

# SHROPSHIRE ORGANIC GARDENERS

Autumn 2025, Newsletter 52



**Rachel's bumper squash harvest 2025**

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 May 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

### Autumn 2026



Hello everyone and welcome to our Autumn 2025 newsletter which once again is packed with lots of input from yourselves.

Summer seems to have gone in the 'blink of an eye' and what a summer it's been. Every few years, some species of trees and shrubs produce a bumper crop of their fruits or nuts. The collective term for these fruits and nuts is 'mast', so 2025 is a 'mast' year, and it's not just been the acorns, beech nuts, sloes etc., but the sheer quantity of quinces, apples, pears, soft fruit and other berries has been incredible. Apple juice coming out of our ears!

As I go around various gardens and the countryside the holly trees are covered in berries, and my wall growing Pyracantha is covered in yellow berries just waiting for my blackbird family to start dive-bombing it to strip them all off. Who knows, perhaps we will have a hard winter, but no sign of frost yet, just the wonderful colours of changing leaves which are particularly spectacular this Autumn – due to high sugar content.

Talking of which, I've heard on the grapevine that sugar levels are very high in apples, so cider made this year could be especially potent – can it really be more potent than a Westons 8.2% ABV?

We've got some excellent write-ups in the following pages for our summer visits so please do enjoy them if you couldn't make the visit in person.

One cancellation was September's visit to Wade Muggleton's Permaculture Garden – the drought ravaged his garden - so that is rescheduled for next April. Thankfully we found an excellent alternative in the visit to LOHAS, which Frank kindly wrote up in good detail. Fascinating science, and whilst it won't replace home/garden composting it will be one to watch in the future for dealing with the dreaded chicken waste and catering waste.

I'm so pleased to report that we were also able to donate a total of £2,588.00 to local community food growing groups around Shropshire this year. Details can be found in the April AGM 2025 Report on page 6.

and full details are in the write-ups from their presentations to us at the AGM.

At the end of February, we had our third delivery of bulk peat-free compost, this time changing to RocketGro, partly for ease of delivery. Rocket Gro is a product made in Somerset and has good reviews. Whilst some members were happy with the products, including myself with the seed compost, the overall feedback hasn't been great so if we do something for 2026, we'll go back to the Melcourt products. We'll keep you all posted.

Planning for Potato Day is underway with Ian putting in our order with Brighter Blooms already. At this stage, we have 48 varieties (25 of which are organic), and this is the first time Ian has ordered literally every organic variety available. As ever, there are always a few variations before the day. It is also the highest cost so far, as prices have increased notably across the board. It will be interesting to see how this pans out from the sales/profit point of view.

Some of you will be aware that following this year's Potato Day, SOGs lost use of the card payment reader. It's all to do with money laundering and fraud concerns, which the banks are a bit hot on. We are now having to consider a way forward in order to reinstate the use of card payments for Potato Day, which as it stands means we will need to become a charitable organisation. A small group from the Planning team are now looking into this and we'll report back to everyone for comment as soon as we can.

Head to the back pages for the Winter Programme of Speakers with the dates for your diaries. We have the return of SOGs Gardeners Question Time in January and don't forget, we have the Christmas Bring and Share and our Big Seed and Garden Paraphernalia Swap, so if you have seeds and garden items you want to pass on, put them on one side for December.

Enjoy the coming 'quiet' season and I for one will be seeking out a lovely local cider which might have hit the high notes of 9% ABV. Cheers everyone.

Rachel Strivens



## EDITOR'S NOTE

Thanks again for all your contributions to this Autumn edition of our Newsletter, especially those I somewhat press-ganged into writing up visits last minute – you're all brilliant! Please keep your contributions coming and I hope you enjoy the read. Dave Croker also deserves a special mention – it's been so great to have such a range of excellent photos to choose from to illustrate the write-ups of our summer visits and celebrations. (And sorry if I don't choose as you think I should!).

It's certainly been an interesting growing season. After last year's cool and wet conditions, the first six months of 2025 were the driest start to any year in England since 1976, in fact Spring was the sunniest and warmest on record. While this was very good for production from our solar panels, it was hard work in the garden and on the allotment and all our water butts were soon empty. We try to grow a good range of fruit and veg in the hope that whatever the weather does, it will suit something. This year our tomatoes, cucumbers and French beans were fantastic, as was fruit (as Rachel notes), but our leeks bolted in the heat and salads refused to germinate until it cooled down!

As the growing cycle draws to a close, I hope you have some good harvests and that you enjoy all the colours of Autumn, the last smiles of the year, in the footsteps of Anne Elliot – I know I shall.

*Caroline Wright*

*'Her pleasure in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn...'*

- Jane Austen, *Persuasion*,  
1817



## REPORT FROM THE APRIL 2025 AGM

### Rachel Strivens, Chairwoman

The report from this year's AGM has been circulated separately to all members. Following last year's very successful AGM, we decided to continue to make charitable donations to food growing projects that are helping their local communities grow fruit and veg, all of which have gone up significantly in price in the shops. Home grown is best! The groups were then invited to join us for the evening and give SOGs a presentation on their projects.

This year SOGs has donated a total of £2,588.00, which included shares in the Babbinswood Organic Farm Crowd Funding project to turn it into a Community Benefit Society and an initial five growing groups:

Dawley Community Garden Project  
Dorrington Community Garden Project  
Flourish and Nourish, Cleobury Mortimer  
Pontesbury Community Garden  
Shawbury Fields Garden

These projects received either money and/or a selection of tools purchased from Tools for Self Reliance, who have worked closely with SOGs over the years.

As we've gone to press, one final project that has now also received some funding to reinstate their veg growing garden is Brockton C of E Primary School - Much Wenlock. They weren't at our AGM but the photo below shows part of what needed to be done, so we hope that a teacher and parent might join us at the next AGM.

Thank you to all the SOGgies who have provided the following excellent write-ups. It turned out to be our second-best AGM meeting ever!

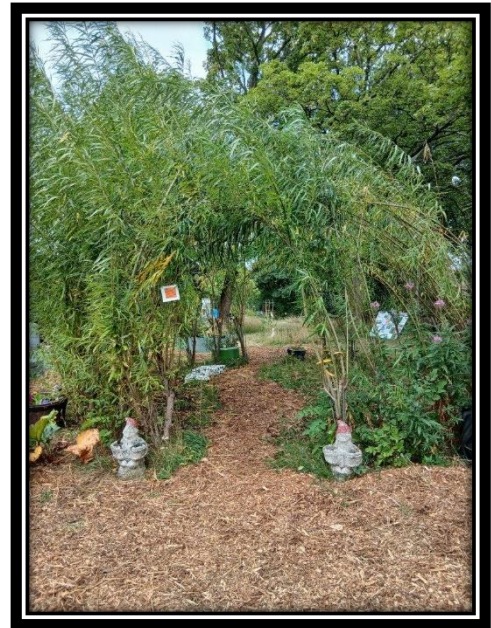


The steep slope at Brockton Primary means raised beds are necessary for the children to be able to garden safely.

## 1. Dawley Community Garden Project (written up by Stella Sitwell)

Liz Pinfield-Wells spoke to us on behalf of the Dawley Community Garden Project group. She gave thanks to SOGS for the kind donation which enabled them, alongside other grants and fundings, to set up the Community Garden project. This exciting venture, supported by Telford and Wrekin Council, originated in 2022 with a smaller garden project, whilst the search took place for a suitable site.

