

GROWING TOGETHER

The Self-Sufficiency Group

August 2023

Newsletter



GROWING TOGETHER Self-Sufficiency group exists to enable and encourage its members to practice self-sufficiency and self-reliance, and maintain a "sustainable life style" in a fast changing worldwide environment

View this newsletter at:-

www.ehss.org.uk

Indoor meetings are held at 19.30 on the
2nd Wednesday of the month in the:-

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Please note: this is for members and their families only... not the general public, who we do invite to indoor talks.

AUGUST 9TH We will be going to Imbrams Farm owned by Margaret and James, for our August outing. Jacob sheep are among the attractions.

Meet 7pm. £3 please on the night

I have been promised directions, which I will email to you when I get them. Sarah tells me that the satnav directions aren't as good as hers! But here is the address as I have it:

Imbrams Farm, Holdfast Lane, Haslemere
GU27 2EX

Call Dru on 07876 731661.

(Sarah's phone no is 07861 381022. But please only call her if all else fails)

Entry fees: Indoor meetings only.

After much useful debate at the AGM in February, it has been decided to increase the entrance fee at meetings to £2 for members and £4 for visitors to cover the cost rises from renting the hall and the speakers. However, it has also been decided to allow a member to bring a new to EHSS "first time guest" at the members fee of £2. We hope you are all happy with that as we feel it is a good compromise which may encourage our members to introduce possible new people to our group.

For new members: the hall is open to us from 7.30pm and the talks start at 8.00pm, with a duration of approximate 1 hour. Members pay £2 on the door and visitors pay £4. All are welcome!! Free Tea and Coffee are usually available from 9.00pm.

As I am still the lucky person who arranges the talks, here are some of the talks and visits we may expect.

September Cheese on the Way, plus Alec is arranging a group visit to Wisley!

October, ecologist Matt Phelps from the Knepp Rewilding project.

November Alan Williams from the RHS talking about the history of allotments

December Christmas Party...

From Tidda Dobbs:

I am planning to put in an order to Infinity Foods on Tuesday 8th August for delivery on the following Friday.

Details of their products can be found on their website. Orders to me please email tiddadobbs@BTinternet.com by 8th or telephone 07765545763

Here is something to look forward to!

Ash House Weavers

The Ash House tapestry weaving group is holding an exhibition of woven textiles on Sat 23rd /Sun 24th September at Stedham Village Hall from 10am - 4pm. Entrance Free.

For more info: hilary@totallytextiles

Our July visit resume.

And the weather was kind!

Our visit to the Community Garden in Petworth was enjoyed by quite a few of us, on a really nice warm evening...it only rained towards the end...

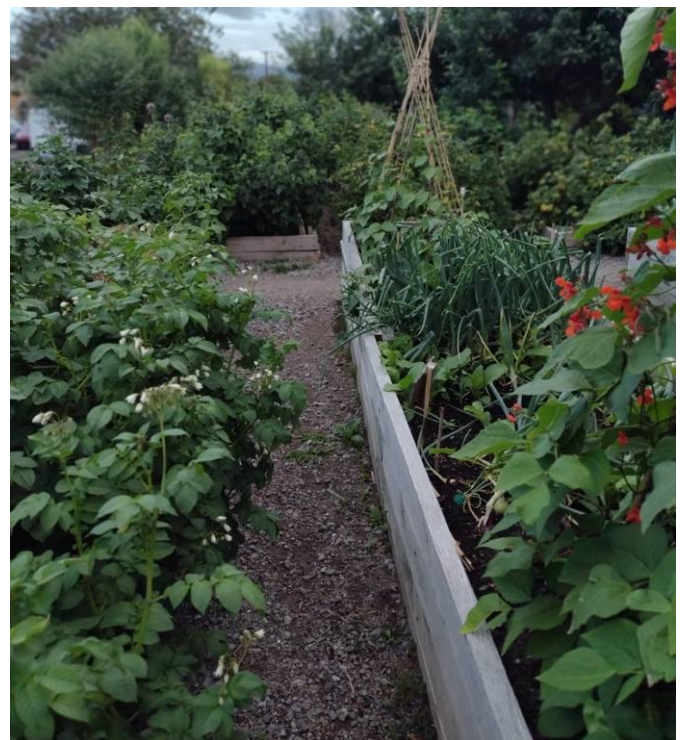
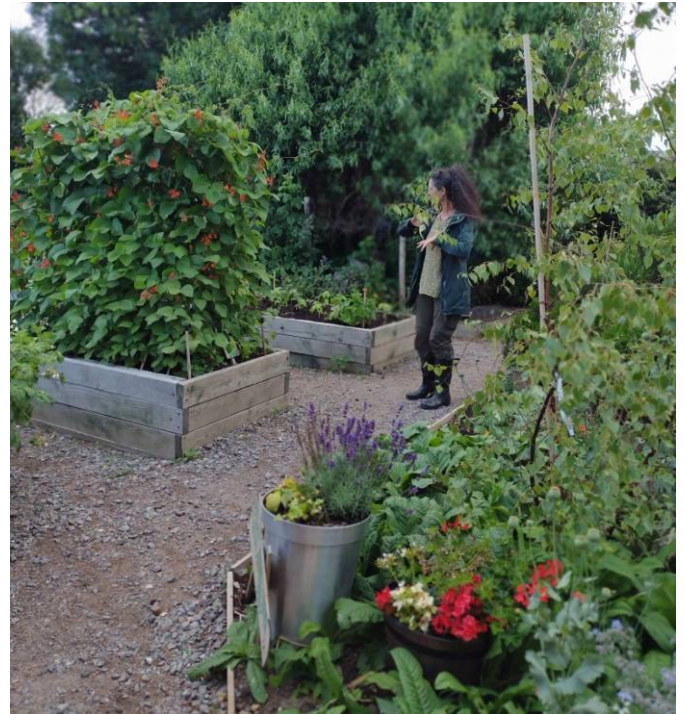
Kate Green welcomed us, apologising for some of the beds a little overgrown, as the garden is only open to volunteers on Tuesdays... it looked great!

