

GROWING TOGETHER

The Self-Sufficiency Group

October 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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Our talk for October,

We are lucky to have ecologist Matt Phelps from the Knepp Estate, Rewilding project coming.

I think this will be a very interesting evening, what ever you think of rewilding, so come and hear what he has to say. Bring your friends! Tell everyone!

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

December Christmas Party...which I shall not be arranging!

Resume of our talk in September.

John Brown, Cheese on the Wey. A play on words and easy to remember!

John Brown makes very good cheese....and it all started when his wife gave him a one day course at River Cottage 10 years ago...Up till then he had worked in construction, and is a chemical engineer. He had a particular interest in passive house/sustainable builds, so had lots of insulation and such like materials at his disposal for free to kit out his dairy. So 6 years ago he took premises at Pierrepoint Farm at Frensham. We heard about this farm earlier in the year from Nick Dobbs from the Countryside Regeneration Trust who own it.

The milk comes from the Jersey cows on the farm. He does the pasteurization himself, getting it to the minimum temperature needed to kill off the nasties. He would only use unpasteurized milk if it was from his own farm (he doesn't have one) and he had total control of the whole process from cow to cheese. Raw milk cheese is much more difficult to make.(I believe it can go wrong and a whole batch could be ruined) Milk from just two cows supplies all he needs to make 5 tons of cheese a year! Did I hear that right? He goes the couple of hundred yards to collect 300litres at a time, in a tank in his car! The type and quality of the pasture land plays a very important role in how the final cheese will taste. Outdoor grass fed is best by far. And how the cows are, ie happy and relaxed or stressed alters the cheese...

The Romans loved cheese, brought hard cheese with them when they invaded and presumably the native population liked it and learnt how to make it. up till then it is likely we only made soft cheese

with a short shelf life. Cheese was made by Benedictine monks here and in Ireland. During the Black Death in the 14th c wealthy landowners who gained a cow when a tenant died suddenly found themselves with a heck of a lot of cows, and milk! Cheese really took off!

Now for the difficult bit: The samples went round the group.... and then we learnt about each one. He makes 5 different types.

Colway; like feta but better! He used to make a batch once a month, but its popularity means he now makes a batch ever week it quick and easy to make.

In the past by day 3 the milk would have collected natural bacteria or had a cheese starter added.

For instance the mould you get on wholemeal bread is the one found in blue cheese.

Now he uses cultures he buys in. Its a known product which will give consistent results. "Penicillin Rockfortii" (ok, not sure of spelling) is what he uses for his blue Millie. He only needs tiny amounts per batch....good thing at £25 a batch.

Both Colway and Millie have Floradareca(?) and DH. These cultures and starters dictate how the cheese will turn out and what its rind will be like.

Blue cheese has air pockets. Stabbing it lets carbon dioxide and ammonia out and oxygen in which causes a bacterial reaction....blue cheese.

Millie; matures for only 30 days. A young mild but flavoursome cheese. Its an award winner and tastes a bit like Caerphilly. It needs a specific fridge temperature which means he has to by pass the settings to get it right for this one. This one gets weighted down to get all the air pockets out.

Blue Millie with the blue mould culture takes 3 to 4 months to mature. It has 3 "starters", including "Rockforte"

Alfreds Yellow Jersey; a ref to King Alfred and the cycling yellow jersey. This is an unmaturred slightly tangy cheese with a high acidity, tastes a bit like Wenslydale. Not sure I could taste the Fenugreek seed, but it was lovely. An easy cheese to make and ready to sell in about 6 weeks.

He talked about "washed rind" cheeses. How it completely alters the flavour. Cider is popular as a wash. The famous "Stinking Bishop" is washed in cider. I really didn't fully get the bit down somoving on.

Unlike a cheddar cheese, which needs a press, none of his do.

So now we get the subject of Rennet.....the stuff that turns milk in to curds and whey. Originally taken from the stomach of a cow, it was a good, but brutal. Vegetarian rennet has come a long way since it was first made x years ago. Microdial Rennet, now very good, made in a lab.

The culture goes into the vat with the milk before the rennet is added. For a hard cheese the curds are cut into tiny bits. For a soft cheese the curds are left much bigger.

So what happens to the wey? John doesn't like wasting a valuable resource, so it goes a few miles away to delight some pigs.

We all really enjoyed his talk and the display he made of his products, setting up the tables like his market stall. And several of us bought cheese to take home....I for one had some as soon as I got home!



**Hope this gave you a "flavour" of the evening!
Dru**

The Compost Bin

Plenty of baby snakes! Yes, they're still around, though I suspect more are discovering a crack in the woodwork and taken an escape route to more pleasant surroundings in the long grass beside our stream. Even when I tipped out the incubator (which I thought had failed), out wriggled another half-dozen babies who then joined the others in the compost bin.

See Alan Titchmarsh, or Isabella Tree of rewilding fame, or Tim Peake the astronaut, Sheila Hancock and loads more well-known personalities.... they're among the speakers at this month's Petworth Festival Literary Week. It's not often such people all combine at a fairly nearby place (in fact some meetings are even closer, in Midhurst). Find out all about this ambitious event at www.petworthfestival.org.uk.

