

# SHROPSHIRE ORGANIC GARDENERS



Spring 2026, Newsletter 53



**Potato Day 2026: Pupils and teacher from Brockton Primary School**

For gardeners, allotment holders, window box owners, who wish to grow without chemicals and meet with others.

# SHROPSHIRE ORGANIC GARDENERS

We are a group of growers of fruit, vegetables and flowers with gardens, allotments or smallholdings in various places in Shropshire.

Winter meetings on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.00pm.  
Summer meetings from April to October are usually at weekends, and consist of visits to members' gardens, outings, practical workshops, demonstrations etc.

See the programme on the back pages.

We are regularly involved in putting on displays at green days/climate events/local and sustainable food events.

Subscription rates: £12 per person per year  
Visitors: £4

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## MESSAGE FROM YOUR CHAIRWOMAN

### Spring 2026



Hello everyone, and welcome to our Spring 2026 newsletter. Yet again it feels like a long, wet winter, and although I suspect there is more to come through the remainder of March, we're inundated with the first daffodils, so spring does feel like it's around the corner. As I write this on the 13<sup>th</sup> March, it is dry, sunny and crisply cool.

Our upcoming Summer Visits Programme is finalised, with 3 members' garden visits which is exciting, 2 of which are new members. There are also a couple of changes this year. We're starting earlier than usual with the first visit on 26<sup>th</sup> April to Wade Muggleton's Permaculture Garden, which had to be cancelled last September due to the drought conditions. Please note the number limit on this, so first come first served! We're going to be taking a 'visit holiday' in August this year and finishing with an autumnal fruit juicing session using the SOGs own Fruit Crusher/Juicer and a bring and share lunch. Head to the back pages for all the details.

There are some excellent write ups for the winter meetings programme so do enjoy reading them, whether you attended or were unable to. Thank you to all who took on the task of writing them. I'd like at this point to encourage everyone to take a turn at doing these. It makes it far more interesting to have different scribes for each meeting or visit; an important part of this newsletter and a small ask of our wonderful members.

In January we used the Zoom meeting to return to a second SOGs GQT and had a good turn out with some lovely knotty questions. However, it is definitely harder to find people who are happy to give online talks, so as a group, we need to consider whether we should return to having a 'proper' meeting in January, or whether we don't bother with a January meeting (like some other groups), or whether we have more input from all of you to find suitable speakers for an on line session. I'll be raising this at the AGM.

Which brings us to Potato Day 2026, and yet again, what a truly amazing day. Ian has done a fantastic write up for us, and Caroline is including a lot of the feedback we had, but safe to say we hit an all-time high of 564 people clicked in by 1.00pm! We almost certainly

exceeded that figure because people continued to pop by, including one couple all the way from Milton Keynes! We appear to have had a lot more new visitors this year and from further afield, and I was particularly delighted to welcome Fiona Taylor, CEO of Garden Organic and her husband, for their first visit, *'incognito, just as a gardener'*. Bearing in mind Potato Days started at Garden Organic (then HDRA), it was lovely to see them and have a catch up.

We also had another record number of new members joining on the day, bringing our overall membership to 167. The second-hand book donations were down on last year a bit, but boy did the Tea and Cakes make up for it! They jumped from takings of £457.15 last year to a whopping £736.20 this year.

Sadly, Tools for Self Reliance were with us for their last time, and they've been very much part of our Potato Days for quite a few years. For a number of reasons, they are winding up the Shropshire branch of the charity and, amazingly, sold practically all the tools they brought on the day. We wish them all well in their 'retirement' from tool refurbishing, a service that will be sorely missed by many.

As of 13<sup>th</sup> March our total income for Potato Day was £4,343.29, up on last year's total of £3,944.91, but our outgoings were higher this year. The bulk cost of potatoes had gone up and we needed to rent some kitchen equipment to enable the Kitchen Team to have a smoother day of it. This has given us a profit of £1,887.43, which is slightly down on last year but still a good result. There will be a bit more to add from continuing potato sales.

Several of us will meet in the coming months to discuss the feedback and any changes that need to be considered for next year, which might have to include a price rise on the tubers.

We had a significant number of newer members taking part which was really great and I'd like to thank every member that again volunteered in getting Potato Day on the road. It simply wouldn't happen without you and I hope you all enjoyed yourselves.

For many years, SOGs has been a Group Member of Garden Organic, which entitles members to full access to their website and all the very useful information contained therein. However, we've never had a group password and only receive one hard copy of the *Organic Way* magazine, which can be read online. I have now liaised with GO

and we've set up a group password which members will receive individually. I have also added to this membership for the Heritage Seed Library, so that SOGgies can make use of that facility too. Perhaps next year we might consider a group purchase of seeds like we've done in past years. Would you be interested? Let me know.

Continuing the all-important focus on locally produced seed, we have recently added a new seed supplier to our website, to join the other Organic Seed Suppliers already listed. The Heritage Seed Farm is based in Devon, selling organically cultivated, open-pollinated seeds and plants.

Do continue to make use of our website and the info on it.  
<https://shropshireorganicgardeners.org/organic-seed-suppliers.php>

SOGs will again be offering financial donations to food growing groups using some of the profit from Potato Day. The decisions about how much and which groups will, however, be made after the AGM this year, as time hasn't been on my side.

However, a couple of previous recipients are coming to give us an update and hopefully some people from the Crabapple Community at Berrington Hall will also join us. Our AGM business is but part of the evening.

Enjoy the coming season.

*Rachel Strivens*



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## EDITOR'S NOTES

Thanks once again for all your contributions to your Newsletter, and to Dave Croker and Pat Frost for photos (*inter alia*). Those I approached to write up our Autumn/Winter events were most obliging and punctual, much appreciated!

We have some very exciting visits coming up this Spring/Summer, so please don't hesitate to contact me if you'd like to write-up one that particularly catches your eye, just email me:

[carolnewright932@gmail.com](mailto:carolnewright932@gmail.com).

I've been musing this Winter over why I like gardening so much and one of the many reasons is that it's a constant in my life that, by and large, doesn't change. With technology moving so fast for many of us that it's hard to keep up, I can still pick up my trowel and lose myself in tasks that stay reassuringly familiar and comforting. My trusty trowel never demands two-factor authentication before I can use it, or a software update, and it's entirely unbothered if the internet is down!!

In a world beset by so much war, conflict and bad news, gardening is also an important source of peace and solace for me and, I'm sure, many of us. And that's the theme of my chosen poem for this issue.

*Caroline Wright*

### **A garden is all the therapy I shall ever need**

There's something profoundly healing about the simple act of tending to a garden. Among the blooms and the soil, worries soften and the mind finds peace.

Each seed planted is a quiet promise of growth, a reminder that life moves forward, slowly but surely. In the hush of early morning light or the golden warmth of late afternoon, a garden invites presence, grounding you in the now, far from the rush of daily noise.

With every weed pulled and flower nurtured, the soul exhales, releasing stress and welcoming calm. It's in this quiet rhythm, dig, plant, water, wait, that we reconnect with the earth and with ourselves.