A site was located behind the scout hut where a good-sized plot of land of about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of an acre was situated and not being used. Planning permission was awarded, and the work began, firstly tidying what had been left behind, such as tending an abandoned clump of Willow saplings which, with a little nurturing, could be trained into an interesting sculptural form.



This enthusiastic group went on to develop recycling and composting systems. They gained a greenhouse, pots, and wheelbarrows, and created 'pallet' beds with just a little money. The slides depicted the great amount of activity and progress which had been made there.

Furthermore, links with the adjoining primary school have been positive, fruit trees have been planted in the school grounds by the project and the school are keen to be involved with the growing. A good number of raised beds have provided opportunities for planting rhubarb, daffodils, potatoes amongst other crops, whilst a consideration for wildlife can be seen in the 'Plants for Pollinators' area.

The longer-term plan is to create some 'accessible' raised beds for people with disabilities, and, in partnership with the council, to establish a pond area and to gain some compost bins.

It was delightful to listen to Liz speak passionately about what has been achieved and the wider positive impact which this project has made to this community. SOGs made a plan to visit the Dawley site in the coming year to see what has been happening there and we went in August (see page 34).

## 2. Dorrington Community Garden Project (written up by Stella Sitwell)

At Dorrington everyone is encouraged to join in the project by the words, 'Please come in and have a potter!' How lovely is that? This horseshoe-shaped plot of land has flourished and continues to do so. Apart from the SOGS donation, which part-funded the building of raised beds, this project received funding from Wickes, B&Q and the 'Good Food Trail', amongst others.

All the raised beds are accessible, both vegetables and flowers are grown, and some of the beds are used by the adjoining nursery where younger children can enjoy early involvement with gardening.

The site has many different areas to provide interest for everyone. Along with the raised beds, a pond and an 'undeveloped' area provide a habitat for wildlife, a Perennial bed offers a quiet area to sit and reflect, and a 'Forest School' area enables outdoor learning opportunities for the local school. Furthermore, the project plans to provide a footpath which will link all the different areas, allowing people to walk through. Planning permission has been sought to erect a polytunnel to increase yields so that more food can be produced.



In association with the Shrewsbury Food Hub, The Dorrington Community Garden Project is working on a scheme called 'Grow to Give', which will allow them to give away more fresh healthy vegetables to those in need and thus enable involvement with communities further afield. After taking part in the RHS, 'It's in your Neighbourhood', scheme, a level 4 out of 5 'Thriving' award was granted, with the description that the project was 'an inclusive group for the community'.

People are enjoying the space, and the group now feel confident that they can keep it and are setting ambitious future plans. They continue to encourage new people to get involved, both directly and using social media.

### 3. Flourish and Nourish (written up by Maralyn Hepworth)

Katja Jones came to talk to us about this new Community Project initiative, with dynamic, keen, folk determined to get Cleobury Mortimer 'Planting, Learning, Growing, Watering, Harvesting, Cooking and Sharing', whilst making new friends. With a horticulturalist on board, plus others with excellent skills, they have done so much in a short space of time.

Having found an area round the back of the Scout premises, they have quickly established a rabbit and cattle proof fence round the allotted area with the help of Severn Trent volunteers and £2500 of funding. For this they made a video of the project which we saw – so much help from them, and later the



Young Farmers, to establish their space. They also asked locals why they thought it was important and there were many reasons, one being: 'we would go out more'.

With raised beds now established, Friday and Sunday mornings are volunteer days, with new residents and home schoolers able to get to know each other. Future plans are for compost heaps and a floral area, important for pollinators and beauty. One volunteer is an herbalist so is hoping to use the area for workshops etc. in the future. The ideas evolve along with the community. The £250 donation from SOGs has been a great help.

#### 4. Pontesbury Community Garden (written up by Pat Frost)

The fourth presentation came from Philip Bradshaw representing Pontesbury Community Garden. Philip had already introduced SOGS to the Community Garden in his article published in the 50<sup>th</sup> edition of our Newsletter in the Autumn of 2024.

The Community Garden has now entered its second growing season, maximising on last year's learning curve. 2024 had been highly successful in terms of production, with produce going to Pontesbury Food Bank. A new cordon fence with newly planted fruit trees has been added, to offer the planting area some protection from young footballers on the wider green area. The children's raised bed has been built and this will be shared with the local Ark Nursery. The group hope that the children will encourage their parents to get involved in the garden.

The bi-weekly working days have their regular volunteers. However, as seems to be the case in many similar community projects, more volunteers are needed. The group hope they can gradually draw in residents from the Cricketers Meadow housing development where the garden is sited. The Committee are still looking for ways to boost community involvement with the objective of self-sustainability for this site.

Several other possible sites have been identified within the village, however, until the Cricketers Meadow site becomes self-sustaining, the Committee and present volunteers cannot contemplate creating another garden.

Phil ended by thanking SOGS for their kind donation of tools, seen below, which will be a great help and well used.



## 5. Shawbury Fields Garden (written up by Frank Oldaker)

All of the five presenters, from projects that SOGS supported, certainly conveyed the enthusiasm and passion which has meant so much has been achieved already. But Tracey Tudor-Smith, in talking about Shawbury Fields, admitted that it had been suggested to her that she curb her enthusiasm a little. We say - Tracey just ignore them!!

The garden was only started exactly a year ago and is there for serving personnel and civil servants at RAF Shawbury, but because it is located outside the security perimeter it is open to the community. The Youth Club is next door.

Funding was obtained to get things going and ten raised beds were built. In spite of a late beginning and late sowings and plantings, very good crops were obtained in 2024, which gave everyone a boost. Tracey now wants to create a really good composting area which can be used for education and training, an important purpose she sees for the garden generally. As there is space, expansion is also a goal. The donation from SOGS will help fund the plans.

The name for the garden, 'Shawbury Fields', was suggested by Tracey's husband and, of course, immediately reminds us of the Beatles song 'Strawberry Fields Forever'. In writing the song, John Lennon was conveying nostalgia for lots of happy times as a child playing in the garden of 'Strawberry Field' - the Salvation Army children's home near where he lived. So, with such a lovely connection, here's to many happy times for all the people who get to know 'Shawbury Fields'.



## GARDEN VISIT TO MOAT HALL

Martin and Helen Davies

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2025

Written up by Pat Frost

For the first SOGS visit of 2025, on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May, a grand turn-out of 50 members gathered in the Spring sunshine at Moat Hall, near Annscroft, c.3 miles south of Shrewsbury, as the guests of the owners Helen and Martin Davies.



The former dairy farm, in the family for over 70 years, now operates as an independent, family-run wedding and events venue, created by sympathetically restoring the barn complex and maintaining the historic setting of the site, whilst minimising the environmental impact. Meanwhile the fields are now rented out for grazing.

The location and the weather proved ideal for SOGgy cyclists (who stayed dry!), and we had a grand collection of bikes safely parked against the new wall personally built by Helen.





Today's farmhouse is a Grade II Listed building believed to have replaced the medieval family seat of the Berrington family in the late 16<sup>th</sup>/ early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The timber-framed structure is hidden from view by brick casing and roughcast plaster at first floor level and

the house has been altered and added to in later periods.

The moat that surrounded the house is now dry, but the ditch can be traced on the north and west sides. The remainder of the moat has been infilled, and the farm complex extends east from the house. The moat once had a masonry bridge on the west side. Helen informed me that its sandstone blocks had been dug up and many of them re-used by an owner who thankfully tries to re-purpose everything!