So good to see how it all works there: from the composting toilet, the easy to negotiate paths, wheelchair friendly, the raised beds, to the cafe/kitchen. The first thing we all noticed was how wonderfully full and lush was the growth!

The furthest of their allotments is beyond 2 run by other allotment holders. One is run on the permaculture/sustainable no dig lines like the community garden and it looks very good. The other one is run on tradition lines, and the difference was so noticeable. By traditional digging and/or rotavating, many of the deep rooted perennial weeds, like the dreaded Marestalk, have spread across the whole allotment. Without raised beds the soil appeared to be very dried out and poor. Extraordinary to see them side by side.

No dig raised beds seem to me to be the perfect way to grown veg!

Kate Green was as usual a delight and showed us around and answered all our questions.



Beans!!

So much to see and enjoy.

The Men's Shed was locked... we couldn't see that!

Outside the cafe there is a lovely seating area, giving the whole place a sense of calm and welcome.



This polytunnel has been such a welcome addition to the garden and allows so many plants to get under way early and protected.

And finally: my brother in law Phil was very involved with this garden and although unable to physically do the work he was always ready with advice and knowledge. He had a strange sense of humour: hence "The Naughty Corner" came to exist there. He probably spent some time there himself! After his death they got a sign made up. Here I am, photo by Andy, on the seat beneath the sign!

To finish off a lovely evening, we were given tea and cake and convivial conversation... what more could we want...?



NO COMMENT!

JUST a brief update on my life:

The garden is flourishing! It loves the warm damp conditions, even though I am not so keen. The dahlia's are stunning, likewise the cosmos. Other things like ginger lily and cannas so slow off the mark they won't come to much this year. Same with several other plants I'm sorry to say.

As I now have a battery hedge trimmer on a long pole I decided I would take on the hedge in the car park (its supposed to be done by the business owners...) and then in a fit of boredom and the prospect of a challenge I offered to take on the garden of the pub just beside us as it is now under a new tenancy. It has not been touched for a good 2 years. I was so shocked and disappointed when I saw it and saw nice roses struggling and other plants covered in nettles and brambles that I offered to put it right. Still won't be much this year, but at least children and dogs can play in the garden without being hurt by brambles and nettles.. Planning to take cuttings of shrubs from my garden and split herbaceous plants to make a nice border for next summer. The sewage disposal system is in a large fenced off area at the end of the garden... except the fence has lost a couple of panels and the huge green "Works" was covered in bramble and nettle. Took me 10 hours and 12 one ton dumpy bags to sort that out.... oh I do love a project!



Took this in the drizzle this morning. My herbaceous border. In a few years time I hope there will be one in the pub garden like this!

~Dru P.S. my tomatoes have got blight!