The colours, the textures, the gentle labour, they all work together as a kind of natural medicine. In a world that often moves too fast, a garden offers stillness. And in that stillness, healing blooms.



Art: Stephanie Lambourne

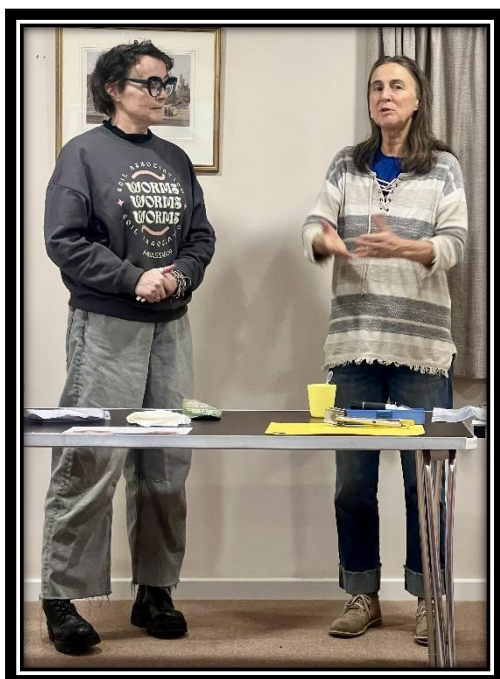
**Spirit of a Hippie** - 5 June 2025

# TALK: SHROPSHIRE GOOD FOOD PARTNERSHIP AND SCHOOLS FOOD WEB

Emma Cantillion, Shropshire Good Food Partnership  
5th November 2025

Written up by Judy Crook

For our first meeting of the autumn, we welcomed Emma Cantillion, co-director of Shropshire Good Food Partnership and project coordinator for the Schools Food Web. She was accompanied by Julie and Silke who are also involved in the promotion of good food across Shropshire.



Emma explained that the Good Food Partnership, in partnership with Let's Go Zero, had been awarded a grant of £100,000 to work with twenty schools (pupils, staff and parents) to help them decarbonise through food. It's been important to create a roadmap and a legacy after the initial year, so that the projects will continue as knowledge and skills are shared.

Examples of the work undertaken are helping schools to: grow food to supply ingredients for school meals and cookery classes; learn how to procure more locally sourced produce; participate in food preparation and cooking; and understand how to reduce food waste. Participants have learnt about nutrition and enjoyed 'taste the difference' sessions.

SOGgies were delighted to hear that all twenty schools have had master composter sessions and a lot of them are now continuing to compost. Apart from the many benefits to learning how to grow and prepare good food, this is also saving schools money as they don't have to pay to have food waste taken away and have learnt how to make use of cardboard in no-dig beds.

Pupils have enjoyed a juicing pilot with Tom the Appleman, well known to SOGs, have planted soft fruit, saved supermarket food from landfill, been foraging, made damson ice cream, and a staggering 2,500 children have made smoothies with the smoothie bike - I would love to see this bike! Initially work was with primary school children but now the project includes a secondary school in Market Drayton, where 170 year sevens have done a master composter session.

Julie talked to us about the work she has been doing at Longden School and elsewhere through hands on sessions, for example getting the children to taste, compare and think about carrots and apples - what do they smell like, how do they feel in the mouth, what do they taste like. She also gets the children to think about how to reduce waste through the food system.

Next Silke told us about the work of Grffn (see [www.grffn.org](http://www.grffn.org)) a Community Interest Company whose mission is exploring how to grow, measure and promote the benefits of nutrient-rich food which



tastes good and promotes soil health. Grffn are developing citizen science projects to assess food quality. To this end, Silke showed us how to use a refractometer, to test and record food quality values using the Brix scale and compare the tastes of various fruit and vegetables. For example, SOGgies were invited to test and compare apples and carrots from different sources - supermarket, homegrown, local veg shop etc., and consider factors such as sweetness, flavour and aftertaste, recording them on a chart. Individuals can join Grffn's citizen science projects to help validate a new food quality standard.

This was an interesting session which prompted a lot of discussion, and it was encouraging to hear that the values and knowledge so important to SOGs - growing good food sustainably - are being passed on to another generation.

# CHRISTMAS BRING AND SHARE

## 3rd December 2025

Written up by Siobhan Reedy

On the 3rd of December we held our much-anticipated Christmas Bring and Share party. Although numbers seemed to be a bit down on previous years, festive spirits were high with a good display of Christmas jumpers, hats, earrings, etc.

As well as the delicious food we all brought along and enjoyed, there was plenty of Rachel's non-alcoholic punch and Dave Simpson's home-made wines to wash things down with.

The plant, tool and seed stand, which comprised a range of pre-loved (or, as we used to say, second-hand) tools, pots, garden plants and home saved seeds, attracted a lot of interest.



Earthenware flowerpots were snapped up quickly, as were horseradish and Verbena Bonariensis plants. The packets of home saved seeds included runner beans, broad beans, carrots, marigolds, 'unstoppable nasturtiums', sweet williams and lots more that I didn't make a note of. By the end of the evening there wasn't much left, apart from some rather rusty shears!



Dave Simpson and Peter Anderson presided over, or perhaps more accurately propped up, the drinks table! The eclectic range of drinks on offer included home-made beer and cider and lots of wine - blackberry wine, artichoke & coffee wine, marrow & coffee wine, damson & coffee wine, and many other bottles of

extraordinary blends and flavours. When asked why so many wines were made with coffee, Dave explained that it helps to mellow the wine. Am I alone in wondering why this discovery has not been taken up by commercial wine producers?

Those who kept a sober head enjoyed stretching their little grey cells with the Christmas quiz, which was compiled by Louise Lomax. Thirty questions, some cryptic and most plant related, proved suitably challenging and required lots of team effort. The winning team (they know who they are) certainly benefited from overhearing some of their neighbours' answers!



In summary, a great evening was had by all.

**Editor's Note:**

The food was indeed as prolific, varied and tasty as ever, but unfortunately, we didn't get any photos of the marvellous spread! Next year...



## ZOOM EVENT: SOGS GARDENERS QUESTION TIME



7<sup>th</sup> January 2026

Written up by Ian Thom



### The Panel

**Sue Stickland (SS)** (former head gardener at Ryton Organic Gardens, author, and currently part of Gaia Foundation's Seed Sovereignty programme)

**Sue Bosson (SB)** (long-time member of SOGS, Llanrhaeadr Garden Club, and North Staffs Gardeners)

**Peter Anderson (PA)** (recently retired long-standing SOGS chairman, a farmer all his life, fan of compost, and cakes)

**Rachel Strivens (RS)** (current SOGS chairwoman, a Master Composter, worked in horticulture, commercial veg production, and Permaculture, and currently a professional gardener)

Facilitated on Zoom by Mike and Sylvi Richardson - Attendance 32

The session was a mixture of previously submitted written questions and questions arising from the audience on the night. I've tried to distil the discussion down to its essence rather than reproduce a transcript – any errors are mine!