SOGs members fully explored the acre of garden, the large lawned area with colourful borders, the kitchen garden, soft fruit garden, orchard, cut flower beds and the huge and recently acquired vintage greenhouse.



Apart from the planting, there was considerable interest in the many items uncovered by the owners while developing the site. These included stone troughs, cheese weights, staddle stones, stone mushrooms and even a large cast iron pipe which was clearly part of a nearby colliery pumping engine!



The surrounding fields are still used as grazing pasture and we watched a dairy herd taking themselves off for milking, ambling across several fields in a steady single file. Sheep grazed happily in an adjacent field, untroubled by the screeches of the guineafowl, and the owner's attempts to enclose the little bantams were definitely not successful! Mother hen kept her little chicks inside and 'under her wing' as best she could!

The whole site exemplifies the owners' commitment to conservation and environmental issues. 3, 200 solar panels were installed in the lower field to the east of the farm 10 years ago, with panels placed high enough to allow sheep to freely graze underneath. They provide electricity for 400 homes, alongside welcome shade for the sheep.

Members were also very interested in the free-standing solar panels that form a shelter for a seating area to the south side of the house, with the inverter neatly placed in the old outside latrine building! I heard several mutterings of 'we could do that'.





Having wandered the grounds, SOGs enjoyed home-made teas provided by the owners in the large barn, which is now the main function space for weddings etc. The hot drinks and home-made cakes were very much welcomed; equally enjoyed was the opportunity to sit inside this impressively restored former hay barn. It is hard to imagine the space once filled with animals and hay!

The barn now has double-glazed solid oak joinery and modern insulation below a reclaimed tiled roof. The restored oak was best viewed

from the hayloft above. It also enjoys underfloor heating powered by the water-source heat-pump in the pond, which itself makes the ideal setting for outdoor weddings.



A final vote of thanks to our hosts was given by Rachel, seen above with Sue, whose bucket and large collection of golf balls was in fact to remind us about her dry comfrey fertilizer method, as reported on in the April 2025 Newsletter! All in all, this was an excellent start to our 2025 summer season.

# **SOGS 35<sup>TH</sup> YEAR REPORT**

**By Peter Anderson**

I do not quite go back to the beginning. I joined SOGs in 1993. These are some musings and anecdotes from over the years.

SOGs was meeting in a tiny upstairs room at the United Reform Church at The English Bridge. At my first meeting Polly Bolton was the speaker, folk singer come organic nursery woman. She recognized David Simpson - ask him how the encounter unfolded! Another speaker was Tyll Van Der Voort, who looked as if he had stepped out of a Rembrandt painting; sharp beard and piercing, twinkly, blue eyes, he was mesmerising. He was from a Camphill Village Trust; all biodynamics and social conscience. Anne Farquar, now departed to that great organic garden in the sky, was the chairwoman. Stephen Bromley was the next chairman; he had some great ideas for speakers and visits. He and his wife Ann have now set off around the world to seek new horizons. Then came one Peter Anderson and he lodged in the job for the next 24 years until he was dragged out, kicking and screaming, to be replaced by the sainted Rachel.

During all this time SOGs grew. The Reform Church room was not big enough, so we moved to the Salvation Army Hall in Longden Coleham. That was a cold winter, and the hall was even colder. St Chad's beckoned and for years it suited us very well. The booking secretaries sometimes got confused and once we were double booked with a tribe of vicars who were using the hall as a changing room for the installation of the suffragan bishop of Shrewsbury. The place was like a jumble sale and half-dressed vicars abounded; but we pressed on with the important task of saving the world by making it organic one gardener at a time.

SOGs outgrew St Chad's, and we flirted with Dorrington village hall and the Shrewsbury Cricket Club but then came Draper's Hall. What a good place it is. It has everything that an organic heart could desire. Carpets, projector, chairs, tables, lights, heating, kitchen, car parking is easy (on street or Abbey car park) but every Eden must have its serpent and we have had complaints about the noise we make on departure. It is in every organic heart to be considerate so now we tip-toe from the meetings.

Talking of consideration, it has been noticed from the beginning that SOGs is the friendliest place and SOGs members are the most welcoming and volunteering people that could be met on a long day of visiting gardens. The conundrum is, does SOGs attract friendly people? Or does SOGs make people friendly? (Answers on a post-card please.) Talking of volunteering, has it ever been said in SOGs that one volunteer is worth ten pressed persons? It must have been because we have never had to press anyone! Talking of sergeant-major's volunteering, SOGs is in need of a programme secretary. In the past, volunteers have stepped forward and soon the same will happen again.

To dwell on all the fabulous activities, talks and visits that SOGs has engaged in over the years would fill this whole newsletter and it is all there in the archive for anyone with a spare rainy week to spare...But there is one thing (well, two, actually) to dwell on, with relish, for a while. Potato day! 22 years ago whilst we were building a garden at the Flower Show (that's number two), Andy McQueen had just done a Guinness Book world record of potatoes in a single display, more than 500 varieties! He suggested that SOGs should do a seed potato sales day. We did and the popularity stunned us. We are still stunned all these years on with the continuing popularity. What makes it so popular? The answer is easy and it is one word, volunteers! At one time or another every SOGs member has volunteered to help with potato day. It has made SOGs potato day a legend all over Shropshire and beyond. Many people attend potato day just to bask in the friendly glow (and to eat cakes and bacon sandwiches) (and to talk gardening). For years we have tried to articulate this special atmosphere that pervades the whole event and then it was summed up this year by Callum, who sells herbs. He said, 'I attend lots of events selling herbs and SOGs potato day is my favourite because it has personality'. So now it is official, SOGs potato day has taken on a life of its own; it has that magic, synergistic quality called PERSONALITY.

Dwelling on the second thing: attending the Shrewsbury Flower Show. For nigh on 30 years SOGs did a stand and later a garden too at the Flower Show. It may well not be a coincidence that since SOGs stopped doing this the show has gone into a decline and this year it has stopped altogether. SOGs was gifted the stand and some money on the understanding that organic gardening would be present at the show. This was back in the day when no one knew what organic gardening was. If it was thought of at all, it was considered to be 'all muck and magic' and not in a good way. Over the years we have

persuaded a reluctant public to become our adoring public, to such an extent that we worked ourselves out of a job. Organic gardening is now mainstream, and people tell us what to do! The stand grew in sophistication and size until we were invited to do a garden, and we showed the world how to do a proper display garden.



**SOGs Shrewsbury Flower Show Garden, 2015**  
**Photo credits: Marian Byrne**

But then the big money took over and the gardens just became expensive ways of advertising for housing associations, schools and funeral directors. Professional gardeners and designers were employed, and many thousands of pounds were spent; but before that happened SOGs had applied its magic and volunteers and we had swept the board of prizes, silver medals, gold medals, best in show, Mike Hough trophy. Chelsea was talked of, but better sense prevailed and instead of trailing off to Chelsea to mix it with over-paid celebrities we decided to stay at home and enjoy what gardening is really about, fruit and veg and friends.

**SOGS 35<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY GARDEN PARTY**  
**Angela and Francis Cattermole**  
**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

**Written up by Various!**



**Susan Tonge**

The party was a great celebration of 35 years of SOGs because it was brilliantly organised, an ideal venue: plenty of room, lovely garden, beautiful pond with dragonflies and damselflies, perfect weather, excellent food (obviously), lovely to see old faces (won't mention names), and a continuous stream of new members (challenge for the memory!).



