

CSGGA Newsletter

August 2022



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Inside this Issue

- August Meeting Report
- Monthly Cup Winner
- Next Month's Talk – Plants for Bees
- M's Monthly Action Diary
- Green Gardening Tip of the Month
- Community Orchard Project Visit to the National Memorial Arboretum and Hill Close Gardens

Growing Food Not Gluts

Hazel Roberts

This month, we had a welcome respite from the heatwave in an air-conditioned hall. A definite incentive to turn up and the talk proved very interesting and useful.

Dr Hazel Roberts came to explain how to grow food not gluts. Something I expect we've all had experience of when it comes to planting.

Prior to 1996, Hazel knew nothing about growing fruit and vegetables but she moved into a house with a garden with her partner and started off growing veg. Then they moved again and acquired an allotment, which expanded to two

allotments. She also became involved with her children's school, running a gardening club for them. She became so successful that by 2007 she was selling to the public, then to shops and cafes and offering a preserves-making course. Inevitably, along the way, she produced gluts and she offered us an insight into ways of avoiding them in the first place, but if inundated with fruit and veg, how to use it up.

She took us through the pros and cons of different places to grow food. Allotments have rules, can be hard to get and you have to pay for them. Gardens are not always ideal but you can put fruit and veg in to create an attractive space using the potager model. The 'square foot plot' method, which breaks a 3x3ft space into 9 1ft square areas into which you can grow something different, can be applied to raised beds and is ideal for children. If you haven't got a garden, grow in containers such as hanging baskets, patio planters or growbags. This can work well for tomatoes, herbs or small fruit bushes.

Alternatively, again for those pushed for outdoor space, you can grow salads and herbs indoor as houseplants. Hazel recounted her experience of growing peanuts from unroasted (obvious but important!) monkey nuts, broken open and planted. Don't expect great things, however, as Hazel was amused to tell us that the 13 nuts she planted yielded 6 back! She has also experimented growing a pineapple but that can take 3 or 4 years. Lemongrass is very easy to grow from a supermarket purchase of the herb. Put it in water, wait for roots to grow and then put in a pot. Hazel also grew turmeric and ginger from the pieces of root she bought to cook with. The plants grow then die back and you can harvest the root but the result may be less than you might hope for – she produced 8g of powdered turmeric!



Of course, you can always just forage. Who doesn't like free food with very little effort?

So, how to avoid a glut...

It's very easy to produce a glut but with a bit of planning it can be avoided. Create a plan around Christmas time and visualise and quantify the space you have, working out the number of plants that will fit. Hazel uses the website <https://www.growveg.co.uk/> which enables her to plan her planting to scale in the space she has available each year and manage crop rotation.

Think before you buy. Review your existing seed store and check if they are in date. Avoid impulse buying and stick to your plan. Try different and unusual varieties of the same type and look to have something to eat throughout the year. It's easy to produce a glut in summer and autumn but home grown food in the spring and winter is very welcome.

Be inventive when thinking of ways to use the food you have grown:

- Beetroot can be used in rostis, rolls, winter slaw, veggie sausage rolls, cake, bortsch, burgers, bhajis and chutney.
- Pumpkins can be added to cakes, muffins, pureed in marmalade, roulade, chutney, tea bread, pancakes and casseroles.
- Plums can be used in crumbles, cakes, pastries, jam, chutneys, sweet chilli sauce and flapjacks.
- If you've got a glut of pears, these can be more tricky as they don't show signs of overripening until it's too late. You need to process them quickly. Try pear and chocolate cake, Eccles cakes, treacle tart and cheesecake and, yes, chutney again! They can offer a vegan alternative to honey.
- Apples – earlier ones don't store as well as later ones. Make into apple sauce and jam and also try adding them to muffins or making charlotte. They can liven up a stew and are an important element of the ubiquitous chutney. Add them to low pectin fruits to help the jam set.
- Courgettes – who hasn't grown a couple of plants only to find they are inundated with these green monsters that grow at a rate faster than we can harvest them?? Don't grow too many plants. Two are probably enough. Ways to use courgette include stuffed, in a veggie sausage roll with onion and walnut, in cakes, bread, soup, stir fries, and chutney, particularly when they have turned into a marrow.

Storing correctly can help you keep your produce for longer. Some go off quickly so you need to use them up quickly, eg, soft fruits, pears and lettuce. Others can stay in the ground such as beetroot, leeks, parsnips, and swede. Some crops can be stored for longer periods, such as apples and pumpkins. If you've got



cucumbers and courgettes, don't put them in the fridge but find that Laithwaites box you were going to recycle and pop them in the sections of the box at room temperature. They'll be ok for up to 3 months. Any green tomatoes can be strung up and left to turn red if they haven't got blight. Apples should be stored in a box somewhere cool as long as they were harvested in autumn. Potatoes, onions and garlic should be left to dry out naturally. You can get dehydration machines which are good for herbs.

If you're planning to freeze your crop, you will face the eternal question of "blanche or not to blanche?". As Hazel said, blanching is a faff. One way of avoiding this is to cook and then freeze, eg, ice cream, pies and crumbles, etc.