**Q1 from Siobhan Reedy.** *My brassica plants have been eaten by cabbage whites just recently, and I've even seen a caterpillar on the plant after this recent frost. How is it surviving to eat my brassicas?*



SB raised the point that caterpillars do have a sort of antifreeze mechanism in them; it turns out they binge on food prior to winter, then hibernate and activate this mechanism. SS & PA noted that this last year has seen a prolonged dry spell, followed by a mild wet period, in effect a second spring, which has enabled caterpillars to keep going. Although this particular caterpillar hasn't kept going, as Siobhan has seen it off! The panel observed that netting brassicas is still a good idea later in the year in these circumstances.

**Q2** from Liz Pinfield-Wells. *I have a lot of young apple trees in the garden, and I wondered whether it was possible to form them into a hedge/espalier, perhaps by digging around the roots and leaning them together?*

The panel felt that as apple trees can be transplanted, it could well be possible to do this hedging/espalier option. However, it would be best to double-check that they are on a vigorous stock before doing so, and it would be necessary to build a suitable framework for them, as would be the case with cordons or espaliers. It would also be best to do this work in the spring, with suitable pruning above the graft to aid the retraining. RHS advice is available on pruning:



<https://www.rhs.org.uk/fruit/apples/winter-pruning>

**Q3** from Suzanne Webb-Thomas. *I have a problem with alkanet in my garden. It's taking over. I've tried digging it out, but it comes back. I find it hard to identify the seedlings because they look like foxgloves and forget-me-knots. Any tips?*



Alkanet is like a comfrey, mostly a green plant, with blue flowers. SB & RS agreed that digging it out is a good option, but it does have deep roots, and if it flowers, it seeds very well. It can be used in composting, just like comfrey. PA's home-grown solution involves continually cutting off the tops, which weakens the plant eventually. In his case, he uses goats!

**Q4** from William and Linda Edmondson. *We have a Hebe in the garden, which never stops flowering, even in winter. What does a winter plant do for pollination?*

SS & SB noted that these plants do set seed, and bees are still around, but also that self-pollination does occur. RS noted that it depends on the variety, but that some Hebes can survive up to minus 15 degrees. The RHS site could be used to identify varieties, and there is also the Hebe Society Facebook page:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/hebe>

[https://www.facebook.com/TheHebeSociety/?locale=en\\_GB](https://www.facebook.com/TheHebeSociety/?locale=en_GB)

**Q5** from Camila Loney. Leeks are now being attacked by grubs in between the layers. The plants are getting eaten and are withering away. Any ideas as to what is going on?

SS thought this could well be the Leek Leaf Miner (or possibly the Leek Moth). It might be possible to cut the plant right back to see if it regrows, but the best thing to do is to cover them with Enviromesh netting. Some SOGS members have taken to building an Enviromesh cage for their leeks (and carrots). SS & RS recommended the Babington Leek, a hardy perennial, which stays below ground in the summer, and comes out in the autumn.



**Q6** from Mike Richardson. We would like to plant a loganberry or a tayberry (the spineless varieties). Any advice?

PA has a loganberry, which has appeared in his garden, fruits very well, and hasn't been attacked by the blackbirds, which have plenty of other targets. Peter offered to take a cutting for Mike.

**Q7** from Don Millborrow. How does leaf mould differ from garden compost, and when should each be used to improve soil structure and fertility?

PA is of the opinion that anything alive will compost, and that there is no wrong way – the 'old-fashioned way' was to put cuttings and waste in a 'rubbish pit'; leaves could also be raked together in a heap on the ground, with the time-honoured tradition of 'piddling on it' to activate it.

Other panel contributions noted that leaf mould does not have so



many nutrients as a compost, so is best used as a mulch and/or a soil conditioner. Waste and cuttings can also be put into a trench (e.g. for runner beans) with layers of soil. A similar system is 'hugelkultur' which uses branches, grass clippings, plant debris, and soil/compost as a growing base for vegetables [see pp.47-49 of Newsletter 52, Autumn 2025].

**Q8** from Jan Gibb. *Can anybody tell me how to grow a good cabbage?*

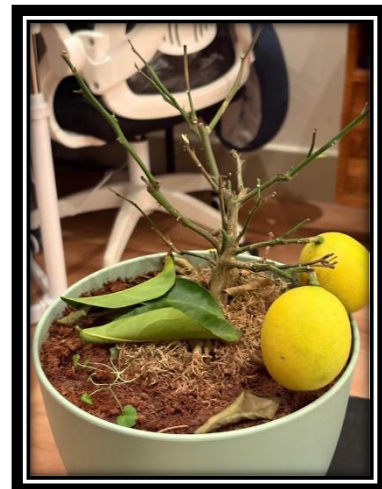


SS advises that if you want a winter cabbage, get a good winter variety like January King (left), or maybe Savoy (right). Sow in May, and they like plenty of



compost and water. They need to be covered with Enviromesh to keep out the large white butterfly, small white, and the cabbage moth.

**Q9** from Maggie Anderson, *I have several citrus plants in containers which I put outside for the Summer. In September, when we started having frosts, I brought them into our conservatory. Since then, they have lost loads of leaves and the lemon tree has shed all its little lemons. The two smaller plants have lost all their leaves. What am I doing wrong and what should I do now?*



RS advised that citrus fruits generally do not get enough light in the northern hemisphere and can also suffer environmental stress when brought inside. It's best to let the soil dry out between waterings. They can be put back out when the temperature outside is a regular 10 degrees outside. SB has noticed that the Seville oranges at Powys Castle are kept in the orangery with little if any watering, although in winter they are put in a (slightly) heated area. RS suggests Maggie just checks that the citrus are still alive by gently lifting a small section of bark low down to see if it's still green. RS is confident it will be.

**Q10** from Frank Oldfield. *Is it possible to be certain we don't end up with toxic squash by avoiding growing certain varieties together and if so, what are they?*

SS 'Toxic squash' was a term used in the media referring to an episode where someone ate bitter courgettes and became ill. It turns out that some courgettes had been grown with some Mr. Fothergill seed which had accidentally cross-pollinated with a wild gourd. This seed was withdrawn. It is very unlikely to occur, and obtaining good seed is still the right thing to do. If you are saving your own seeds, you still need to be careful to avoid cross-pollination.

**Q11** from Chrissy Bridge. *My daffodils and Narcissi come up every year, despite being occasionally flooded... easily a foot deep, sometimes for 24 hours, can be up to 3 days (see photo). The Snakeshead Fritillaries, however, despite being alleged to like the damp, failed completely, not a sprout. Any ideas for perennials or annuals that can cope with floods?*



SB has had similar flooding in her garden affected by the River Tanat. Snowdrops didn't seem to mind, and the fritillaries eventually made it through. RS noted that those in Oxford survive the flooding well, so maybe it's a case of persevering for a couple of years. Hellebores might also be a good option.

Siobhan referenced Motte Meadows NNR near Wheaton Aston, where there are snake's-head fritillaries doing well in an alluvial flood meadow. In many places, fritillaries can spread well by collecting the seed and scattering it and can do well in pots.

