

Green Fingers Newsletter 2 - April / May 2021

It's time to get going!

Green Fingers is encouraging people to grow their own vegetables, herbs and fruit at home. It's also about gardening with wildlife in mind.

Last time we set the scene with some things to think about - planning, positioning and soil preparation. As the days lengthen and the temperatures rise it's the time to get going. If you are just starting out as a gardener a good website to dip into is [here](#) and a list of things to do each month See April [here](#) and May [here](#).

If you have kids or grandkids maybe you get them involved [click here](#).

Where to start with veg

It's always best to grow things you like, or things which are not easy to find in the shops. Some vegetables are relatively straightforward, for some examples see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Some tips

- Don't start sowing seeds until the soil temperature has risen. A clue is whether weed seeds have germinated.
- Check the seed packet to see whether to sow direct in the ground or in trays. If sowing direct it's better to sow too shallow than too deep, but don't let the soil dry out.
- Some seeds are started off in trays [Click here](#)
- Shrubs are best planted between October and April. [Click here](#)
- It's time to give some thought about flowers and plants to support pollinators.

Some handy guides

Vegetables [click here](#) Flowers [click here](#)

Shrubs [click here](#)

Lucy's Vegetable plot

In a bid to be organised I made a list of vegetables we'd like to grow and when they need to be planted. First on the list for March were the tomato seeds. I've sown 3 varieties – 2 are cherry tomatoes which I know the kids will enjoy eating direct from the plant and one is a reportedly great tasting all rounder called Noire de Crimée which we are looking forward to trying.

Using my Grandma-in-Law's windowsill propagator, I've sown the seeds and am proud to say I'm nearly on for 100% germination. To avoid tall 'leggy' seedlings, they're in a very bright spot on our living room windowsill.



Next were nasturtiums; not a vegetable, but the leaves are edible and the bees love them, so I hope to use them as *companion* plants around the vegetable patch. I've tried using old toilet rolls as seed 'pots' to limit plastic use. So far

they seem to be working well – I'll keep you posted.

We use a lot of garlic, so this was on the list for late Feb/early March sowing. So many options! Softneck vs. hardneck? We went with a softneck - Picardy Wight as I want to plait the bulbs once harvested. They should store well until next May if all goes to plan and as 78% of the world's garlic is from China we can reduce our food miles.

We stored the garlic cloves in the fridge for 2 weeks before planting (an old wives tale?) We'll soon find out!], and we've planted them out in some old plastic pots gifted to us from a family friend last year. More info about garlic can be found [here](#).

Happy gardening x

Lucy's Vegetable plot (contd)

I recently sowed some Rainbow Chard directly into the soil in my raised beds and have enjoyed watching them emerge in the last few days. I saved some old lolly and icecream sticks last summer which have worked well so far as plant labels. I was gifted some potatoes which I planted out in pots a few weeks ago and they are starting to come through now too and I'll be banking them up in the coming weeks as they rise up. I've entered into a family competition to grow the largest pumpkin so I'm still trying to work out my winning strategy - any ideas will be gratefully received - I'll be planting them in half barrels so will need to maximise the moisture and nutrition retention. Happy gardening x

Veg for the kids

BBC Good Food says "Growing fruit and vegetables at home is a great way to encourage children to learn about where their food comes from. Your children will love sowing seeds, watering young plants and eating the food they have helped to grow." [Click here](#)

Choose easy-to-grow food that's quick to mature like carrots, beetroot and salads. Try something different like purple carrots and rainbow chard. If space is an issue try a few potatoes in a large pot or a growing bag which can be easily found at Wilkos or a garden centre. [Click here](#) The Lady Christl and Casablanca varieties have both won awards from the RHS in containers.

Container Gardening

For veg choose containers with a diameter of 30cm or more, the larger the better. Ensure it has drainage holes and fill with fresh, peat-free, multipurpose compost. Mixing some soil in will help avoid it drying out too quickly. Crops in pots need feeding more regularly. You can buy slow-release fertiliser pellets or liquid feed – tomato feed is widely available and perfect for a variety of flowering crops like [courgettes](#), [sweet peppers](#), [aubergines](#) and [strawberries](#). For more advice [click here](#).

Tip: With flowers or shrubs it's important have more soil in the pot as the plants will soon use up the nutrients in the compost.

Eating in season

If you want to enjoy food at its best, every ingredient bursting with flavour, there's no doubt eating seasonally is the way to go, whether you grow it yourself or buy it locally. As Hugh Fearnly-Whittingstall puts it, "*(this) is not a high-minded duty or a restrictive chore, but a liberating pleasure. Infinite year-round choice is a kind of options paralysis ... understanding the seasons frees you from this ball and chain. In a world where the production and marketing of food has gone mad, seasonality is sanity. If you follow the seasons, you'll never get bored because one ingredient is always being overtaken by another.*"

SinCH also says think about the carbon miles and chemicals involved and the need to support local suppliers. To see what's in season when click [here](#) and [here](#).

Herbs

Herbs are a staple in the kitchen and a good way to engage the kids. They do well in containers and many herbs attract pollinators.