When is a tomato a cucumber? I was surprised to find a small cucumber nestling in the pebbles between the many pots of tomatoes in the greenhouse. I traced the stem back to one of the tomato pots – a single seed must somehow have ended up in that compost. Both tomato and cucumber plants were healthy, but I don't intend to repeat such sharing in future!

Flopping cucumbers: like many others I train my cucumbers up to a horizontal wire, now raised to just below the greenhouse roof for easier picking. *Not such a good idea!* This year, despite twice-daily spraying with water to increase the humidity and green plastic shading, the leaves completely flop. It seems to vary between varieties, with the mini-munch type slightly better – but they all suffer to some degree. Presumably it means that the plant has difficulty in raising the head of water that high in a challenging year, whereas those trained at a lower level have fared better. Next year I'll be less ambitious and lower the support wire.

Seed saving time! Yes, it's the ideal time to save most seeds for growing next year (but remember not to bother with F1 varieties). I have an excellent book entitled "The Seed Saver's Handbook" which is well worth buying and can save its cost over and over again. Here's a good tip for tomatoes – after choosing fruits that are on the verge of over-ripe, squeeze out the innards into a jamjar and leave it for three days (no more, no less) in a warm place until it develops a faint green mould. This digests the gummy substance which otherwise sticks the seeds firmly together. Tip contents into a fine sieve,

rinse well and then tip out onto a slightly absorbent surface (bare MDF is ideal). When dry, lift seeds gently with a spatula or steel ruler and tip into a packet. **Warning:** after completing this process with seeds of hot chillies, wash your hands – and then wash them again!

Other seeds like flowers are best collected by hanging the seed heads upside down in a *paper* bag for a few weeks.

Summing up this year: generally good crops of apples but a fair number were attacked by hornets and some just rotted. **Flowers** on the whole were really spectacular, especially dahlias and roses, but I'm fed up with Cosmos that grow to over six feet and then snap off at the bottom; next year I'll start again with seeds of a more dwarf variety. **Outdoor tomatoes** were eventually affected by late blight, but these were well away from the greenhouse which fortunately was virtually unaffected, where the crop was also saved by cutting off every affected leaf showing early signs. Slight blight on **maincrop spuds** but not the others. **Watering** our light soil this year was a nightmare, a daily task of half-an-hour or more just on the vegetables and fruit, but increased to twice daily in the (properly-shaded and ventilated) greenhouse whenever the temperature outside approached 30 degrees (40deg+ inside!). Outdoors, **butternut squash** grew huge; courgettes needed very frequent picking to ensure a dainty size that suited the cook. **Blackberries** were the best ever, we had to give up picking our five thornless plants when we passed the 30lbs total, for lack of freezer space. Climbing **French beans** also heavy-cropping when well watered. **Carrots** were the best ever, mainly thanks to a concertina-type tunnel of micromesh ("Kingfisher Netted Grow Tunnel 3M x 45cm") that must be our best buy of the year. Everything in the beet family (**beetroot and spinach beet**) suffered badly from leaf miner. Fewer aphids and caterpillars generally. Our lawn turned brown with the early heatwave but suddenly recovered in September for some reason, maybe the early dew helped. Fewer butterflies than usual, I feel.

Was your garden at all similar?

Alec.

Wisley visit report from Alec



A group of our members had a great day out at RHS Wisley Gardens; the weather was perfect, and even the forecast traffic jam never materialised – so we wasted no time in making an early start.

Everyone was given a folding map which clearly showed the various places of interest, and in addition Alec's daughter Janice, accompanied by her daughter Rose, gave further suggestions in finding our way around; after making our way to some picnic tables where we enjoyed a coffee together, some members continued with us while others made their own way round. The magnificent tropical glasshouse with its own inside waterfall was among the most spectacular attractions, and – with most outdoor plants clearly marked with their names – it was easy to identify those of particular interest.



In case people thought “won't the flowers be over by now?” No way...

Photos from Andy and Frances





Well, I'm impressed!

Many thanks to you all for these photos.

And what have I been up to??? well, I ran the bric-a-brac and pre loved stall at Trotton Fete on Sept 10th. Made them lots of £! I was on my feet and going for it from 7 am till 6pm....I don't think my feet have ever been that sore! DIY kitchen complete. Cupboards down. Shelves up. Room re painted. Under shelf LED light. Pleased....with the look, how it works and that its done! Got a lovely black Lab called Pluto staying, as our friends in Storrington are on holiday! He goes home tomorrow....unless I hide him! Lovely walks and all showers avoided. Dahlias a picture! And the Morning Glory are still doing fine. Lots of work coming up now....some cutting back, but leave what I can for overwintering insects. Stray/feral cat here most days at the moment. Sits under the blackcurrants and waits for food to be delivered. So even stray/feral cats have staff!!!

Tickets For RHS Wisley

We have an RHS card to share which will admit up to 2 of us to any of their gardens with a 30% discount. At £14.95 each full price entrance that's a total saving of £8.97. So that's a large chunk of your £15 EHSS membership fee for 2023 ! Andy has them. 07511 242000