**Q12** from Theresa Nolan. Last year I planted Harlequin squash and butternut squash from saved seeds. There were plenty of plants, but they did not resemble the squash I'd taken the seeds from. Why is that?

SS says it's not a good idea to use seed from supermarket squash because they are almost certainly F1 hybrids; seeds saved from these will not produce plants that are true to the parent type. It is possible to hand-pollinate your own squash, but you need to identify the male and female flowers – the female ones have a bulge at the base where you can see the immature squash, and the male ones have a straight stalk (of course); you then need to tape up a male and female flower just before they open, pick off the male flower and dab the pollen into the female flower when you've untaped it, and then retape it (simple!).

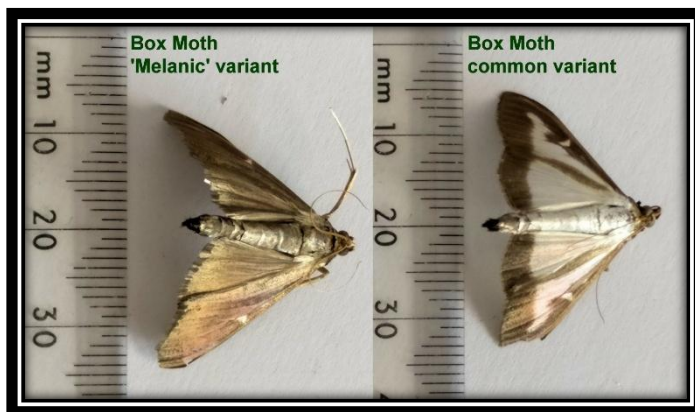
Discussion went on to eating the squash leaves, which are apparently quite tasty when added to sauteed onion, garlic, and tomatoes. [See the recipe suggestion in **Recipe Corner** on p. 19.]

**Q13** introduced by Rachel Strivens. What to do about box blight in a Shrewsbury garden?

RS showed photos of box blight affecting a client's garden. Remedies include pruning back hard or stripping out and burning. In this instance, the client has had them replaced by lavender.

See RHS advice:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/disease/box-blight>



Discussion moved on to the box tree moth (*Cydalima perspectalis*), which is quite attractive when you see it. If you do see one, the advice is to kill it as its caterpillars can defoliate plants very rapidly!

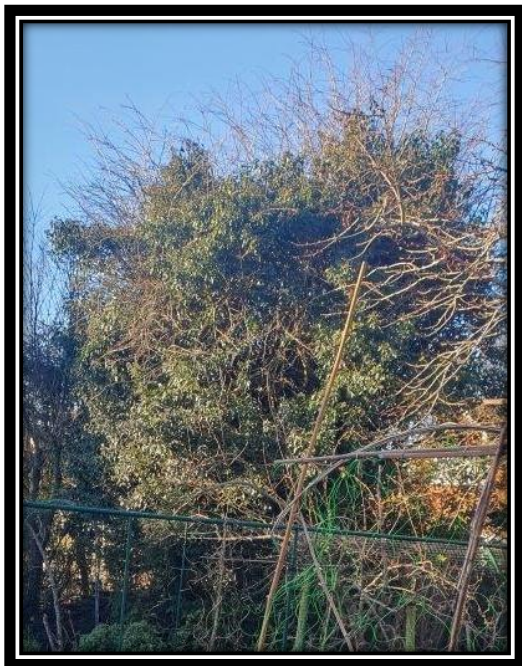
See RHS advice: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/biodiversity/box-tree-caterpillar>

**Q14** from Don Millborrow. *What can be done with a wildly overgrown hedge between neighbours? (photos included).*

RS/SB identified the overgrown hedge as a honeysuckle. With the neighbour's agreement, it needs to be hard pruned back to about 8 inches from the ground, and all the dead and leggy stuff needs to come out, together with the ivy. Ivy is good, but in the right place.



**Q15** from Maralyn Hepworth. *What would the panel do with a pink hawthorn covered in ivy? When I moved in, 30 years ago, it was a mature tree with lots of pink flowers in Spring. Now the tree struggles to reach the light due to the huge amount of ivy, with branches above the ivy and no flowers further down. It faces West. The fruit cage is in the picture.*



*to reach the light due to the huge amount of ivy, with branches above the ivy and no flowers further down. It faces West. The fruit cage is in the picture.*

PA suggested that ivy can be a positive plant, but it can dominate and overwhelm in some cases. In this case, it is best to remove the ivy. All the panel agreed, but perhaps by reducing severely rather than killing it. Siobhan noted that aged hawthorns can collapse, so you need to be quite careful, or perhaps use a tree surgeon.

At which point, we ran out of time!

### **Editor's Notes:**

Some of the images used to illustrate this article were photographs provided at the time by the member asking the question, others have been inserted by me to illuminate the issue in hand.

## RECIPE CORNER

### A) Griddled Courgette Salad

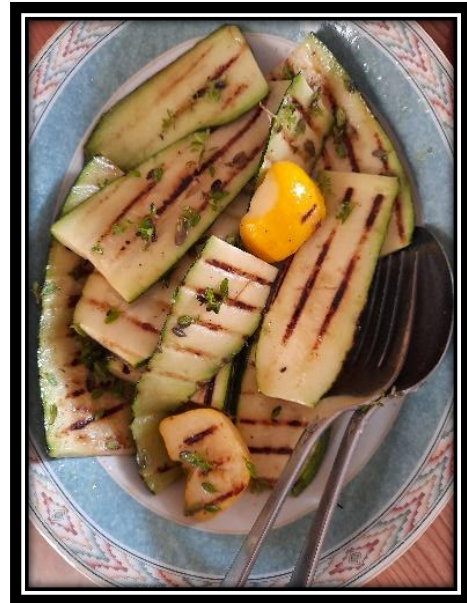
If you grow your own, you're likely to have at least one courgette plant on your veggie plot in the summer. This is one of my favourite recipes for courgettes and I look forward to it every year. So quick and easy. It's a Nigel Slater creation originally and this is my version. Find other recipes for your courgette gluts on my food blog (details below).

#### Ingredients

- A couple of courgettes, sliced lengthways, about 4mm thick (a mandolin is useful here)
- Olive oil
- Juice of half a lemon
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- Fresh herb of your choice. Thyme is nice and lemon thyme is even better

#### Method

1. Put the sliced courgettes in your serving dish and brush liberally with olive oil.
2. Put your griddle on to heat up. (If you haven't got a griddle, a frying pan works just as well, you won't get the griddle lines though.)
3. Griddle the courgettes for about 3 minutes each side. You may need to do a few slices at a time.
4. Return the griddled courgettes to the serving dish and add the remaining ingredients. Stir about a bit.



Notes: Eat this salad immediately, while it's still warm. Any leftovers keep well in the fridge. Using different coloured courgettes looks great.