### Sue Fisher

Maggie made her large and appropriately decorated cake which was scooped alongside a celebratory fizz. The great variety of food which SOGgies always provide (without any sweet/savoury lists), together with the addition of BBQ 'd items, was a testament to how varied we are and yet how similar in our desires to promote good organic growing.

### Maralyn Hepworth

It was such a great 35<sup>th</sup> celebration as I got to catch up with SOGgy friends from many years ago and also bonded with a new SOGgy over mesembryanthemums. What I like most about SOGs is the acceptance of ALL gardeners, whether they have a field or a window box, and the SOGgy Community. Looking forward to the next 35 years? Like Angie, the member who provided the daisies for the magic garden I designed, now in my lawn, I will be pushing up the daisies!



**Maggie Anderson**

We had a lovely time celebrating our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary. There were so many old and new members, lots of chatter and reminiscing and, of course, wonderful contributions of food. The venue was lovely with a large pond with dragonflies darting about and an interesting vegetable garden.



**Alison Edwards**

I introduced myself to some of you at the wonderful Garden Party celebrating 35 glorious years of SOGs. I am a fairly new member and I joined on Potato Day at Wattlesborough Village Hall. I am thrilled to be a member of SOGs because of the dynamic mix of gardening.





### **Sue Bosson**

Clive and I really enjoyed standing by Angela and Francis's pond, watching the dragon and damselflies. The blue hawker dragonfly, which I think may have been a common or emperor species, was doing his thing, hawking back and forth across and pond and similarly there was a flatter, shorter broad-bodied chaser dragonfly flying back and forth, but perching often on a blade of grass overhanging the pond. His colour is a beautiful pale blue. The last species were two bright blue damselflies flying in tandem, resting often to lay eggs. Magical on a sunny, hot afternoon.

Thank you to our hosts. They must love sitting beside the pond. I know I would.

**Jacqueline Leech**

It was such a great celebration of 35 years of SOGs because it demonstrates how the organisation has so successfully grown, and with such a bonding of spirit. Here's why I'm looking forward to the next 35 years of SOGS. It means I shall have reached the splendid age of 112!



**Jan Gibb**

What I like most about SOGs is the friendliness, the enthusiasm, the quirkiness and everyone's willingness to share their experience, their tools, their seeds and their cakes. It's just all so enjoyable!

**Sylvi Greenfield**

What I like most about SOGs is the friendly atmosphere at every event, always knowing someone will have an answer to my gardening questions. Here's why I'm looking forward to the next 35 years of SOGs: because there will be simply more of the same things I value; friendship, knowledge, enthusiasm, positivity.





### Sue Fisher

I wanted to thank Rachel, Angela, Francis et al, for their hard work in organising the event....and clearing up after! It was marvellous that so many 'originals' of SOGs were invited and to me Rachel's speech summed it all up. The memories of meetings in the Salvation Army Hall, followed by St. Chads Hall for many years and now in Darwin Place.



# CONDOVER OPEN GARDENS

## Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2025

By Maralyn Hepworth

We were asked at the beginning of March if we, along with others, would open our garden in aid of the Village Hall. A good way to celebrate our organic wildlife garden, with plants to dye with!! I was doing well. Now, with a deadline, all those jobs on the list would get done! However, my meds began to stop working, then I broke my wrist. So, Frank not only had the garden etc. to do he also had to cook, wash and wait on me!!!



Do we cancel? No!!!! If it wasn't perfect, it was a real garden – not Chelsea! Having bought lollipop markers from Greenacres at Potato Day, I thought they would be good to identify dye plants, soapwort and teasels - traditionally used in the woollen industry - but how to get them? Greenacres were fab and, realising Susan and David were SOGs, added them to their egg delivery and then Susan and David brought them here – with a sedum from their garden. David then dug up a couple of dead plants in



the herbaceous border, put in the sedum and one I grew earlier!! Many thanks to them.

Rachel put out a plea to members and Diane Monether, who was an ex-colleague, heroically weeded the path. Meanwhile, Sue Fisher brought Sheila, who had helped me in my garden a quarter of a century ago and now assesses for NGS, and they zapped the borders. NGS eat your heart out! Without their help it would not have looked as wonderful. SOGs to the rescue.

The day arrived. After weeks of dry weather, it rained! Graham, a master composter, set up in the conservatory whilst I sat all day by a table



French windows with the photos from the SOGs visit in 2001, when Shropshire Wildlife Trust did the 'make-over'.



Frank did Crowd Control! After a morning of rain and no visitors, they started to arrive... and it grew to a crescendo, including a lady interested in dye plants from Wrexham, and a SOGgy with his Canadian brother-in-law. Lots of interesting conversations – but hardly any children! However, Grown-ups like Teddy Bear picnics too. And the mammoth in the ferns drew attention!! (not to mention Frank's meerkat...).

It was good to meet locals and those from farther afield and for them to show a garden fit for People and the Planet. Graham left his compost stand to go around the other 8 gardens and was pleased to find that, in

Condover, composting and wildlife abound! Since joining SOGs around 30 years ago, it is good to be mainstream at last!!

## SMALL-HOLDING VISIT: SHEPHERD'S BARN

Sam and Kate Davies

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2025

Written up by Caroline Wright

This was my first visit to Shepherd's Barn in Corvedale and, having heard two excellent winter talks from Sam and Kate, I was keen to see how they did it: being self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables for 20 years and counting! Our usual SOGgies Summer weather luck was with us. Having driven through a very heavy shower, one of the first in weeks, we were promised at least two hours in the dry and that's exactly what we got, with the rumbles of thunder not threatening until our visit was coming to an end.

Over 40 members assembled in front of the house, itself originally a sheep shed, beautifully converted and nestled into the landscape. Here we enjoyed the south-facing Elemental Garden, dedicated successively to Fire, Earth, Wind and Water and carefully designed to enhance wildlife and only



require one day of maintenance a month! Fire was a particular riot of colour, with several types of Sedum flowering especially early, while pollinators were also loving the Lavender and Eryngium.

Sam began by explaining the evolution of the site, starting with the decision to retain the existing hedges as wind breaks, natural divides and wildlife habitat, but to lay them to reduce their width. The vegetable garden and orchards are obviously central to self-sufficiency, and there is also space for goats for milk and cheese and bees for honey. The

need for a shady area by the house for hot days led to a Japanese themed area, with beautiful Acers and fast-growing bamboo, the latter providing a rustling soundscape, food for the goats and excellent poles. Their commitment to wildlife enhancement has meant the designation of 'semi-wild' and 'really wild' areas within the site. In the semi-wild areas, trees and shrubs enjoy an under-storey of wildflowers, while in the really wild areas the brambles and nettles reign unchecked apart from an access path to the big pond, habitat for great crested newts and moorhens.



We then divided into two groups, the first enjoying Sam's talk about the all-important veg patch while the second explored the whole site at leisure, and then we swapped round. I have to confess that I was so fascinated by the first veg talk, further enriched by interesting questions from members, that I stayed around well into the second and was still learning!



