

# GROWING TOGETHER

The Self-Sufficiency Group

December 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](http://www.ehss.org.uk)

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

Triangle Centre, Liss. GU33 7DX

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## WISHING YOU ALL A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS.

January is membership month. We do hope you will renew. There will be a newsletter but no meeting.

Please try and come to the AGM in Feb: there will be important announcements about the group meetings for the year ahead.

### Decembers meeting is the Christmas Party. Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup>. 7.30

There will be a raffle and a quiz, so bring your brains and a raffle prize!

Please bring some food to share (finger food, we have no cutlery) and something to drink.

### Resume of Novembers' talk

Alan Williams from the RHS talked about growing veg and eating them! He was going to talk about the history of allotments but unfortunately due to technical difficulties his end he was unable to do so. We heard how he had been the proud possessor of an allotment for many years, but having moved back to Rowlands Castle where he grew up, he now has a bigger garden and can grow at home....well, when he has finished the interior work his wife said came first....funny that!

And he sent me lots of recipes, so here are two, more to follow in Jan 24. Dru

### Pumpkin Soup

If you're tempted to get a pumpkin to make into a lantern, try making this soup as well to get even better value for your purchase. It's simple and easy, and there are only a few other ingredients.

Large saucepan

Blender / food processor

Sharp medium sized knife

Spoon

Slotted spoon / colander

### **You'll need:**

25g / 1oz butter

1 teaspoon olive oil

1 large onion (chopped)

2 shallots (chopped)

2 medium potatoes (peeled and cubed)

1kg / 2lb pumpkin

2 litre / 3 pints Chicken or Vegetable Stock

½ teaspoon ground cumin (more to taste if desired)

Pinch ground nutmeg

Salt and Pepper to taste

Fresh Parsley / Chives (for garnish)

If you're planning to use the pumpkin for a lantern, remove the "lid" as you would normally, scoop out the seeds, and then carefully scoop out the pumpkin in chunks, using a knife or strong spoon. Set aside the pumpkin for carving.

#### **To make the soup:**

Melt the butter and olive oil in a large saucepan (the olive oil helps to stop the butter from burning).

Add the onion and shallots and cook until just softened (about 5mins).

Add the pumpkin, potatoes, stock, cumin and nutmeg, salt and pepper, bring to a slow boil and then reduce the heat to low and simmer, covered for about an hour or until the vegetables are thoroughly cooked.

Using the slotted spoon / colander, transfer the cooked vegetables to the blender and blitz until smooth, adding a little of the cooked liquid if needed. Return the puree to the pan and stir until well mixed. Adjust seasoning to taste, and serve.

Garnish with fresh herbs if desired.

Tastes great with crusty bread or just on its own.

#### Courgette and Cheddar Muffins

##### **You'll need:**

Muffin tray (this recipe will make about 10 to 12 muffins, so depending on your tray, adjust the measurements accordingly)

450g self-raising flour

2tsp baking powder

200g courgettes (grated)

Salt and pepper to season

150g cheddar cheese

350ml full-fat milk

2 eggs (beaten)

150ml virgin olive oil (plus a little extra to grease the muffin tray)

2 tbsp rosemary (chopped finely)

Preheated oven to 180°C/350F/Gas 4

Grease to muffin tray with the spare oil and set to one side.

Mix the flour, baking powder, courgette salt & pepper, and about two-thirds of the cheese together in a large mixing bowl. Combine well.

In a separate bowl whisk together the milk, eggs and olive oil. Make sure that the liquid is also well combined. Add the rosemary and mix again.

Add the liquid to the flour mix, and stir until well combined. You should end up with a fairly stiff mixture, but one that you will be able to spoon / pour into the muffin tray.

Pour into the muffin tray and bake for about 10 minutes, then remove from the oven and sprinkle the remaining cheese on top of the muffins. Return to the oven and bake for a further 10 to 15 minutes until the muffins have risen and are a golden colour.

#### Gooseberry and Red Onion Chutney

##### **You'll need:**

Sterilized jam jars with lids

700g Gooseberries (topped and tailed)

1 tbsp finely chopped fresh root ginger

2 tsp mustard seeds

250g pitted soft dates or prunes (chopped)

1 large red onion (chopped)

½ tsp salt

350 g light brown muscovado sugar

350 ml cider vinegar

Combine all of the ingredients in a large heavy saucepan. Bring the mixture to a boil over a medium heat, then simmer uncovered, stirring frequently for approx. 30 to 40 minutes or until very thick and pulpy

Remove from the heat, leave to cool for 10 minutes, then ladle into hot

sterilised jars and seal. Store in a cool dark place for one month before eating.

Unopened jars keep for around 12 months

### **The Compost Bin**

**Crisis in Spain:** well, no garden news this month as we spent most of November working in our old farmhouse in the Spanish mountains. For the benefit of newer members I'd better explain.



We have this old farmhouse high up in the Malaga mountains, with only the occasional farmer and

passing herd of goats for company. It is about 300 years old and was bought as a ruin over 20 years ago; a local builder put up a new roof and rebuilt a couple of metre-thick walls and most of the rest has been down to Erna and myself.

Sadly, due to Brexit followed by some bother over a fractured pelvis, the last time we've been there was four years ago. We had expected to return within a few months as usual; so we just locked the door and left everything just as it was. As you would expect, four years of neglect, in temperatures up to 40-plus, things happen.

As I mentioned last month, we knew that the reinforced pipe which carries mains water to our 2000-litre outside tank had been chewed to pieces by some thirsty animal (wild boar, we thought), and a friendly builder had made an emergency repair; he commented that the contents were like green pea soup, so he drained most of this off.