**Suzanne Webb-Thomas**

Food blog: <https://attemptingdeliciousness.blogspot.com/>

## B) Squash Leaves with Tomato and Onion

### Ingredients

- 1 large bunch of squash leaves (tender leaves and stems)
- 2 tbsp olive oil or butter
- 1 medium onion, sliced or diced
- 2-3 medium tomatoes, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- *Optional:* 1/4 tsp crushed red pepper flakes or chili
- *Optional:* 1/2 cup broth or water

### Method

1. Wash the leaves thoroughly. To remove the fibrous, prickly texture, snap the edge of the leaf stem and pull downward to peel away the stringy outer layer. Finely shred the leaves and chop the tender stems.
2. Bring a saucepan of salted water to a boil. Drop in the shredded leaves and cook for 3–5 minutes until tender. Drain well and squeeze out excess water.
3. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté until soft and translucent (about 5-8 minutes). Add the garlic and chili (if using), cooking for another minute.
4. Add the chopped tomatoes to the skillet, cooking until they start to break down and form a sauce (about 5 minutes).
5. Add the blanched, drained leaves to the skillet. Stir to combine all ingredients and cook for 2–3 minutes until heated through.
6. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot.



Young leaves near the tip of the vine are less fibrous and taste best.

Some variations: add a tablespoon of peanut butter or a splash of coconut milk for richness.

Serve with rice, polenta, or as a side dish to chicken or fish.

# POTATO DAY 2026 REVIEW

By Ian Thom

In the last few years, we have been unable to obtain some varieties of seed potato; this year those missing included Ratte, Yukon Gold, Carolus and Pink Fir Apple.

Our potato supplier (Brighter Blooms) obtains their stocks from four different growers. The issue with Pink Fir Apple is that it was another poor harvest, so the grower has re-planted his stocks to try and increase the yield for next year. It appears that there will be no Pink Fir Apple available in the UK this year. Often varieties are grown by just one farmer so if they have a bad crop there is none available UK wide.

Arran Pilot had a very low yield, and not enough to satisfy wholesale demand. Our supplier also says that Carolus is no longer grown. Many growers are concentrating on varieties that are easy to grow and make money from. This is connected to Brexit. The UK growers do not have the European market available to them any more so without that volume they are growing less varieties to maintain reasonable volumes. They are also concentrating on varieties that are easy to grow and make money from.

However, despite all this, we had 48 varieties of seed potato on sale this year, 25 of which were organic, which in recent times is the most we've had available.

Most of them sold very well. We had 13 First Early, 12

Second Early, and 23 Main Crop. Swift and Kestrel sold out within an hour (appropriately enough!), eight varieties sold out within two hours (including all 4 bags of Charlotte), and in all, 22 of the varieties were completely sold out on the day, and a further 10 had only a very few left.



There were one or two varieties which did not sell particularly well, so we may not purchase them next year, or at least in the quantities we had this year. Our potato bill was our highest yet, so we may need to consider a bit of rationalisation on this front. As ever, some of those leftovers went to good causes (Transition Town Telford, Madeley Nursery, Dawley Community Garden), and the rest went to be sold via Peter and Maggie at Baschurch.

Judging by numbers alone (564 through the door in four hours), the day was a success, and certainly I got that impression from the large number of positive comments made at the cash desk on the way out.



Our volunteers yet again made the whole day work well. You may be aware that we were deprived of our card reader last year. It appears that regulations about money-laundering have been tightened up in recent times, and as a result, SumUp stopped their service to us (without adequate explanation to us of the circumstances). We have since discovered that card services are now only provided to organisations with a registered charity number or a registered company number – SOGs has neither of these, so no card reader contract.

Fortunately, the Shropshire Good Food Partnership stepped in at the last moment to provide us with the use of their own card reader, and access to their account in order that we could continue to take card payments on the day, and we are very grateful that they did so. This meant that we could take over £700 in card transactions (as well as nearly £2,000 in cash).

A word on the car parking. This year we had very firm instructions from the Police and the Highways that under no circumstances were our volunteers to direct traffic on the A458, and we were to stay within the car park. I thought that the car parking team coped with the usual influx magnificently. We also increased our signage on the road, including two large signs borrowed from Minsterley Show.



Incidentally, we have looked at other venues in the last year, but none offered any better parking arrangements, and certainly none were as suitable as Wattlesborough Village Hall overall. I've already booked next year's Potato Day – **Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2027**.

And finally, a few things I learnt at Potato Day:

1. 'Aruba' is not a variety of seed potato. It is a small Caribbean Island off the north coast of Venezuela (within the Kingdom of the Netherlands!). It has a 10-cent coin which looks remarkably like our 5p coin, which is probably why it ended up in our takings. The bank declined to take it.
2. Mary Somerville was a Scottish writer, scientist and polymath, and was the first person to be described as a scientist (in 1834). She was a member of the Royal Astronomical Society and was known as the 'Queen of Science'. She appears on the Scottish £10 note which was in our takings. The bank, of course, accepted it.
3. £1 round coins issued in 2008 are no longer legal tender. They were 'de-monetized' in 2017 and replaced by the multi-sided bi-metallic £1 coin. You cannot spend them anymore, but the banks will still take them into deposit, as they did with the one in our takings (it wasn't one of the rare ones, unfortunately).
4. Modern £5, £10 and £20 notes are made of polymer, and are longer lasting than paper notes. However, when people fold them up in various ways, they are really difficult to flatten out when you are trying to count the takings!

## FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON POTATO DAY 2026

### Editor:

Somehow the sad news on the day that this was to be the last time for Tools for Self Reliance (who are winding up their Aston on Clun branch this Spring), morphed into a rumour that this was the last Potato Day full stop!! Judging by the emails Rachel then received, full of praise for the event and suggestions going forward, **this is definitely not the case!!**

### Adrian Cullis

This my first year with SOGS, it was a pleasure to attend Potato Day. I'd no idea what to expect but was impressed by the organisation, the good humour of the punters and people's genuine interest in accessing different varieties of potatoes - amongst other fruit and vegetables.

I joined David's team in the car park - although I'm not sure he needed more helpers - and thought he organised it brilliantly. Kudos to him as it was not easy! Thanks too to the refreshment team for providing cups of tea and a bacon bap!

Thanks to all the organising team for such a splendid event.

### Maggie Anderson

We used to do a recipe book when we started Potato Day. I still have some of them. They are all potato recipes but we could do one for cakes...



### Angela Cattermole

Definitely do Potato Day again!!

**Alexis Tippitt**

Thank you for another fantastic Potato Day. I too thought the car park pioneers did a great job squeezing everyone in.

Knowing where people have come from is a good idea. We did mention to Dave Green on our way out that we'd come by bus, the X77 Shrewsbury to Newtown. It comes through Frankwell and up Cophorne Road, so is very convenient for anyone on the west side of Shrewsbury. It might be worth letting people know about the service next year.

And I very much hope there will be a Potato Day next year, we love it at our house!

**Carola Adams**

I know nuffink and see only potatoes on the day so it's good to know how the different areas got on.

Yes please, Potato Day next year, it's the reason I originally became a member of SOGs. And I still love it!

**Jonathan Hartnell-Beavis**

A fabulous event as always. Well done to one and all. I do hope it's not the last - that would be a huge shame!

**Dave Thomlinson**

How about hiring a charabanc for the day, to get people out to the hall to ease up the parking?!