How to grow herbs – [click here](#)

How to make a herb garden – [click here](#)

An idea for a multi-herb container – [click here](#)

Composting Update

We covered this last time but some additional advice from an on-line session run by [Waste Savvy Staffs](#).

- Cheap bins work OK.
- Position the bin on bare ground.
- Getting the mix between "green" and "brown" i.e. carbon waste is vital. If it dries out then add water. If you have fruit flies in the heap it's too wet so add more carbon (e.g. paper, twigs).
- Grass cuttings mixed in (but not just dumped on top) mix them in - they are a good activator.
- Another useful website – [click here](#).

The Wildlife Trust at Wolseley Bridge sells peat-free compost so let's support them. (The shop has now reopened.) For compost bins costing as little as £10 [Click here](#) Enter your postcode and code SWP13L or phone 0844 571 4444.

Simon's Wildlife Gardening



In February I was checking what is already in the garden and made a list of things to consider. One thing I missed were the hellebores. They are an important source of nectar in February, March and into April. As well as brightening the place up they are particularly favourite of the bumblebees. **Tip** - March and early April is a good time to pick up cheap Hellebores from the garden centres so you can establish them for next year.

My baseline is not bad - earlier in the year there have been snowdrops, crocus, hellebores, primroses and daffodils. At the end of March the ornamental cherry came out with the forget-me-nots and grape hyacinths not far behind. Gordon kindly gave me some of his surplus wallflowers at SinCH's last coffee morning back in the autumn and they are now plugging the gap before the Aquilegias (Columbine) and Bluebells come out.

The bird boxes I put in last autumn seem to be in use so I'm hopeful that nesting is going on.

So the next steps for me are:

- Create the pond area.
- Find more branches for the log pile.
- Plant more pollinator-friendly herbs.
- Sow some bedding annuals in trays.
- Sow Hardy Annuals direct in the soil ([here](#)) For bees – sunflowers, nasturtiums and nigella.
- Dig up isolated crocus and other bulbs whilst they still have green leaves and replant them near others to make larger pockets of nectar.
- Leave the borders under the hedges alone now to encourage ground nesting insects.
- Check out bird boxes and bee hotels at the Wolseley Wildlife Centre shop [here](#).

SinCH's April on-line *Green Drinks* meeting had a fascinating talk from the Staffordshire Bat Group, so it's worth thinking what can be done to help bats in your garden. Some ideas [here](#) and [here](#).

Wildlife Gardening at Lucy's

In a bid to increase the biodiversity of our garden lawn and encourage bees and other pollinators I've planted Cowslips, Snakehead Fritillaries, Bluebells and Bird's-foot Trefoil in the last 12 months and it's so rewarding to see them starting to come through.



We have let our back lawn grow long for the last 3 years, only cutting it back once or twice each year, and are planning on doing the same again this year. It has been so interesting to watch the different cycles of flowers which grow over the spring and summer, as well as getting excited as plants appear which we have never seen before and watching

the pollinators enjoying them too. We cut a path through the grass to allow us to access the beds and bird table easily, but otherwise leave it to grow long.

Your own Nature Network ?

Here are two community projects showing the power of people acting together to improve biodiversity and brightening up their neighbourhoods. It would be good if we all could do something similar here, so why not get in touch?

Felixstowe's Little Green Space [here](#) is inspiring and their archive is well worth dipping into for ideas [here](#). Also Naomi Schillinger's blog [here](#) – lots of ideas and examples e.g. a tree pit sown with wildflowers.



Useful info about pollinator plants can be found [here](#) & [here](#).

There are two extensive sources on Wildlife Gardening in general from the Wildlife Trust [here](#) and [here](#).

Blossom Watch

In the same vein the National Trust is launching its second BlossomWatch campaign, encouraging people to begin a new UK tradition emulating *hanami*, the Japanese custom of relishing the fleeting sight and scent of blossom. [Click here](#)

In the fields between the Haywoods and along the canals we can already see a great deal.

Hedgerow blossom kicks off the season with the goat (pussy) willows in February, in March we have the tiny white blackthorn flowers, before tree blossom like bullace (wild plum) and damsons arrive. In the gardens we have magnolia, cherries, plums and apples – before the finale of the white hawthorn coming into flower in May.

SinCh will be responding to the Parish Council's request for ideas about the new Memorial Garden at Coley Lane and the Jubilee Playing Fields. Perhaps there's an opportunity to work on Nature Networks and also to focus on blossom?

Your ideas please.

News and events

Nigel at Roots Larder, who supports our Lamb and Flag plastic free and recycling events, has started a Fruit and Veg box scheme. see [here](#) "*Loose, organic, fruit and veg - Supplied in pre-used boxes for Collections and Local Deliveries.*"

Gordon has some spare cabbage, onion and lettuce plants so let us know if you are interested.

Please bring some spare plants or seeds to swap at SinCH's Plastic Free and recycling event at the Lamb & Flag on Wed 19th May 11.00 to 12.30.

Your input please

Please give us feedback on what's been useful in this edition and what else you'd like us to cover.

If you'd like to contribute to the newsletter yourself or have a project you want to share with everyone please get in touch. Please share your thoughts, experiences and photos.

Got a question about how to do things? Need some advice and support?

Contact info@sinch.earth