions! If any of you out there have grown any of these, it would be good to hear your experiences (contact: enews@heog.org.uk). All the seed came from Chiltern Seeds.

Good King Henry/mercury: perennial, alternative to spinach

Texsel greens/garlic kale: salad leaves

collards: an annual, like a leafy, less fibrous cabbage

minutina/buckshorn: like a sweet, nutty mixture of parsley, spinach and kale, with a crunchy texture

stridolo/sculpit: herb with a flavour like a mix of chicory, tarragon and rocket

Questions

Black spot *from Chris*

"I wonder whether anyone please has any ideas about how to deal with black spot?"

We've a very well-established quince tree in our front garden. Every year it gets off to a great start and at the moment looks very healthy and is full of potential blossom. Eventually over the summer it succumbs to black spot and ends up looking very miserable indeed. I try to clear away the dead leaves and over the years have tried various proprietary sprays (not now, I hasten to add) but they didn't work anyway! Has anyone any thoughts please? I'd be very grateful and so would my tree!"

Salsola *from Lily*

Q. "I was interested in the mention of Salsola in 'Corona your own' #4. Please can you give an overview of this vegetable; how to source seeds or root stock and its cultivation? And, of course, how to use it in the kitchen."

A. Salsola has quite a few names, including agretti - I bought mine from Chiltern Seeds under that name. It is an annual grown from seed. It has to be fresh seed, so no point in ordering any more than you're going to sow this year. It can be eaten raw, or blanched and stir fried. I think it tastes like samphire, but below are two links with more info – this from Riverford Organics (not a fan)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZAd9VFxakk> and this from Learn-how-to-garden (he loves it!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueu6uIltzRA>

WATCH

Last week's Gardeners' World (24 April) is a good one for new gardeners – herbs, lettuce, carrots, beetroot – as well as a visit to an amazing tiny London garden. (*Many perennial herbs can be grown from seed – slower but much cheaper. I have a large orange thyme bush, creeping thyme, hyssop and lavender, all grown from seed.*)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000hjpt/gardeners-world-2020-episode-6>

Carrie's spring equinox video, including her thoughts on managing the chickens over the course of a year and demo of potting up tomato seedlings. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMX565wLJE8>

LISTEN

The Food Programme, Covid-19: The Food Waste Dimension <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000hmnd>

COOK-YOUR-OWN

Quick and easy soda bread: This is a useful bread to make as it doesn't need bread flour or yeast (still totally failing to find any flour or yeast in my more than weekly but less than fortnightly supermarket shop). <https://rps.gn.apc.org/organic/resources.htm>.

For organic omnivores

Of interest to anyone looking for highest welfare certified organic meat, old friends of HEOG, Rosamund and Richard Young, can now supply their 100% grass-fed, free range frozen beef, lamb, hoggett and mutton by overnight courier direct from their farm at Snowhill, near Broadway. One speciality is home-cured mutton ham and bacon but you may need to place an advance order for these. Meat is sent in 'Woolcool' boxes using sheeps wool insulation, for which there is a refundable deposit. An order form and instructions can be downloaded from <http://kitesnest.sdnnet.co.uk/>

The farm is situated in an especially delightful part of the Cotswolds and we intend to organise a Group picnic at the farm for when travel restrictions permit this. For more background on the farm, see <https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/key-issues/farm-stories/kites-nest-farm/>

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