

GROWING TOGETHER

The Self-Sufficiency Group

February 2024

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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The February meeting, the AGM, is on Wednesday the 14th, at 7.45 promptly. Please try and come to the AGM: there will be important announcements about the group meetings for the year ahead. AND ITS MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME.

Arm yourselves with cash!!!!

Following the AGM, lets have a "BRING AND BUY". Amongst other things, I will be bringing two pairs of walking/gardening boots size 8, (new, worn once) £25, £15, some indoor boots size 7 £5 and some books.....plus?

I know I have one large pottery pot, not really a flower pot, due to shape, (tall and urn shaped). Unglazed. Maybe some garden tools...got far too many.

THE COMPOST BIN

As a winter treat for our four hens, during autumn and early winter I like to fill a seed tray with once-used compost mixed with garden soil every few weeks, sprinkle it with grass seeds,



germinate them in two or three days in a warm room indoors, then it goes out to a shelf in the greenhouse for a month or so where it grows to full size. The chickens really enjoy the fresh grass at a time when there's so little left in their outside run.

Something else we sowed before the winter: we filled this old, discarded window box with spent compost and a sprinkling of fertiliser, sowed spinach beet and it's now growing in the greenhouse, ready to produce an early crop a month

or two before the outside plants are ready.



Not-so-bargain spuds: did you see the tempting advertisement in a recent weekly TV programme magazine for everything you need to grow a varied crop of potatoes on your patio? You just have to buy 18 seed potatoes (6 each of an early, middle and maincrop variety), 3 pots, compost and delivery for a total of £55.90. With potatoes selling in supermarkets for a year-round average of little over £1/kilo, it seems obvious to me that that you need to produce around 50 kilos from your three pots before you break even. I'm not at all sure I could reach that target myself, so I hate to think how the average beginner might succeed!

The sweet peas I grow each year are never as successful as I would like. I sow the seeds indoors in early spring but germination is erratic and those that do grow are usually rather feeble specimens. Worse still, when it comes to picking them, nearly all seem to be the same feeble pink colour, nothing like the vivid selection on the packet. This time I'm more confident. Shunning the previous supplier – Dobies – I bought a packet of bright mixed colours from Thompson & Morgan, sowing the seeds in October and achieving 100% germination. They've grown steadily into very sturdy plants which survive the winter frosts in an unheated greenhouse, and I have every confidence that this year they'll put on a decent show. If these are also a faded pink colour, I think I'll give up!

Talking of greenhouse temperatures, I have a min/max thermometer in mine, and I find that during an outdoor overnight frost the air inside the greenhouse is 1.5 degrees *colder* than outside. Like the great majority, the framework of mine is aluminium alloy; yet I never had that problem with a previous model of cedar wood. I'm used to it now, and have plenty of folded-up insulating fleece

ready for use in the spring, but it's a factor to bear in mind if I ever buy another.

I was saddened to see so many acres of rotting pumpkins in the large field beside the A272 just outside Rogate. Presumably the demand for these has been less than expected, despite having been heavily promoted at Halloween. Now only the crows seem interested and I'm curious to see how the problem will be tackled. The field doesn't seem to be fenced so cattle can't feast on them, but presumably if the rotting fruit are ploughed in, the seeds will germinate. Anyone like to guess what will happen? I'll keep you posted!

More heat for free: our son gave us an amazing Christmas present this year – a small fan which is rested on top of a woodstove and rotates silently as soon as the fire warms up. In our case the stove is set well back into the wall as the chimney is built beyond the outside wall, so we were losing a lot of heat. The new fan seems to double the stove's efficiency, to the point where we sometimes need to let some heat escape into the next room. It costs nothing to run – apparently a bi-metal plate generates the electricity to power the fan motor. Our best present ever!

Finally, and most importantly, may I urge every member to attend our AGM. We try so hard to arrange an interesting and varied programme of walks and talks throughout the year, and this vital meeting is where you can tell us what *you* want us to lay on this year. The AGM is also an ideal way of meeting other members, and your chance to volunteer for the committee, or vote for others who are willing to continue helping the group.