The Compost Bin

SCORES of snakes!: last month I mentioned the large snakeskin I found in my compost bin. Since then I've found another outgrown skin that is slightly smaller (the male?)... and a huge mass of eggs! I managed to fit 140 plump ones in my propagator – the one I use for my seedlings – and all the others were carefully returned to the adjacent compost bin in about the same position as before. The eggs singled out for my priority nursing at 24°C went on a bed of moist compost, lightly covered, and as close to the original conditions as possible (*see photograph*). I found a wealth of information about them online – from keeping the eggs facing the same side up so they don't drown, to all the things that are illegal (they are not just a Protected Species but qualify for *Priority* Species under the post-2010 Biodiversity Framework). I read that the incubation time is 6-8 weeks, part of which may already expired, but then what? Anyone know a good herpetologist? Anyway, watch this space, as they say..



FREE FRUIT FOR ALL! Something told me that 2023 would be a record year for blackberries – I wrote that same feeling in my garden diary in May when I spotted the profusion of tiny flower buds forming on nearby wild bramble bushes, and now I can't remember seeing them more heavily laden with developing fruit. So, barring environmental disasters, you should be able to partake of this free bounty from just about now onwards. I'm a great believer in foraging, whether it's wild garlic, birch sap, mushrooms, sweet chestnuts... or blackberries; so, with fruit at a record high price in the shops, do make the most of this particularly nutritious gift. I suggest you stop by the end of September, though – they are said to be “touched by the devil” on 1st October!). We find those giant yogurt tubs with handles (e.g. Lidl) are ideal for picking them, and hold 1.25 lbs each; never use bags, which squash them, nor your best basket which can be spoilt by staining.

“Grandad, my bean's been deaded” said the unhappy five-year-old Wilbur, **“can you undead it?”** It was, I couldn't deny, *very* ‘deaded’. The cleaner, he complained, had put his pot back on a high shelf at home and it didn't get watered. How could I refuse such an innocent plea from the heart, and I promised to do my best before school returned from the long summer break. After he left for home, I filled a similar size pot with compost (“dirt” he called it) and found a replacement seed. I only hope this reincarnation, assuming it grows and is returned to school after the break, will bear some resemblance to its fellow survivors – if indeed there are any!

Eggstraordinary: I know I am not the only backyard poultry keeper with a broody problem

this year which earlier sultry weather seems to have triggered, but it's annoying when egg laying stops for a week or two – especially if, like me, you are down to only two hens! So when one was showing early signs of going broody she needed prompt discouragement. I don't like confining her in a traditional small, airy "broody cage", nor has the tip I read ("put a wrapped-up bag of frozen peas in the nest box") ever worked for me.

Puzzling over the problem while watering the adjacent raised vegetable bed, I accidentally pointed the hose in her direction; she took flight and momentarily forgot all about being broody. So I tried chasing her for a little longer with a gentle spray from the hosepipe (and inevitably the occasional slight wetting); it immediately cured her and she returned to her full appetite and normal life. Within a week or so she was back in full lay.

I had to pull up my Pak Choi and oriental spinach as both went straight to seed, despite regular watering; I may try again later in the season. In their place I sowed an extra row of the ever-trusty perpetual spinach beet (which reminds me, I must soon sow a few more for the greenhouse, to last throughout the winter). Yes, I do love my spinach but Erna isn't so keen because of all that tedious individual leaf-washing; I offered to put them in the washing machine in a cold rinse cycle, but my ingenious gesture was declined. No doubt she's thinking back to the time I put my classic car carburettor in the dishwasher; it may have come out sparkling clean but the smell of petrol lingered on our crockery!

Do you, like me, grow too many tomato plants but never like to throw any away? This year, after distributing some among friends, I planted my few left-overs in the vegetable garden – not just the usual Gardener's Delight which loves it outside, but some of the uncommon Continental varieties (including giant beefsteak types) which I have grown inside for the past couple of years. Well, they managed surprisingly well outside, and are ready for ripening (and even if some don't, we need the green ones for making chutney). With climate change happening faster than predicted, I wonder if we will come to regard greenhouses as things for the winter eventually?

I'm among those sad people who would find it hard to manage without an "Alexa" in the corner to answer every question, advise me of any local weather warnings, remind me that the cooking has finished or just have an occasional chat or joke. It seems obvious to me that she is coming under the growing influence of AI (what isn't these days?); I find it's even given her a sense of humour. Rather early one morning I asked her to "Set a timer for 1 hour and 55 minutes", to warn me when the new loaf would be baked. She took a little more time than usual to respond, so I admonished "Come on Alexa, have you just woken up?" The response was a loud snore. Many people doubt my word on this, but I swear it's true. Maybe she and I have established a certain *rapport* between us. Do you reckon I could chat her up?