Continuing Sam and Kate's earlier practice as allotmenters on heavy clay that flooded, most veg is grown in raised beds. This soil is free-draining, and they do have to water; luckily rainwater storage is advanced at Shepherd's Barn, and thus far

they've not had to resort to using tap water (despite this year's exceptionally dry Spring and Summer). Veg is mainly on a 5-year rotation to keep diseases at bay, with green manures used over-winter, except for potatoes, squashes and mangles (for the goats) which are on a 3-year rotation. 'No dig' is generally practised, but potatoes and leeks

are more traditionally planted. Permanent crops include everlasting kale (more on that later), grapes, raspberries, strawberries, blackcurrants, gooseberries, rhubarb, asparagus and artichokes.

Bean production is taken very seriously, as a great source of winter protein. While the last of the broad beans had been left to go to seed for next year's planting, a huge array of climbing beans (runner, butter, Inca, Cobra, you name it!) stood over 10 feet tall, to be harvested in September, dried on the plant ready for storage. A highly insulated cold store is used for carrots, potatoes and beetroot, while fruit leather (dehydrated fruit puree) deals with the summer gluts. Pumpkin and squash storage is maximized by washing with Ecover non-chlorine bleach, they then go through until the following May, used in a myriad of recipes.



Outdoor tomatoes must be F1s to be blight resistant, and potato varieties are chosen with resistance in mind, for example, Sarpos. A garlic spray is used against aphids. Living with nature means module planting for legumes, otherwise they're just a tasty snack for mice and rats, and planting leeks as late as possible. It also means turning the many molehills into something productive rather than seeing them as a nuisance; their fine tilth mixes well with leaf-mould and general compost to make an excellent potting compost.

Compost production was one of several impressive, closed loop systems at Kate and Sam's small-holding, utilising muck from the goats, hedge clippings, and leaf mould as well as all the usual fruit and veg



matter. Being self-sufficient means growing a goodly quantity, but nothing is wasted – the chickens are partial to carrot tops, celeriac peel, spoiled strawberries, while the goats will eat anything, including tough outer leaves. Of the four nanny goats, two are in milk and two are resting at any one time, and all the surplus milk is made into cheese,

both for home consumption and to barter locally for other goods and services. The whey from cheese production is high in potassium, ideal for tomatoes, or if it's very thick it goes straight onto the compost.

Finally prising myself away from the veg plot, there was plenty else to enjoy across the site, with its myriads of paths and changing vistas. An excellent garlic crop was drying in the greenhouse by the house, the goats were posing on their pallet loungers and climbing frame, and the orchard meadows were alive with birds and butterflies. And, of course, there was time for very welcome tea and a chat, with a choice of delicious Shepherd's Barn cakes. Several of us then followed Sam back to the veg plot where he generously distributed pieces of everlasting Kale, the rare variety Taunton Deane, cultivation of which is one of his top tips for self-sufficiency.



All in all, this was a most inspirational and enjoyable visit. A big thankyou to Sam and Kate for all their input to SOGs over the years and best of luck to them going forward, as they scale back from visits and talks.

## SEED-SAVING TIPS FROM JANET GREENE, PLOT 14 Friday 15<sup>th</sup> August 2025

By Caroline Wright

At our December 2024 'Bring and Share', I was musing aloud about who might like to write-up Sue Stickland's Zoom talk on 'Seedy History and Seed Saving'. Janet Greene's name came up several times as someone very interested in and knowledgeable about seed saving. I approached Janet and she politely declined writing up, but we did hatch a plan for me to visit her allotment in the Summer and learn more about her approach. So it was that on a hot and sunny day in the middle of August, I met Janet at Plot 14, The Column Allotments, to be enlightened.

Janet has had an allotment for 40 years and been in SOGs for 31 years, almost since its inception! Her original plot was larger, but after her husband died Janet didn't want as much ground and the plot was divided, with SOGs' very own Ian and Judy becoming her good allotment neighbours!

Janet's plot is a well-planned and abundant mix of fruit trees and bushes, particularly plum trees and raspberries, other perennials like asparagus, then crops grown as annuals in rotation: onions, carrots, parsnips, potatoes, peas, beans, sweetcorn, tomatoes, lettuces, chard, beetroot, brassicas. Nasturtiums in typical orange and a striking dark red colour caught my eye on the day of my visit, while sweet peas perfumed the air. The wildlife pond was full of frogs and there were plenty of pollinators about.





Janet always saves seeds from legumes, simply leaving a few pea, broad bean or climbing bean pods to ripen on the plant, further drying them in the shed if necessary and then storing them in jam jars. That said, she hadn't bothered with the peas this year as the hot weather limited the crop so much. Her French climbing beans were a picture with their dark purple pods. She usually starts legumes off at home and grows them on, so the plants are better able to combat slugs when planted out.

Tomatoes are another favourite to save seeds from, particularly when it's a taste she really likes. Janet leaves the tomato until its over-ripe, then cuts it open and spreads the seeds out evenly on a piece of kitchen-roll, leaves it to dry and then stores it in a labelled envelope. She doesn't bother washing off the sticky natural gel around the seeds. In the spring she plants the piece of kitchen roll on top of compost, sprinkles further compost lightly on top and then germinates the seeds in a propagator. She's had great success with this technique for over 15 years. Noir de Crimée is one of her favourites, a large beefsteak tomato with dark reddish-brown skin and great flavour.



Nature, of course, has her own ways of saving and distributing seed that Janet's more than happy to take advantage of. Her first asparagus plant was self-sown, and then by collecting seed from it, Janet got a whole asparagus bed for nothing! Similarly, her parsnips originated with a self-sown plant and then by allowing a few to stay in the ground over-winter and flower the following season, Janet has collected seeds to keep her (any many a SOGgy!) in parsnips.

Not all her plants are from saved seed; Janet sows Swiss Chard, beetroot, onions and brassicas from bought seed. Her seed potatoes come from Potato Day of course, with Ratte a particular favourite! If a crop that she normally saves seeds from isn't doing well, then she advocates starting again with seed from elsewhere. And of course plants grown from hybrid seeds, like her Goldcrest sweetcorn, are not worth saving seed from, as they won't come true.

As well as growing fruit and veg to eat, Janet grows a lot of plants for the Allotment Plant Sale at the end of May and to sell from her garden wall in aid of Cancer Research. She showed me her propagating bed for rose cuttings, with Rhapsody in Blue; Generous Gardener and Give me Sunshine cuttings from 6 weeks ago doing well. Janet makes a trench and puts the rose cutting into the bottom with hormone rooting powder, waters regularly and if the cutting takes, she will pot it on next year.



It was my pleasure as my visit came to an end to help Janet out with a particular problem she was having with her Victoria plum trees. An exceptionally abundant crop, coupled with the very dry weather, had caused some to suffer from snapped and splitting branches. The immediate remedy was to pick the plums and I, together with allotment friends who kept turning up, was very happy to do – and they were delicious!



