

# GROWING TOGETHER

The Self-Sufficiency Group

March 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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OUR MARCH MEETING WILL BE ON WEDNESDAY THE 8<sup>TH</sup> at 7.30 AND WILL BE ABOUT THE WORK OF THE COUNTRYSIDE REGENERATION TRUST, by Nick Dobbs

## LAST CALL:

Your membership is due for renewal.

You may pay online thru BACS or Faster Payments: details on the membership form attached with this newsletter; go to our website

[www.ehss.org.uk](http://www.ehss.org.uk) or send a cheque to Ann Brockhurst, 73 Vann Road, Furnhurst GU27 3NP, or you can give cash to Ann or our treasurer Andy Tate at the March meeting;

**please remember you will need to have your membership form with your payment.**

(Dru/Andy may have a few printed out at the meeting). The fee is still £15 for your entire family!

## Entry fees:

After much useful debate at the AGM last month, 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.

**March** Nick Dobbs from the Countryside Regeneration Trust.

**April** Kate Green who runs the Petworth Community Garden,

**PLUS a Saturday:** "Lambing Experience" on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, the day after Good Friday. We hope this is a good time for you all to come and enjoy the Easter lambs, the herald of spring. The

warmer weather, new life and growth. Details will be in the April NL

**May** awaiting confirmation.

**June** A lovely rose garden.

**July** a visit to the Community Garden run by Kate Green, in Petworth

**August** Imbrams Farm

**September** tba

**October, or November** ecologist at the Knepp Rewilding project, Matt Phelps to give a tal.

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*Dru's News*

## **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 for a committee!!!**

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

~ *Dru*

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Interested in Bees?

The West Sussex Beekeepers Association will be holding their annual auction in Pulborough, in April. You can find details on their website.

From Beverly Law:

Could we have a stall at the MRC Community Day on Saturday 22nd April, 10-2pm. It is a perfect match for the group. I will be there with a stall so would be unable to help on a group one (unless we were next to each other!), but would definitely support it. The contact details for this are: **Maddie Hathaway** 01730 812451 [www.mrc-academy.org](http://www.mrc-academy.org)

The poster explaining it is <https://images.app.goo.gl/vHmnmamizJ1a8hXs7>

I also suggest we have a stall at The Floral Fringe Fair held this year at Loxwood Meadows. It is run by Jean Jackman. Details: [The Floral Fringe Fair on September 2nd and 3rd 2023 at Loxwood Meadows, Loxwood, West Sussex RH14 0AL: Floral Fringe Fair](#)

I will be there giving talks throughout the weekend but could help out at times on the group's stall.

This is from PECAN

*( who are putting our poster out to their members.)*

The successful conclusion of our bigger-than-ever fruit tree project, and some lovely events in Petersfield, we have had a busy couple of weeks! You can find out more about these, as well as several exciting upcoming events, below.

We would particularly like to highlight some very time-sensitive help for small businesses, in the form of a LoCASE grant. The deadline for new applications is the end of March. If you own a business in East Hampshire you can also benefit from a free energy survey, and you will find details in this newsletter.

PeCAN is keen to help local businesses become more sustainable, in the form of tailored advice and information, and ultimately via a programme of activities and workshops. We want to enable business owners to reduce emissions and thereby reduce their energy costs, via retrofitting advice and access to government funding. Please [contact PeCAN](#) to find out how we can help you.

We are starting to see a glimmer of the promise of spring beginning to reveal itself. We hope you are enjoying the snowdrops, crocuses, hellebores and daffodils as much as we are!

Thank you Beverly for sending this to me. We are forming links with Pecan and with ERA, the Trotton based eco action group,

But we are not moving away from who we are and always have been.... our interests in farming and growing food, in buying local, shopping sustainably, living sustainably are at our core. They are just going mainstream now... well, trying to!

### Report on the February meeting.

21 one of us attended the AGM followed by a bring and buy. The AGM went on much longer than usual... because members engaged in questions to the committee! Good!! The Chair, Treasurer and Hon Sec, along with the committee were re-elected and will carry out their diligent work behind the scenes, which includes running the website, editing the newsletter, managing the finances, answering calls and emails from members and prospective members, and now we have added several people posting info about the group on social media in their area. Dru

**I too have been very busy**, walking and looking after friend's dogs, Mabel and Bella. Faffing about in the garden: all old perennial stuff cut down now, and the beds are full of spring bulbs, particularly snowdrops, and hellebores. I am making plans for a few annuals which I will attempt to grow from seed. I am not good at that... I much prefer the bigger more robust jobs. I made a new wood store last weekend as we need to have 3, one empty awaiting logs, one in reserve and one in use. That's the theory anyway.

I m busy at work as well as new decking is being laid in a week or so, as the old stuff is not only very slippery but rotten in places and a risk to the elderly owner and his guests! I will be bringing home any wood that is not rotten for fire lighting wood. I am also hoping to get some of the rotten wood which I can put out in the yard in piles to rot down naturally (it's not been treated for years) as habitat for insects etc and eventually adding to the soil structure. So glad I have a hatchback car! I do make it work for its living. I also bring back a lot of leaves, as the gentleman only wants beech leaves in the leaf mould. The rest come here and mulch the raspberries and hedging. 5 large bags awaiting my attention today.... among a huge list of other commitments which include finding the sat nav and programming it for a funeral tomorrow.

Its rather cold but the sun is shining and I must get out for a walk.

I have used Frycycle a couple of times recently to let go of a few things... its really an excellent site, and well worth belonging to, and you would be amazed at what people want and what's available.

If an item of mine doesn't go in two or three days I take it to a charity shop where I will be going this morning..... some clothes now too big or unsuitable for me.