**Fiona Taylor, CEO Garden Organic**

**Jill Lea**

This was the first Potato Day I've been to and I was very impressed by how incredibly well organised it was, to create such a successful event. The amount of work undertaken, the information available and the friendly atmosphere were formidable.

It would be wonderful if it continues and a shame if such a successful event disappears.

**Joke overheard by Dave Croker**

'I'm a constipated gardener...

I can't pass a nursery!'

(or garden centre!)



**Linda Price**

Dear SOGs

Thank you for allowing me to set up a stall on behalf of Greenacres Farm at the Potato Day. It provided a great stimulus for Service Attendees and staff to focus their making on a specific audience. At your next meeting, please pass on my thanks to those kind people who helped carry items between the van and the stall. Amazing cake again - how about a SOGs recipe book - not just cakes, but tasty veg recipes, too? Thank you!

# TALK: WHAT REALLY IS REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE & WHY IS IT GROWING IN POPULARITY?

Clare Hill, Planton Court Farm, near Ludlow  
4<sup>th</sup> February 2025

Written up by Frank Oldaker

Clare was a lucky find indeed. Rachel had, by chance, come across Clare and her work on Regenerative Farming and thought that what she is doing, and her ideas, would be of real interest to SOGgies.

What we found out was that Clare has had a career in the mainstream food industry, working for Red Tractor, the NFU and Sainsburys after graduating from Harper Adams. She had then become a farm manager to practise what she believed, eventually acquiring Planton Farm (80 acres) and two years ago founding 'Roots to Regeneration' (R2R), to educate farmers and professionals wishing to



understand regenerative principles. So overall she has an exceptional knowledge and understanding of the subject.

There is misunderstanding about the differences between organic and regenerative practice. Organic is regenerative but regenerative is not necessarily organic. It is well understood that organic producers have to comply with the requirements of their certifying body and the label 'organic' is legally protected. But as it is difficult to define 'regenerative', this hasn't gone down the same route and there is no control over using this description. However, as some people do think the two are equivalent, this disadvantages organic producers.

Also, producers of high-quality products by regenerative methods can't simply differentiate what they offer from the mass of poorer

quality output from conventional methods. By selling directly to an informed public, they can overcome this, but it limits their markets. A few businesses are of some help, those which have decided to use only high-quality ingredients and buy from regenerative producers.

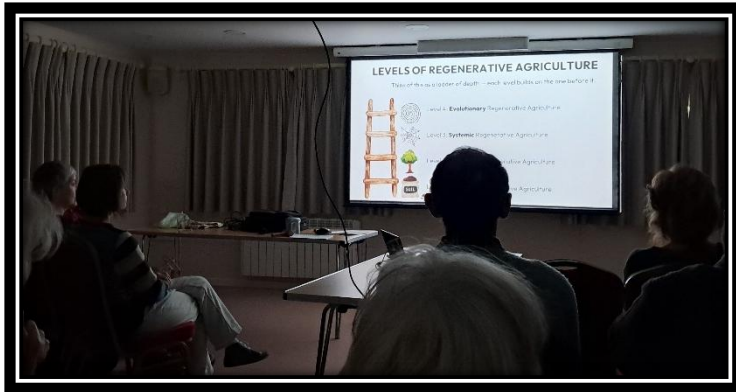
So what is regenerative farming practice? Using Planton Farm as the example, Clare talked about all the interconnected elements: the animals, the pasture, the market garden, plus plant diversity, woodland, nature generally, promoting local food etc. She is keen to promote perennial food plants and management of pasture to maintain quality (for example, chickens follow cattle to eat invertebrates – but not for so long that they eat all the dung beetles!). Trees within pasture provide protection for cattle in bad or hot weather.



Regenerative agriculture involves deliberate action to increase plant diversity and encourage nature generally and to appreciate a flourishing landscape. The ethos re animals is that they lead lives they find satisfying, not just free from pain, which is the criterium for conventional farming and allows life in a cage.

This all involves a lot of knowledge, recognising opportunities and sustained effort. The path from conventional practice to regenerative can be described in four steps. From a conventional minimum standard, they are as follows:

1. Being nature friendly and making room for nature
2. Practising sustainable agriculture to move towards net zero – more room for nature
3. Start achieving regenerative outcomes that improve soil and increase biodiversity.
4. Achieving a regenerative agricultural system with human and natural systems working together



As this is complex, R2R has the objective of giving ‘a deep and wide learning experience grounded in farm-based examples and embedded in a supportive regenerative community and culture’.

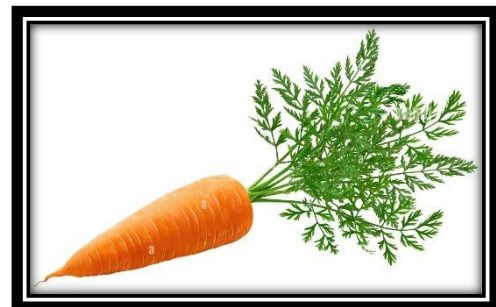
Work includes ‘a

supported, regenerative design process, on farm experiences, engaging online learning, live sessions with guest experts, fortnightly coaching calls, and expert support.’

With this combination of theory plus the practical and personal support, it is an impressive initiative designed to give participants a good chance of success with their own farms. However, Clare did point out that farmers are facing a lot of challenges at present and deciding to regenerate a farm is not a simple decision.

It was a highly informative presentation but for many of us the point that will stand out is the carrot story.

From 1940 to 1991 the average carrot lost 75% of its magnesium, 48% of its calcium and 46% of its iron (research by McCance and Widdowson). So, in 2026, assuming a continuing trend of nutrient loss, we need to eat 6 carrots to get the same nutrients as one carrot gave people



in 1940. This loss is largely due to the objectives of industrial farming being yield and shelf life plus faster growth cycles, which reduce nutrient uptake from ever more depleted soils.

Thanks to Clare’s knowledge and experience and a great presentation we were left with a much better understanding of the complexity and the issues facing farmers who wish to follow the regeneration path.

Have a look at their website for further details about the farm, produce for sale, events and R2R: [www.plantonfarm.co.uk](http://www.plantonfarm.co.uk)

# TALK: HEALTH AND HERBS FOR THE SPRING SEASON

Helen Whitworth, Medical Herbalist  
4<sup>th</sup> March 2025

Written up by Maralyn Hepworth

For me, having been growing herbs for culinary, medicinal and dye uses for many years, this was a must do talk. Helen has also had an interest in herbs and their medical uses for many years, growing many, and has been a SOGgy in the past, but, as a GP was unable to use alternative medicine in her practice. Retiring last August, she then trained as a medical herbalist and now sees patients in Shropshire.



As a GP, she only had 10 minutes per patient, but now she has time to understand her patients and their health issues. She was also concerned as a GP about the huge influence of drugs and food companies in research and treatments. She now uses a more natural, holistic approach, merging her medical training with herbalism.

Helen chose six common plants to describe their uses, and discussed foraging, as well as the 'Eat 30 Different Plants a Week' concept for a healthy gut, with a handout of all the plants that are available. This includes tea, coffee, nuts, seeds, spices and herbs, so reaching 30 is not quite a daunting as it sounds.