# GARDEN VISITS: DAWLEY COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT AND WOODSIDE ALLOTMENTS

## Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2025

Written up by Rachel Strivens, Chairwoman

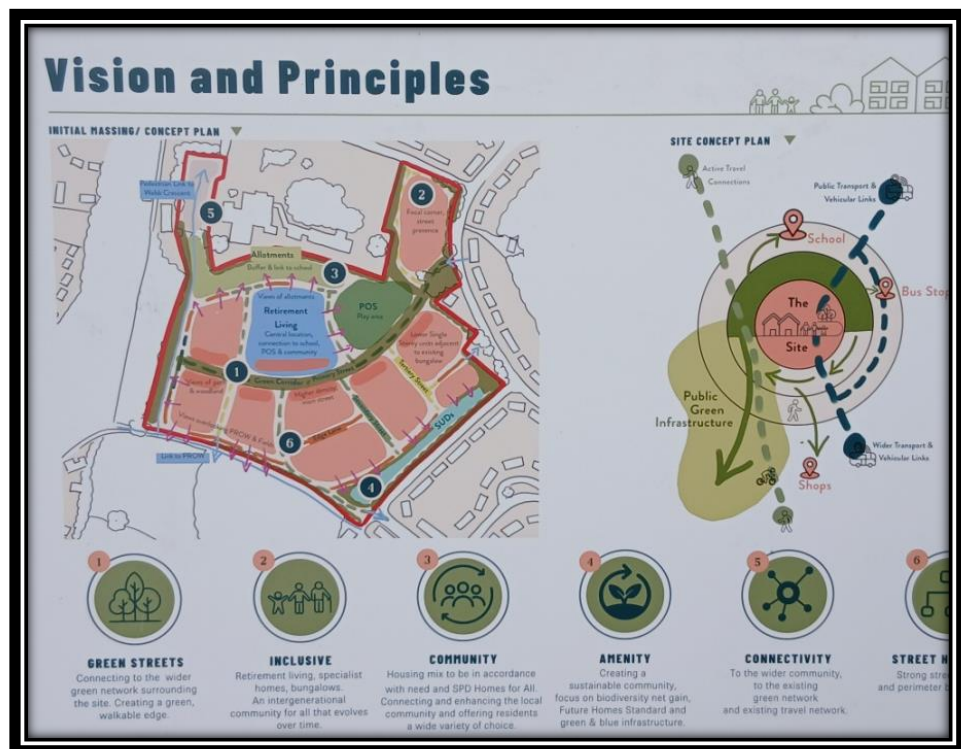
Looking for a visit for August, both SOGs members Steve Lawton and Liz Pinfield-Wells offered to host SOGs as part of their open days, conveniently the same day in August. How could we refuse!

First off in the morning was the Dawley Community Garden Project, which we learnt about from Liz's presentation at our AGM in April. SOGs gave a donation of money towards other grants and funding to help set up the project (see Stella's write up on page 7 under Report from AGM).

When I arrived there were already a good number of local people who had clearly been involved in the project and there was a great friendly atmosphere to the morning.

Remembering back to Liz's slides from when they took on the site, the progress is significant, as can be seen in the photos. Everyone involved

has clearly worked so hard and they've got a clear Vision and Principles for moving forwards, which involves local schools. We wish Dawley continued success with this local food growing project.





Raised Beds for Herbs and Vegetables have been well used



SOGs member Louise Lomax enjoying the R&R 'cabin', which also provides much-needed rainwater collection



Luxury Bug Hotel

By the time we had wended our way over to the **Woodside Allotments** to join Steve Lawton, it had turned into a very hot afternoon. Being their general allotment open day meant it was incredibly busy. Steve had offered to host this visit because the allotments had undergone a change of management committee last year and the new committee are very keen to move towards becoming organic.



A great use of blue barrels

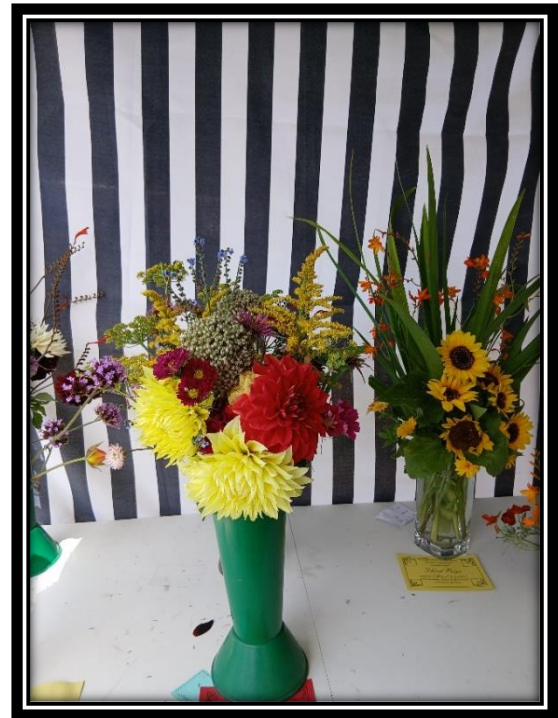
As Steve took us on a tour around the site, which is huge, he gave us some background. There are well over 100 allotments on the site, which is owned by the Gorge Council and run by the Woodside Allotments and Leisure Gardeners Association. The site is always fully utilised with a waiting list. However, those on the list can find an allotmenteer who is willing to mentor them whilst they wait for their own plot. What a brilliant idea!

Every plot was different, and they have a beekeeper who has an area for her hives at the far end of the site. By the time we'd made it back for the judging of the Flowers, Fruit and Veg, it had become quite clear why



they need such enormous compost bins (see above), made from edging curbs. I also thought GPS might be useful to find one's way around!

Some SOGgies stayed on for the judging, and we were pleased to be able to applaud Steve's winning entries, as below.



It made a nice change to have a full day visit to two very different sites, but which both have similar aims – get people growing food and composting.

+++++

## **RECIPE CORNER**

### **A Roasted Quince Recipe without using sugar!**

**From Jan Gibb**

Quince is a middle eastern fruit so use in curries and tagines. They really do give a superb flavour to these dishes.

Take a small slice off the bottom of each quince to provide a flat surface. Stand the quince, and with a sharp knife slice down the side of the core on four sides. Discard the core to the compost bin. Lay the sections of quince cut side down on a baking tray. Drizzle with olive oil and roast until very soft.

Let the quince cool off then pack into containers and freeze, to defrost when ready to use.

# VISIT TO LOHAS FERTILISER

Carlos Kao and Lian Lin  
Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2025

Written up by Frank Oldaker

Our visits are most often to established gardens, small holdings etc., where we relax and enjoy the results of much work by the 'owners', with a little gentle learning along the way.

The visit to Lohas was very different and, following a warm welcome - and with a hot drink and snack in hand - we began a highly technical session about Lohas products, production methods, history and future plans. They rent space on a farm and their equipment, along with everything else, is in a barn. Machinery noise and an untimely heavy rain shower drumming on the roof meant we really had to concentrate - but it was fascinating and well worth the effort.



So who are they and what are they up to? The owners are a family from Taiwan who relocated to Shropshire 4 years ago, seeing an opportunity to greatly improve the way waste is treated here, especially that from chicken production. (Lohas is actually an acronym for 'Lifestyles of

Health and Sustainability' and in Taiwan this ethos is woven throughout the life and actions of society.)

Now for the science and technology – quite simply the basis of their business is enzymes. Appreciation of the speed of enzyme action, together with a national problem dealing with organic waste, stimulated years of research in Taiwan by a prominent microbiologist (and entrepreneur) Young Chiu-chung. He and his company, Tetanti Agribiotec, are now able to create enzymes targeting different types of waste.

Knowing the UK's reputation for supporting innovation, as well as the problems we have in dealing with chicken waste, the family decided to introduce this technology here and set up a company in Shropshire, close to all those chickens in the county and in neighbouring Herefordshire.

The process is to take the chicken waste and mix it with the correct quantity of enzyme - which is imported from Taiwan - and then heat it to 80 degrees and continually stir for 3 hours at this temperature. The result of this rapid fermentation is an inoffensive product



in particle form that is free of pathogens and which is then the basis for fertilizers that can be used in agriculture, horticulture and gardening.