Alec.

Dru's life.....

Thank heaven for a nice mild dry sunnyish weekend! I am a fair weather gardener, hate wind and rain, so this gift was very welcome. Indoors so much is like prison, and a small one at that! So yesterday we cut up old pallets for fire wood and filled empty sacks and stacked the full ones in my "kindling" store. I bought a little 4 inch blade battery chain saw as my hands are not so strong now and still got frozen shoulder, 10 months in, and it is great! Today it pruned all the buddleias in a matter of minutes... All small bits distributed in undergrowth for insects etc, larger bits stacked, same. Roses pruned, beds cleaned up so we can see

the snowdrops... late this year, oddly. 15 pots overwintering in the summerhouse have made it damp, so dried out and memo to self not to do that next year. Taken some plants out of pots and planted out, but not those.... a friend very kindly gave me some plants over the last two years... all tender, all needing frost free winter, like ginger lily, pineapple lily, I think it is. I think I must do a real rethink and maybe give them away. I really don't want plants that need too much extra care. Plus I have two lovely fuchsias, again tender... I unpotted the dahlias and dried them off and they are stored in dry newspaper in my shed, so I really hope they will be ok.

This garden always looks nice and has many insect friendly plants. If I had a different shape garden, not long and thin, I would plan it very differently; plants to look and smell nice including herbs, near the house and moving to less structured towards the boundaries. Would love nice fruit trees as well as soft fruit... an orchard with geese would be perfect!

Friend's dogs continue to come and go, bringing a bit of fun into an otherwise monotonous life of work, cook shop, sleep (not much), and start again.

A friend wants us to go on holiday to the Peak District with her this autumn. I should be jumping for joy, but not. I am not really a lover of holidays unless I get to do what I want to do... walk a dog, enjoy a beautiful place, not cook or do anything remotely domestic at all and not have to fit in with other people. Wonder if I can get out of it... What I really like is a chunk of time without formal work, during which I can put one of my schemes in place. The ones that start "Barry, I'm thinking of doing/painting/changing/making.... what do you think?" and watch him go pale.

Wednesday 31st Jan

I realise I haven't filled this page, and I don't think I've got anything from anyone else, so apologies. I seem to have entered a phase of very poor sleep, a whole 2 hours last night, a long dog walk and a morning gardening at my job and I am very tired ...

See you at the AGM

Dru

Chicken Run Notes.

Winter storms can wreck havoc for chicken keepers, even if not accompanied by snow. Falling branches can bring down fences allowing foxes in

and chickens out and piles of wet leaves can quickly cover the base lines of electric fences shorting them out.

Worse is when a tree decides to land on top of a chicken house. This is precisely what happened to us back in November with storm Ciarán.

All was fine when I checked in the morning after most of the storm had passed; but on going up to do the evening feed my mind went "Huh? That view looks rather different." Indeed it was, as a large goat willow had fallen over during the day. We didn't hear or see it fall but it certainly made a mess of my largest chicken run. It had landed on one house, and was blocking access to some of the other runs.

The gods were smiling on us though, as the house it landed on, and the runs it had smashed were all empty. The runs it was blocking access to were a different matter and Andy resorted to the silky saw whilst I grabbed "zippy" my trusty handheld mini chainsaw that thankfully had a fully charged battery.

It took a while to remove the biggest branches and clear enough space to be able to gain access to check all was well and feed those pens of bantams.

We still have about 60% of the tree left to clear but that can wait until spring. Being willow it would make poor firewood, but if cut up into lengths might make a log style wall. One down side is the bees will be lacking a major source of food early in the season as that tree would hum with their presence as soon as it came into flower.

On the bright side it could have been an awful lot worse. There was no damage done that can't be shrugged off as one of those things. Another good thing is that I now don't have to decide if its time to prune the willow back to a more reasonable height.

Thinking about it I also realise I will no longer have giant willow aphids dropping on my head or down my neck any more. , Now that is a real silver cloud, I hate those things...yuk.

Frances