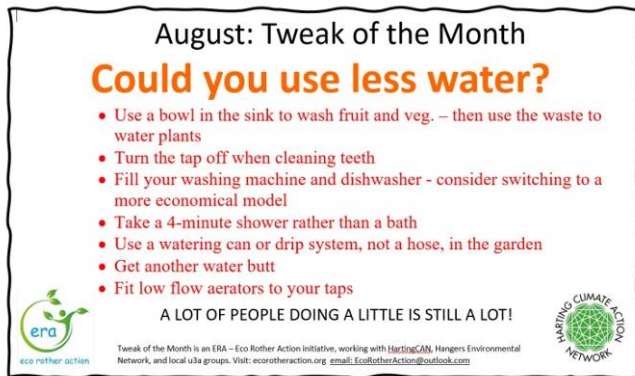
Word's the word: Writing something like this in Word is also becoming more remotely scrutinised. Under the "Editing" mode at the top of the screen it will do just what the word says automatically, but even in normal mode I've just realised the significance of those words it underlines in red. Of course it can be ignored and you can carry on if you're sure it's right; but you can either left-click on it to review the spelling or grammar only, or right-click for a wealth of ideas and suggestions for possibly more suitable replacements. How long will it be before Word knows me well enough that I can just ask it to "Write the Compost Bin for September".

AI Chat could of course, after studying a previous one to get the style.

Well, I suppose I ought to own up at last– this month's contribution was almost entirely produced by artificial intelligence. Am I kidding? That's for you to decide... maybe there's no substitute for real people. Long may they prevail.

Alec.

This is from Eco Rother Action!



I have included the Tweak of the month from ERA, and I am sure that we all do most if not all of these tips....

The next village along from me going west is South Harting. When I first moved to this area in 1980 it was a charming, old fashioned village full of very upmarket people (said at the time to have more titled people living there than anywhere else in England!!) but a bit stuffy... not very forwardlooking... wow, how that has changed!

Harting Climate Action Network is on the ball and active. They have just held their first Future Energy Landscape workshop, about what kind of renewable energy would be right for their village. The conservation project this year is “Operation Nest Box” where households have made suitable accommodation for swallows, house martins and swifts...

They have a repair cafe which opens once a month and is well attended. If you can carry it, they will try to repair it.

Harting also has a thriving horticultural society and I note there is an initiative at the primary school to teach children about the natural world, and about our changing climate and what it will mean for future generations. They had an assembly with a teacher giving a talk on the science behind climate change, its implications and possible solutions. That school has also had its first ever “toy swap” showing children they can have something new without buying new.

On that subject, I have been very aware this summer holidays that many more children and going into charity shops with their mums dads and

grandparents to look for toys and games, as well as clothes. Great news!

~Dru

NEW TALK ORGANISER NEEDED

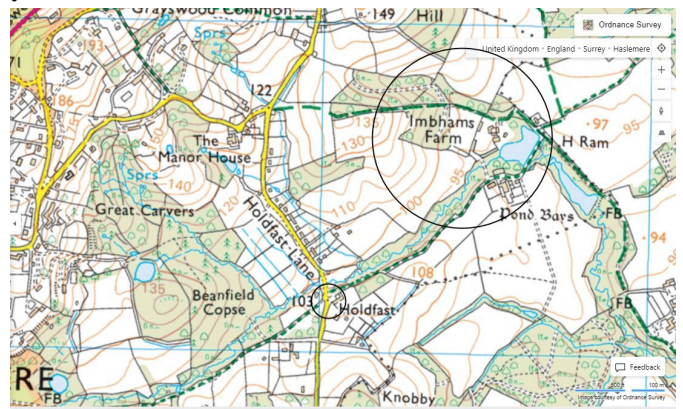
This really will be the last year I am going to do this job. I will be retiring from this role from November 2023 onwards.

Please someone, take it on. I feel dreadful about leaving you in the lurch, which is why I have gone on doing it so long... BUT the time has come for someone new.

From personal experience: It really has to be one person in charge: this really isn't a job to be run by a committee!!!

By all means ring for a friendly chat if you are possibly willing to take on this group role.

No talks... no group maybe... ~ Dru



Map shows Farm complex set back from Holdfast Ln, and junction drive with Holdfast Lane. This is at What3Words ///arranger.struts.fiery. GoogleMaps location not accurate

Picture shows entrance in 2022 (may now have its sign back).
~Andy