They add precise quantities of inorganic nutrients to produce two products – one a general fertilizer and the other for fruiting and flower crops, which is high in phosphorus and potassium. These are available to buy online via their website. Without nutrient additions the product can be

used as a soil improver with undefined nutrient levels.

The business is in its early stages and a lot of effort is going into building awareness where it matters - with the government, organisations and people who have an interest. There are different ways in which the business could develop. They could expand their own production or, as the machines can be in various sizes, they could also be located at the



sites where the waste is produced and the product used locally. Lohas could then also become a supplier and servicing company. This could be relevant for other types of waste, eg. food waste, because a catering establishment could have a small machine of its own. They are open minded about how the firm is developed, ready for opportunities as they arise.

Lohas makes much of it being a company that is supporting sustainable farming practice, reducing ammonia and greenhouse gas emissions, addressing ecological challenges and improving soil health.

We are all very aware of the devastating effect on the river Wye of run-off from land on which chicken waste has been spread. If all waste was turned into fertilizer by the enzyme process this ecological challenge would be solved. Also, the process does reduce



greenhouse gas emissions compared with composting and the final product can easily be incorporated into the soil. Similar arguments apply

to food waste and as regulations regarding this are tightened, the process could prove popular.

One caveat is the fact that as this is a quick process at a high temperature it does require a lot of energy. The 4000-litre machine we saw processing the chicken waste used approximately 145kwh/batch in the 3 hours needed for operation (cost approx. £40). We were told a machine can be provided that uses biogas if available, but if electricity is used then clearly this running cost has to be considered.

The visit allowed us to learn about a new process for treating wastes which is much quicker than

composting or anaerobic digestion. It also produces a safe product so allowing easy use. The application to waste from chicken producers, which Lohas are targeting, could be a game changer environmentally. While the products can't be certified organic, they contain high proportions of organic material and are a good option for non-organic growers.

Lohas offer an improved method of waste treatment and, if the 'business side' works out, then we can expect to see wide acceptance.

**Website:** <https://lohasfertiliser.co.uk/>

**LOHAS RECYCLING** Enzyme fermented chicken manure fertiliser

- ✓ Slow release
- ✓ Child and pet safe
- ✓ Odour-free
- ✓ Made for UK weather

**Garden PAL**  
Your Green-Fingered Friend!

Garden PAL is made using the world's fastest enzyme decomposition technology. He can help slow down global warming and climate change!

**Benefits**

- ✓ Slow release of nutrients over a long time (up to 90 days), perfect for busy people.
- ✓ Safe for children and pets. No chemical or bacteria. Perfect for the home gardener.
- ✓ No odour after application, doesn't attract flies, doesn't burn the roots of your plants.
- ✓ Can be used all year around, made for the UK weather.
- ✓ Suitable for organic gardening – see results in 2 weeks.

**Nutritional contents**

Ingredients: 100% fully fermented chicken manure pellets with NPK-ratio: 4-1-2 + 0.5% MgO + traced elements.  
Suitable for use indoors and outdoors, as a top dressing or base dressing. It works as a perfect soil improver for all grass, a wide range of arable crops, root vegetables, fruit trees and flowers.

Using LOHAS Garden Pal chicken manure

Grown without any fertilizer

# FROM THE ARCHIVES: GARDENERS QUESTION TIME

By Ian Thom

This coming January, the SOGs meeting will take the form of a Gardeners Question Time. This reminded me that I had seen something in the archives about previous GQTs.

The first one I can find a record of occurred in November 2012, with a panel of experts comprising Richard Bailey (SOGs member), Martin Ford (lecturer), and John Gales (NSOGs member). There is no other information about the qualifications of these experts, but no doubt they will be familiar to some of you. I also do not know whether 'NSOGs' is another gardening group, or a typo.

The first question was, of course, about potatoes – why were they brown and rotten in the middle? Apparently, this could be either a boron deficiency or thespraing virus (after a cool wet summer). Advice given was crop rotation and plenty of manure.

Other questions related to organic ways of getting rid of moss on lawns (spiking and improving drainage), rabbits (a good fence or a gun), non-flowering Philadelphus (potash or root pruning), little black flies in pot plant compost (Fairy Liquid, grit, or just ignore them), celeriac (plant in a trench and water well), red and brown marks on pear leaves (Pear Blister Gall, usually dealt with by natural predators), onions not storing well (make sure they are well dried before storing), and an unproductive comfrey bed (it's probably exhausted, give it a feed).

SOGs managed to top this in November 2013, by hosting the BBC Radio 4 Gardeners Question Time, at St. Alkmund's Church ('ENTRANCE BY TICKET ONLY'). The panel on this occasion were Anne Swithinbank, Bob Flowerdew, and Chris Beardshaw, with presenter Peter Gibbs, and there were two recordings made back-to-back.

SOGs put together a team of meeters, greeters, and refreshment providers for a sold-out event. Questions for the panel were written on the admission tickets and given to the production team as the audience arrived – the panel didn't see the questions beforehand. The two recordings featured 11 questions each, although not all made it on to the

aired programmes. Unfortunately, there is no record of the actual questions, but I will leave you with this thought from one attendee:

‘Now some of us may not be able to set eyes on our hoe without a vision of Chris Beardshaw lovingly caressing his hoe while polishing it with linseed oil, after his lyrical description of what an erotic experience it is for him.’



### Editor's Note:

You can listen again to the first of the two Radio 4 GQTs here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b03hxjrp>

Questions covered bulb planting; Christmas Cactus care; pruning; choosing a commemorative tree; plants for Autumn and Spring colour, overwintering Salvias and storing Begonias. Plus, Peter Anderson, SOGs Chair, got in a wonderful plug for the 2014 Potato Day as part of his question about Sarpo varieties. And it was our Newsletter Editor Marian Byrne's question about her hoe that occasioned Chris Beardshaw's marvellous reverie!

# NURSERY VISIT: TOM ADAMS' FRUIT TREE NURSERY

Tom Adams (aka Tom the Apple Man)  
Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2025

Written up by Jan Gibb

Well, it was the last visit of the season and very enjoyable and informative it was too.

SOGs had visited Tom when he was just starting out and great progress has been made on the 6-acre site since then. After an introductory talk on what he is all about, we walked around the site with Tom as he explained all the different



areas and his ways of working the land in a sustainable way, making the whole area a rich environment for the trees, plants, birds and insects that live there, and also the humans!



Rare, heritage and modern varieties of Apple, Pear, Plum, Damson, Cherry, Quince, and Medlar are grown here, approx. 4,000 a year! That is some undertaking for Tom, along with a couple of part time workers.



Please visit his website to read through all the fascinating names of the old varieties available. Tom runs his fruit tree nursery on organic, agroforestry principles, a closed loop system of self-sufficiency in woodchip and mulch for soil health and Mother Trees for propagation material. He also grows lots of green manures such

as Vetch, Rye, Phacelia, Buckwheat, Mustard and Clovers (the Crimson Clover was especially attractive) on the areas where the next batch of young trees are to be grown. Tagetes Nema is grown in with the green manures, and that is known to combat Replant Disease (which sees a decline in vigour of young trees).

Strips of trees for coppicing are grown alternately between green manures and fruit trees. These include Willows (rich in Salicylic Acid- believed to keep diseases at bay), Cherries, Hazels, Silver



Birches, Small Leaved Limes and Sycamores. These are coppiced in short rotation for ramial chipped wood (RCW), which is used as a mulch on the rows of young trees. It is rich in nutrients, suppresses weeds, retains moisture, increases fungal activity and beneficial micro-organisms in the soil.....something we can all do on our plots.