Last night I went to Save The Children fashion show at the Tithe Barn at Ditchem, near Petersfield, and bought a pair of jeans that fit, and had a fun evening with Jane Burt and two other group members! Thank you Jane for organizing it.

As you know I am a parish councillor and its election year. I have decided to stand again, but this will be the last 4 year stint I do. I am the liaison member to the village hall committee and have been asked to see if we can put on a coronation picnic in May. My idea is that we open the village hall and make the kitchen available, and ask our villagers to bring a picnic, and their friends and have a simple social afternoon in our lovely hall and hopefully outside where we enjoy a truly lovely view of the Sussex countryside. Just need to know if the Cricket Team are home or away that day.

I never thought, in my younger years, that I would be involved in any way in my local community, but I have learnt the value of it to me, and the enjoyment of getting together with others who are not necessarily within my friendship circle.

Looking forward to seeing lots of you for the talk on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

~ Dru

### The Compost Bin

**This month's garden jobs:** very soon now, we can hope to have one of those rare early spring days in which we all get the urge to be working outdoors and catching up on the backlog of garden jobs; it seems to be brought about by a combination of longer days and slightly warmer weather, although a cold day with bright sunshine can be just as compelling! As far as **seed sowing** is concerned, whether in the greenhouse propagator or in a warm room, start off with hardy varieties – otherwise they will germinate too early and may become too leggy before they can safely be planted out. For outdoor sowings you should also be careful; so far I have only put in my onion sets, but they will soon be followed by spinach beet and the more hardy of the salad crops like radish and lettuce, depending on the reading on my soil thermometer which is currently hovering at only around 9-10 degrees. Actually the field of about 10 acres at the end of my garden has just (end of Feb!) been planted out with lettuces – but covered in fleece. A wise precaution at this time of year.

More urgent is for me to complete the winter pruning of fruit trees before the buds start to open, the winter washing of trees, also **digging the trench** ready for the May sowing of climbing beans containing moisture-containing material including garden compost, old newspapers or cardboard. Garden compost needs to be spread over your vegetable beds if you didn't do that earlier, but avoid vigorously digging it in – that only destroys the soil structure and invites certain death during any coming periods of prolonged drought. Just a gentle raking in is adequate, followed by the essential **gardener's shuffle** to consolidate the ground if your soil is light like mine. Two people together, hands around shoulders, is even more effective.

**Save money - Why buy bagged compost?** I have often thought that my home-made compost was perfectly adequate for growing plants from seed, but I've always grown a control batch on bagged potting compost just to be on the safe side. I was therefore particularly interested to see a link to this YouTube video by the gardening guru of the modern age, Charles Dowding: <https://charlesdowding.us18.list-manage.com/track/click?u=f69551f6f2d7321f64f4b0a30&id=639fbc52c5&e=d88a350ee0>

The vital point is that your compost must be really well matured and regularly turned, it must be carefully sieved before growing seeds, and good drainage is important. Charles is well known for his weekly online gardening newsletter and dozens of helpful videos; remember that through our group you can have the newsletter sent to your computer free of the subscription cost, as I have mentioned before.

**Sharpen up!** If the weather is really foul, why not get to work in the shed putting a keen edge on garden tools such as secateurs and shears, which are best taken apart first and then sharpened with a carborundum stick or diamond rod. Even your spade will dig better if it has a keen edge, and don't forget your rotary motor mower blade. **Avoid** using an electric grinder which will soon overheat and destroy the carefully hardened edge. I have an antique hand-powered grinding wheel in a water bath which is superb for knives, especially if someone is around to turn the wheel for me! I worked out once that there are eleven ways of sharpening tools – maybe I'll have a chance to demonstrate them all sometime.

**Our Fibre Broadband** has at last been fitted and activated, and I must admit I am amazed. I already had an idea of the principle – how strings of glass-fibre can carry a faster and more reliable signal – but I thought a small bundle would be providing my signal into the house. Far from it – there are just two of these, and each is the thickness of a human hair. It is surrounded by a coating of insulation, otherwise it would be hard to handle – and easily lost! Also the old copper-landline phone is out, replaced by a digital signal (yes, all down those same two glass hairs! I heard all sorts of Old Wives Tales about using a phone on digital data – you have to dial the country code first when calling, you don't have a dialling tone, and you need a special digital phone. Nonsense! – our old phone works as usual, even when in cordless mode, there's a normal dialling tone, and you dial the usual numbers. The only drawback is that it doesn't work during a power cut, when you have to rely on your mobile.

The various **Repair Cafés** that have started up over the past year or two have always interested me, but until recently they have always been too far away. So I was delighted to hear that one has started up in South Harting, near Petersfield. It is open on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month, and their experts repair just about everything that's portable – for free! Even sewing (e.g. invisible mending) is included. If any maker's parts are found to be needed, that's all you pay for. I hadn't been prepared for it being so crowded and noisy! – next time I'll be there soon after they open, at 10am. There's an international Repair Café website [repaircafe.org](http://repaircafe.org) which also includes repair guides on many household devices.

**My lawn suffers** from large bald areas where it never recovered from that dreadful heatwave and drought last year, and this is the time to repair the damage. Cover the affected area with a thin covering of sieved soil, and then use a fork to make holes all over the area. Lever this in all directions to loosen the old soil slightly and ensure better mixing of the new and old soil, then sow seed in the usual way and water daily until germination.

**Could I ask** whoever still has the group's copy of that **book on making your own sustainable cleaning products** (on a month's loan) to please return it, so that others have a chance to refer to it?

**New membership cards** are with Anne; if you didn't collect yours at the AGM, it should be available at this month's meeting. ~ Alec