She explained that herbalists use plants that are steeped in alcohol for a long while, which extracts the vitamins and minerals, and means these can be kept for years. The content in fresh herbs is short lived. The companies she uses are all in the UK.

Helen finished with the research into mice poo, and faecal transplants which can be given in a Crapsule..... what more did she need to say??? A fascinating talk, and we hope to see Helen as a member again soon. Thanks to Susan Tonge for helping with the taster distribution.

## Helen's six Spring herbs for us to see and taste

1. **Nettles:** A quote from Nicholas Culpepper in the *Complete Herbal*, published in 1826, 'nettles are so well known they need not a description. They can even be found on a dark night'!! In food, young nettles (pre-flowering) can be added to soups, stews etc. and are a very good source of iron and minerals. Their sting contains serotonin and formic acid, and the Romans used it to keep warm or to expel the devil(!). Now nettle is used for allergies and as a blood cleanser. As a useful aside, docks do not relieve stings, but plantain and chickweed do and can usually be found alongside nettles.

**Taster:** Small samples of nettle, steeped in alcohol, were passed round to try.



2. **Dandelion:** (all 250 species can be used). The young leaves can be used in salads. As they are bitter, this activates saliva and digestive juices ready for food. One of the French words for dandelion is *pissenlit* – literally wet the bed, a clue to the fact that its leaves are a diuretic, increasing urine output. Yet dandelion root can be used to prevent bed wetting, toning and strengthening the bladder sphincter. The sap of dandelion leaves, if smeared on warts, eradicates them.
3. **Hawthorn:** Traditionally, it was said that it was inhabited by fairies, and if taken into the house it was unlucky. Possibly because the

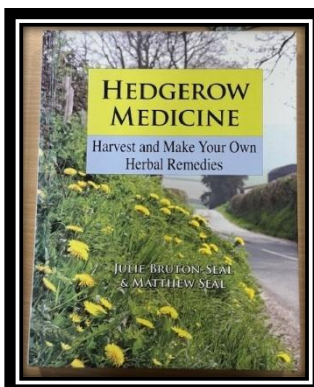
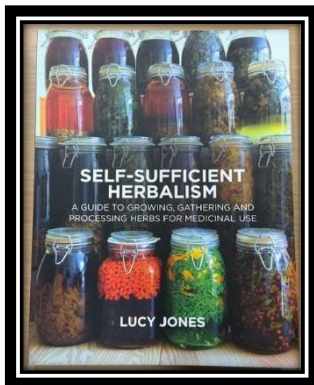
flowers smell like decomposing bodies! It was used in Maypole celebrations to welcome in the Spring, hence it's other name: May. Flowers, berries and leaves can all be used, the berries containing antioxidants which fight viruses. Herbalists use it for high/low blood pressure and both physical and emotional problems of the heart.

4. **Cleavers:** also known as sticky willy, goose grass. This is used to help the lymphatic system flow freely. Put in cold water for 24 hours then drunk, it can reduce swelling and has various uses.

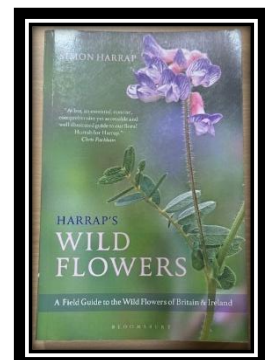


**Taster:** We all had a sample to taste, this time with no alcohol content.

5. **Wild Garlic:** Both the leaves and flowers can be used in salads, soups, stews etc. Or just chop it and cook in butter. It cleans the blood, reduces cholesterol and treats threadworms, improving the gut microbiome.
6. **Chickweed:** traditionally used for conjunctivitis, it is now only used externally as the saponins can cause nausea and vomiting.



Helen Whitworth  
 Medical Herbalist  
[www.hwhm.co.uk](http://www.hwhm.co.uk)



## THE TOP TIPS COLUMN

From SOGs Member Sylvi Greenfield:

What to do if your leeks have gone to seed...

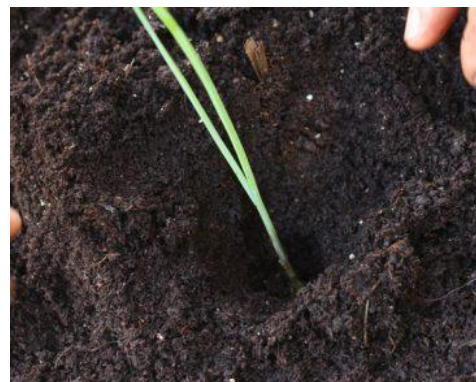
- **Harvest, clean and cook the lot**, eg. leek and potato soup.
- Check consistency and discard the woody core if necessary.
- If too woody the stems can still be frozen and used to flavour stocks for soup, then discarded.



- The bolted stems and flower buds are fully edible, with a sweet, mild onion-garlic flavour.
- Excellent raw in salads or cooked in stir fries.



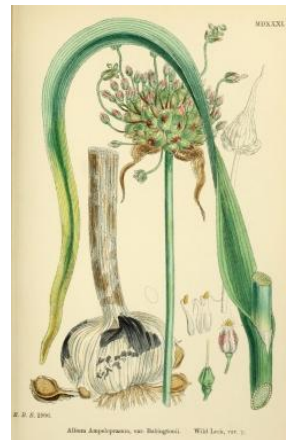
- **Leave (some) to flower for pollinators and seedlings**
- After flowering the hundreds of black seeds in the seed head will self-sow very easily.
- Thin the seedlings out and let them grow on.



- **Leave the original leek to die back and form bulblets.**
- New leeks will shoot up from the bulblets.
- Separate out the new shoots and replant in rows to grow on.
- They may also bolt early, so...



- **Consider growing a true perennial leek:**
- Babbington's Leek
- Poireau Perpétuel
- Oerprei / Perl Zwiebel
- St. Victor's Hybrid (produces larger leeks while still maintaining its perennial habit).



**From SOGs Member Teresa Nolan:  
How to festoon an apple tree.**

- This may be common knowledge for many gardeners, but I recently encountered festooning of apple trees and tried it, as the photo here shows.
- This practice exploits the general tendency of plants to flower or fruit better on horizontal branches rather than vertical, maintains a compact shape and makes harvesting easier.



- **Select Branches:** Choose young, flexible branches (1–3 years old) in late summer.
- **Bend Gently:** Carefully bend the branch into an arch (heart shape) to bring the tip lower than the midpoint, taking care not to snap it.
- **Secure the Branch:** Use soft twine twisted round the branch and pegged down or tied to lower branches or a convenient fence. Tie weights (e.g., small buckets of water, bricks, or plastic bottles) to the branch to pull it down if necessary.



- **Positioning:** Ensure the branch is arched, not bent at a sharp angle to prevent snapping.
- **Timing:** Keep the branches secured for a full season, or at least until they have 'hardened' or set into their new shape.
- **Maintenance:** Regularly check that the ties are not damaging the bark (girdling) as the branch grows.