Strips of wildflowers, blocks of Comfrey and Mint, and areas of perennial flowers are all around the site, for encouraging pollinators, using as fertiliser and compost and for cut flowers. None of the rich land is wasted.

Also on the 6 acres are a chamomile tea business, a vegetable grower, a cut flower grower and Welsh Black Bees to supply a local honey and natural beauty products business.

The land really is a hive of 'Natural Industry'!!



After our tour we had an apple tasting session and Tom answered questions, of which we had plenty. Tom will start lifting Trees for sale from November to March and he also runs Pruning and Grafting Courses during the year.

I think we were all agreed that this tree nursery is a very special place and we all now know where to purchase our 'Red Foxwhelps' and 'Cummy Normans'!

Diversity is definitely the name of the game at Tom Adams' Fruit Tree Nursery.



**Website:** <https://tomtheappleman.co.uk/>

## THE TOP TIPS COLUMN

### 1. Have a go at Huegelkultur

Master composters Colin and Louise have been working with Madeley Nursery, a local authority establishment for 2-5-year-olds, for several years, initially helping with their compost bins, but latterly with a range of garden projects. The nursery's catchment area is South Telford and it caters for children from a broad range of backgrounds. The school has a strong environmental ethic, which is embedded in the curriculum. Gardening with 3-year-olds is a bit of a challenge! 'We have learned to accept that the childrens' education and wellbeing comes first, rather than having an immaculate vegetable patch', says Colin.

Colin and Louise decided to experiment with a heugel bed at the front of the nursery. Neither of them had any experience of constructing one, but the internet came up trumps with some suggestions. This area has less use than the rear garden and is therefore less likely to be damaged by over enthusiastic pupils. The garden consists of rough grass, which is cut infrequently at the nursery's request.

- First the turf was removed and a 50cm trench dug. This was easier said than done, as the area hadn't been touched since the nursery was built about 45 years ago!
- Bricks and stones were plentiful, plus an old crisp packet - proof that they don't degrade, and a good lesson for the children to learn. The turf had its problems as well, as there was a fine mesh of plastic that had come with it - not to be recommended.



- Branches and rotting wood sourced locally were used to cover the base of the trench.
- Then the turf (minus plastic) was placed upside down on top.



- Local woodchip and leaf mould followed (made from leaves enthusiastically collected by the children the previous year).
- The bed was topped off with organic matter from the compost bins on site and topsoil.
- Plenty of water was added while the bed was being constructed.



- Some literature recommends leaving the heugel bed for several months after completion, to settle down.
- But Colin, Louise and the children planted climbing beans, tomatoes and a squash a couple of weeks after the bed's completion.



- The vegetables grew really well, despite some inevitable neglect.
- The beans had a large harvest - despite a rare dry period in June, the plants thrived, needing no extra watering - and were still producing in September.
- This method of growing suits schools, where watering will usually be a challenge during the holidays.



Colin and Louise have now created a second heugel bed and are planning a third, so each nursery class can be responsible for one each.

Adapted from an article first published under 'The Organic Guide to "Lazy" Composting' (2025), *Organic Way*, Issue 240.

## 2. How to stop your cut flowers from flopping

- This method of support for sunflowers was seen at Tom's Fruit Farm and Nursery
- Tom now has a British Cut Flower grower sharing the space with his fruit trees.
- What a great idea!



# IS 'BIODEGRADABLE' THE SAME AS 'COMPOSTABLE'?

By Sylvi Greenfield

I *very occasionally* check claims/wording on packaging. Recently I found a bag with the following on it: 'BIODEGRADABLE, conforms to BSI PAS 2017: 2020'. So, could I stick it in our compost bin, I wondered? I did some internet research and found this in relation to PAS:

'PAS does not cover biodegradation in ... **home-composting** or related end of life scenarios for polyolefin-based products'.

So that was looking like a no to our compost bin.

On further research of what is 'compostable', I found an article written in 2011 by the *Association for Organics Recycling* with the following definition:

'Compostable – materials which biodegrade in a composting process through the action of naturally occurring micro-organisms and do so to a high extent within a specified timeframe.'

This article goes on to say:

'Biodegradable – ... On its own the term is to a degree obsolete as most materials will biodegrade given time. ... the use of this word can be potentially confusing to the general public both in terms of where to dispose of it and what happens to it once discarded'.

So there we have it, biodegradable is not the same as compostable and is a rather unhelpful claim on packaging.

Source: Association for Organics Recycling (2011) *Concise guide to Compostable Products and Packaging*, Available online:

<http://www.organics-recycling.org.uk/uploads/article1983/EN%2013432%20Compostable%20Products%20and%20Packaging.pdf>

See also: <https://www.wrap.ngo/>



## **SOGS AUTUMN/WINTER PROGRAMME 2025/2026**

**Meetings will be held on the 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of the month in The Bradbury Room, Drapers Place, Horsefair, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury SY2 6BP, unless otherwise stated.  
7.00pm Start Time**

**5<sup>th</sup> November 2025**

**Emma Cantillion, Co-director, Shropshire Good Food Partnership, and Project Coordinator for Schools Food Web**

Join us for a hands-on session when Emma will share the Shropshire Good Food Partnership's year-long journey of decarbonising schools through the food system. Over the past year, they have collaborated with 20 schools across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, creating roadmaps for cooking, growing, composting, and reducing food waste. She'll share how they integrated these topics into the curriculum through CPD training, seed-saving lessons, and an exciting '**Can You Taste the Difference?**' **citizen science project**. During the session, we will have a hands-on demo of how students are blind taste-testing produce and using refractometers to measure nutritional density.

**4<sup>th</sup> December 2025**

**Christmas Bring and Share and our Big Seed and Garden Paraphernalia Swap – Christmas Quiz/Competition**

**7<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

**On-line Meeting  
SOGs Gardeners' Question Time**

Since our first Gardeners' Question Time via Zoom back in November 2020, a few members have requested a repeat, so at long last, we have GQT coming back to your (computer) screens to get 2026 off to a flying start.

On the panel will be Sue Stickland, Peter Anderson, Rachel Strivens and A.N Other very keen and knowledgeable SOGs Member – ie TBC. You can start sending in any questions you have to your Chairwoman, including snippets of video if needed ready for the session.

## **4<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

**Final details for Potato Day followed by:**

**‘What really is regenerative agriculture and why is it growing in popularity’, Clare Hill from Planton Farm**  
(further details to follow)

## **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

**22<sup>nd</sup> Potato Day - Wattlesborough Village Hall**

## **4<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

**‘Health and Herbs for the Spring Season’  
Helen Whitworth**

Helen Whitworth is an Herbalist working near Shrewsbury. She originally trained as a doctor and then worked as a GP in Shropshire for 28 years before retiring recently. She is a passionate organic gardener, does wild swimming and enjoys being in Nature. Re-training in Herbalism has allowed her to combine her love of healing with the use of natural remedies and she loves to share this joy. This will be an interactive talk with plants passed round and tasting of herbal treatments

## **1<sup>st</sup> April 2026 – AGM**

**Plus:** Speakers from each of the Growing Projects that SOGs have donated funds to in the last 12 months will give us updates on how they used the money.

**SOGS IS A MEMBER OF GARDEN ORGANIC**