As I'm still rather unsteady, the Special Assistance help at the airports was really appreciated. When we arrived in a desperately parched Spain, expecting to find our land overgrown with weeds, there were none. We found that the major reservoir we drove past was virtually empty after zero rainfall all year, and mains water was in short supply – and none for us when we arrived. After eight days the mains had water – but only for one day. Over the 22 days we were there, we only had water on 3 days. Climate change has a lot to answer for, as in other Mediterranean countries.

However, that was the least of our problems. Although the main lock into the house worked – reluctantly – all the others had seized solid, including the room containing the vital water pump. Easily remedied, just squirt WD40 in the lock and work it around. However, one of those jammed locks was in the door to my workshop – where the WD40 and all my tools were kept. Time to put our thinking caps on... and found some stale olive oil in the larder. Well, oil is oil. Tried it and eventually it worked.

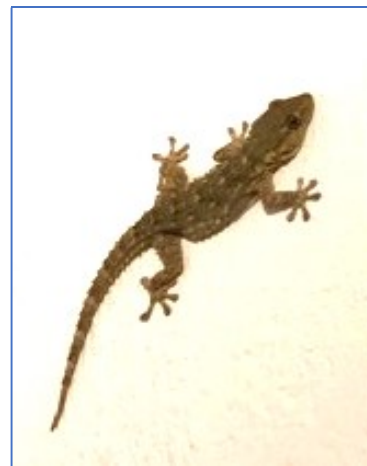
Contrary to my worries, the water pump worked first time, as did the washing machine, the radio/amplifier, the electricity circuit, and our toilets (not that we had much water to spare for them). The reinforced steel doors needed painting to prevent rust, and the blistering paint on the windows had to be rubbed down and repainted. The water boiler took a lot of coaxing to get it going, as

did the microwave oven (its turntable was reluctant to turn but we used it anyway and eventually it took the hint and behaved itself). The main oven keeps tripping the electricity and the element is suspect, so we managed with just the gas rings. The water shortage was a problem but we coped – putting on a succession of washes whenever the mains ran, but re-using much of the water for a second time when it didn't ... washing-up water into toilet cisterns for example:



One nice surprise awaited us when we arrived – four years ago before leaving, I dug four holes and planted an olive nut in each. I arrived to find four new olive trees – one already taller than myself!

Also on the good side, no rodents had invaded us in



our absence, and there were no flies, spiders or other insects – thanks to our lovely resident geckoes (see photo), who can even walk on the ceiling.



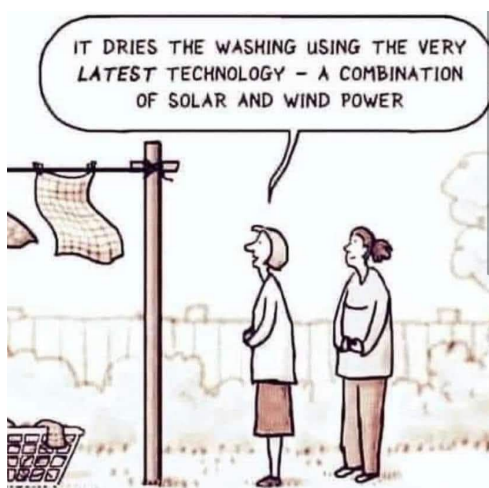
We soon discovered who was chewing up our water pipe – not wild boar but these domesticated pigs (see photo); these belonged to the local goat farmer and he just let them out to free-range the parched countryside and grab whatever they could (including our water.) We decided we would have to live with the problem, so we bought a bag of pre-mix and covered all outside pipework in a mound of pig-proof solid concrete.

The weather was unbelievably good throughout. Obviously not a drop of rain. The temperature never exceeded 24 degrees and was often under 20, but any cooler days were more than offset by the strength of the Mediterranean sun, quite a bit higher in the sky – and the increased day length. One daily treat was to watch the November sun sink below the horizon at around 6pm, toasting the event with a glass of local wine and some salted cashew nuts.

A few jobs still needing doing by the end of our visit, but they can wait until next year!

*Alec*

I have really enjoyed this “compost bin” and I am delighted that you are both so self-reliant and self-sufficient!! Dru



### Feathered News.

Well what can I say? Much to everyone’s surprise there has so far been no Avian Influenza “FlockDown” this autumn. This might be explained by DEFRA coming under a lot of criticism last year regarding the welfare of domestic poultry being kept in confinement for so many months.

Avian Influenza has been bad these last couple of years, it certainly hasn’t gone away. I still get regular texts telling me of the latest outbreaks, thankfully none have been local. There is a good reason to believe AI has become endemic in the British countryside. So taking sensible bio security precautions at all times makes sense.

Thankfully DEFRA has finally lifted the ban on poultry shows in England. Restrictions on shows in Wales are still in place. However there are now so many hoops to jump and so much more expense to get permissions for running a show, they will few and far between for a good while. Indeed many exhibitors are too nervous to get back out on the showing scene at all.

The ban on large scale poultry sales and auctions is still in place and while that restriction exists, hobby breeders, having only limited outlets for selling spare stock will still be restricting the numbers of fowl they breed.

I have heard so many people say they are giving up showing or even keeping pure breeds altogether. It is very sad to think a thriving hobby that has been enjoyed by thousands since the 19th century is now in danger of disappearing.

Frances (Hon Sec)

**My next order from Infinity Foods will be on 5th December for delivery on the 8th. See their catalogue [www.infinityfoodswholesale.coop](http://www.infinityfoodswholesale.coop). Dont forget I add 10% to the price, the profit going to the club.**

**Thanks, Tidda [tiddadobbs@btinternet.com]**