**Editor:** We look forward to hearing how your tree gets on in the Summer, Teresa, and seeing more photographs in our November issue. Have any other members tried this technique? Do let us know, with photos please!

# SOGS SPRING/SUMMER PROGRAMME 2026



Out of courtesy to our hosts, Rachel will email the full membership a month before each visit to see whether you will be attending so numbers can be confirmed, and refreshments organised. As with all visits, we like to car-share as much as possible and full address details are sent out beforehand. [strivens58@btinternet.com](mailto:strivens58@btinternet.com) or 01743 891607

**April 26<sup>th</sup> (Sun), 2.00pm - Wade Muggleton, Station Road Permaculture Garden, Stottesdon.** A former lecturer and countryside officer, Wade Muggleton is an author and Permaculturalist (of some 30 yrs), living in a semi with an 80' x 40' rectangle garden behind it. 21 years ago, when he and his family moved in, it was lawn from top to bottom on heavy Shropshire clay. Now they grow c.20 types of veg and have 15-20 fruit trees, all grown on Permaculture principles in this amazing normal-size garden. You won't see bare soil anywhere, but you will see potatoes growing in straw. This visit will be **limited to 35 members**, and we'll be splitting into two groups between the orchard site and the garden itself. Walking distance between the two. *If more than 35 fully commit to the visit we will need to do the morning as well. DIY refreshments.*

**May 17<sup>th</sup> (Sun), 1.30pm - Members Garden visit - Dawn and Simon Eardley.** The Glyn is a 3-acre smallholding situated in a gently sloping valley 2 miles west of Meifod, Montgomeryshire. Simon and Dawn moved here only 2 years ago and have set about creating a homestead with rewilding, nature and self-sufficiency in mind. Their plot includes an 8 metre polytunnel, raised beds, flat no-dig beds, an orchard and an abundance of fruit shrubs. The land also includes a commercial wildlife photography hide and shepherd's hut accommodation, which the members may find of interest on their visit to this wonderful Welsh idyll. *DIY refreshments.*

**June 13<sup>th</sup> (Sat), 2.00pm - Glyn's Garden, Cemetery Lane, Church Stretton, SY6 1DZ.** Glyn's Garden has been developed from a derelict site on the edge of Church Stretton into an area of productive gardening with veg patches, polytunnels and wildlife habitats. It has

been developed specifically to enable people with disabilities and mental health issues to be able to participate in gardening activities and enjoy being outside and surrounded by nature. *DIY refreshments.*

**July 26<sup>th</sup> (Sun), 2.00pm - Members Garden visit - Ed Penman - Tipton's Croft, A Wild Field Garden.** Located on the edge of Bomere Heath, this is a traditional English croft (field) that is part of a private agricultural smallholding and consists of a wildflower meadow, large and small ponds, trees, rough grass, paths and scrubland surrounded by native hedgerows-a total of about five acres. The croft is linked to a separate smaller property, which includes an orchard, veg gardens (and chickens) and a cottage and gardens. It is a working croft that provides food and other natural produce, but more importantly provides an environment that maximises biodiversity and supports native Shropshire flora and fauna. It is work in progress (nine years as of April 2025) and will take a few more years to reach maturity, but it's already proving a huge success. *DIY refreshments.*

**August - holiday month - No Visit**

**September 6<sup>th</sup> (Sun), 2pm - Planton Farm - Clare and Rupert Hill.** Following Clare's hugely inspiring talk to members back in February, we are now going to visit their farm down near Ludlow. Set among 80 acres of ancient trees and rolling pastureland, Planton is a working regenerative farm, providing a blueprint for a different future for agriculture. The farm thrives on a foundation of soil health, animal welfare and ecosystem regeneration, offering a range of products and services designed to foster a sustainable future. They sell their produce directly to customers and work with local shops and cafes to ensure their community has access to nutrient-dense, ethically raised food. *DIY refreshments.*

**October 11<sup>th</sup> (Sun), 12 noon start - Members Garden visit - Maggie and Peter Anderson, Baschurch.** Autumnal Fruit Crushing/Pressing session with Bring and Share Lunch. This is SOGs members' chance to make use of the SOGs-owned fruit press, enjoy having a wander around their one acre garden, complete with composting, greenhouses, fruit (top and soft), veg, herbs, roses, lawns, trees, hedges, goats (very entertaining), hens, cattle, sheep, (pigs sometimes), horses and dogs, a gardener (wife), socialise with other members and enjoy a lunch morphing into afternoon tea. Please bring your own apples/pears/other fruit and containers to take your juice home in. *DIY refreshments – savouries and sweet.*



**Additional photographs from our Autumn/Winter Get-togethers**

# Garden Word Search

L Y M I L A D Y B U G F S X Q B L O L Z C U L W  
 B B N U E H W H E E L B A R R O W R P F Y Y L W  
 U T U X K K J J F G T F G Z W X X X P Y I A N O  
 C D X S T B B E D S I Q X P W R W K U C M B O R  
 K T D R Q U J C W E N S O V E O A R D G S X I G  
 E A I M X D O T C S T E J N R T W B L R C H T U  
 T D G U K S T W W R J L E M E E Y O O E F P A L  
 X G R F F T P T A W U D S T E W V O C I F X Z O  
 G R E F B H U W J C R F A D H E D O O G W U I H  
 X E T G Y Y B N B A T G I P S T V L M I J D L B  
 F E A E P E V F G U B N Z I U D A S P B J F I X  
 K N W L R W B S N I G V O O X G E R O O O T T S  
 Q H Y R Y A R D V U I E R L N C T E S G Y C R D  
 J O Y L E F R U I T V G M J N M P W T N C T E A  
 T U S V R W Y R A P J E E V L A N O S A E S F S  
 S S S T E M O L G O U T M S H M K L O O B Z M I  
 E E I I L F E L G T C A U D B C K F L G N Z D S  
 V C U C F R G V F S P B N U F R X I W G D Z Y A  
 R E K U L S N S S N O L J Q G Z E U V I K M L U  
 A J Z U O Y D E A G U E K A V D G H G M T E A U  
 H Q F I Z E V T K Q S S R P W O K G V Y V I K B  
 X I L C E A V I W L O D R P X O I J F O Q P Q M  
 Y T U S E E C N E F E P P Q Y N M U H K D U A U  
 O H C L U M X V T N A W K Q G D L S B M C M K O

- Fertilization
- Wheelbarrow
- Strawberry
- Greenhouse
- Vegetable
- Sunflower
- Outdoors
- Gardener
- Seasonal
- Digging
- Weeding
- Ladybug
- Harvest
- Compost
- Flowers
- Gloves
- Leaves
- Bucket
- Garden
- Shovel
- Worms
- Water
- Seeds
- Herbs
- Mulch
- Fruit
- Fence
- Pots
- Grow
- Yard
- Dirt
- Stem
- Soil
- Beds
- Gate





Enjoying hot drinks, cakes, freshly cooked food and a good catch up at Potato Day

**SOGS IS A MEMBER OF GARDEN ORGANIC**

<https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/>