Jam making is of course a great way to use up damaged and/or excess fruit and pickling is quicker than making jam. Fermenting is very popular now as it promotes good gut health – try sauerkraut, kimchi, fefir, yoghurt and kvass. You can find out more, if you're not an expert already, by going on a course or reading books on the subject.

Soups are nutritious and economical and can easily be made into single portions. Or you could see if your crop could be used in a cordial, added to mincemeat, sauces, or mustard. And who doesn't like fruit in alcohol?

Hazel's final advice was that, if you have to give your glut away, make sure you give it to people who want it! Broaden your reach with OLIO, Freegle and Freecycle, all food sharing sites. And of course, as Briony mentioned, we have our own Community Fridge that will take donations of food.

I can't resist saying that Hazel's talk provided us with food for thought (apologies for such an obvious pun). We certainly learned from her mistakes and her successes which were freely shared with us.

If you want to find out more, you can find Hazel at

<https://www.jammk.co.uk/>

<http://jammycowmk.blogspot.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/JamMooKow>

Eleanor O'Connor

Monthly Cup Winner



Caroline Jackson won the monthly cup with her Hybrid Sarracenia cv Eva. It might look tricky to grow but it is Winter hardy and can be out in a peat bog garden all year round. It is a RHS AGM. This very pale hybrid produces beautiful almost pure white lids with sparse dark red and fine green veining on the outside of the pitcher, the inside of the mouth and front of the pitcher flushes pink to burgundy in good light throughout the growing season, this easy to grow clump forming hybrid would do well on a sunny windowsill unheated or greenhouse or sunny conservatory. Needs to stand in rain water.

We haven't had many entries for the monthly cup recently, so it was great that Caroline shared her Sarracenia. If you have anything you are particularly proud of please remember to bring it to the meeting, cut flowers, pot plants, vegetables, all are eligible. Don't forget also, that we will be holding an Autumn Show at the AGM in October this year, following its success last year. More details to follow.

Next Month's Talk – 8th September

Darren Lerigo - Plants for Bees

Helping the honeybee is about how to be a bee friendly gardener - knowing the most valuable plants for providing nectar, what the bee needs to encourage foraging and how to make sure you have something in flower all through the year. And of course, we will look at how to make a lawn a better place for the honey makers.

M's Action Diary for August

- To keep lavender plants compact and neat give them a late summer prune. Cut off all the flowers and the first 2-3 cm of leaves below them.
- Keep wisteria in check after flowering by shortening long side shoots to with 5 or 6 buds of the main stem.
- Cut back alchemilla mollis and hardy geraniums to ground level for fresh foliage and perhaps a second flush of flowers.
- Take semi-ripe cutting of shrubs such as ceanothus, choisya and viburnum.
- Pot up prepared hyacinth bulbs for flowering at Christmas. Place pot in a cool dark place until about 2 cm of growth appears.
- In the next few weeks, purchase hardy perennials, roses and deciduous trees and shrubs, as they are best planted during the Autumn whilst the soil is warm (but delay planting until we have some lovely rain!). Conifers, evergreen and grey leaved or slightly tender plants are best left until Spring.
- Trim helianthemums (rock roses) to remove spent flowers – do not cut into old wood.
- Keep birdbaths clean and topped up with water.



Green Gardening Tip – Biological Controls

Use biological controls to deal with greenhouse pests. Order the controls as soon as you notice the pests; don't wait for an infestation to build up. Use the predatory mite *Phytoseiulus* for red spider mite, the tiny wasp *Aphidius* for Aphids, the predatory mite *Hypoaspis* for control of sciarid fly, the parasitic wasp *Encarsia* for white fly and *Cryptolaemus* beetles for mealybugs. While you wait for them to arrive, rub off any pests you see. <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/your-organic-garden-august>



I recently noticed an infestation of ants on my two young, pot grown citrus trees, one orange and one lemon and the leaves were turning yellow. The ants were apparently nurturing scale insects, who suck the sap and then excrete honeydew, which the ants enjoy. I spent ages removing the scale insects with a damp cloth and then sprayed with a mix of vegetable oil and detergent. It seems to have done the trick, but I would have preferred a ladybird or parasitoid wasp to have had a tasty meal and rid me of the problem!

Proposed Community Orchard Project

Having received a supportive ecological survey on the meadow adjacent to Milton's Cottage, we are now in serious discussions with the Trustees and will be submitting a plan to them this month. If approved by the Trustees, the current thinking is that we will use the funding already pledged to order and plant a small number of apple and pear trees this autumn. This will enable us to mark the Queen's platinum jubilee but give us time to establish a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO), raise funds and eliminate any perceived risks before completing the planting and opening to the community. If you would like more detail or are willing to help in any way, please let Briony or Sam know.

Visit to the National Memorial Arboretum and Hill Close Gardens



At the end of July, we had a thoroughly enjoyable trip, brilliantly organised by Eleanor O'Connor. If you were unable to join us, both the Arboretum and Victorian gardens are certainly worth a visit.

What a gem the Hill Close gardens were. Even in this dry spell there was plenty to see. These were "real" gardens, lots of ideas to take home (and plants to

buy!!) **Caroline Jackson**



Plans are afoot for a Christmas outing. Watch this space!

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New Committee members are always welcome. We are a friendly bunch! Please contact a committee member to find out more if you're interested in joining us.