

Sustainability in Colwick & the Haywoods (SinCH)

Green Fingers Newsletter 1 - February 2021

What is Green Fingers?

It's a new project from SinCH to encourage people to grow their own vegetables, herbs and fruit at home. It's also about gardening with wildlife in mind.

No matter how much space we have there are things we can do.

The idea is to do a monthly newsletter with advice and tips. We want to encourage people to share their ideas and tips.

We'll also be following some SinCH members as they work out how best to do things.

Once Covid restrictions allow we plan to hold some events such as seed and plant swaps and some hands-on demonstrations showing how to propagate your own plants. So watch out for news of this in later Green Fingers newsletters, our Facebook and webpages.

Why should we bother?

There is a growing interest in growing your own and gardening with wildlife. This sits very well with what SinCH is about - promoting sustainable lifestyles and a closer connection with our environment. For many, Covid has reinforced this and has highlighted the well-being effects of being out in the fresh air and in nature.

You can't beat the taste of newly harvested veg and herbs. There's also the fun and satisfaction of growing something yourself. This also cuts down on "food miles", junk food and encourages people to use what's in season.

The statistics on the loss of insects and birds in particular are highly disturbing so if we can each do something to help redress the problem that's very worthwhile.

Where to start?

Up for the challenge? Now is a great time of year to start thinking about what to do.

Step 1 – What space do you have?

Take a look at where you might grow things.

Do you have a fair bit of garden, or if you are pushed for space can you fit some containers in? Either way some flowers, herbs, fruit and vegetables are all possible.

Step 2 – What to grow?

Give some thought to what you like eating or plants you like looking at. Or maybe try something unusual.

Which plants attract wildlife such as insects and birds in particular? Do you have room for a small tree or some shrubs?

What would fit with what you already have? Do you have a particular style in mind? An allotment feel? A cottage garden theme?

Make a shortlist of what you want to try.

Step 3 – Make a plan

It's best to start small and build up from there. How much space do you want to use for your project?

Do you have a blank canvas which requires a "grand plan"? Maybe a bit of lawn to make a vegetable bed? Or perhaps a piece of garden, a border or a space on a patio?

In any event, a rough scale plan of the area you want to work with will help work out what's doable. If you can't measure it precisely just count how many of your steps there are between things.

Where to start? (continued)

Don't forget to consider where the sun goes throughout the day as this will be vital when working out where plants are best suited.

Step 4 – Think about the soil

Plants will only thrive if they are in the right place and have the right kind of soil. Take a look at the existing soil, will it need some extra nutrients?

We'll take a look at soil preparation and growing in containers in more detail in the March edition.

Some advice to check out:

Garden planting styles

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/design/design-with-plants>.

Why not dip into the many short videos from BBC Gardener's World

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006mw1h/clips>

Simon's Wildlife Gardening experiment

The decline of species is really depressing so I've decided I've got to take the issue really seriously. But where to start? A useful resource on Wildlife Gardening <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions>

What I am already doing right.

- Hedges in the garden ✓
- Small trees ✓
- Bird boxes and feeders ✓
- Snowdrops for early bees ✓

Spring to do list:

- Think how to provide a succession of nectar throughout the months.
- Sow more wildflowers.
- Make a small pond.
- Make a log pile.
- Check out bird boxes and bee hotels at the Wolseley Wildlife Centre shop (click & collect) <https://staffordshire-wildlife-trust-store.myshopify.com/>

Lucy's Vegetable plot

Lucy and her family have decided to grow some vegetables this year so follow her progress each month. She's been lucky enough to have a raised bed as an Xmas present so the family has been focussing on getting that ready.



So what's Lucy's family been doing and what are they planning?

As well as lining the new veg patch with cardboard to kill of the grass and weeds, we've tipped out the contents of one of our compost bins to enrich the soil we're going to add in a week or so. Lots of worms and goodness to get us started!



We've also been thinking about seedlings – the kids love eating tomatoes and cucumbers so I'm going to try to grow plenty of those.

Bearing in mind I don't have a greenhouse I've picked varieties which are supposed to do well outdoors and I've picked a very sunny spot for the veg patch to maximise success!

I also saved pumpkin and gourd seeds from last year's Halloween celebrations and challenged my dad and father-in-law to a pumpkin competition so I've been trying to plan how I can grow the biggest pumpkin later in the year – I'm hoping beginners luck will shine through!

Thinking of a vegetable plot? Check this video out <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p006cd93/clips> You don't need a raised bed to make a veg plot but it has advantages and some drawbacks too. We'll deal with those in a later newsletter.

Home Composting

Now that the Borough Council is charging for emptying brown bins perhaps it's time to have a go at making your own compost. Adding compost to your soil helps to improve its structure and nutrient content and its vital for raising your own seedlings.

Whilst it's easy to buy-in compost there are environmental downsides to that, so it's best to make as much of your own compost as possible and combine it with soil and manure.

The County Council has done a deal so you can buy subsidised compost bins from www.getcomposting.com. Enter your postcode and code SWP13L or phone 0844 571 4444.

We'll cover composting in more detail later and we'll see if we can put on practical sessions. See <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/compost>.

It does take a lot of material and time to make a sizeable amount of compost. So when choosing a solution bear in mind how much composting material you will have to process. If you have small amounts then a wormery could be a good idea.

Maybe you could find some old wood or old wooden pallets, or perhaps re-purpose that old brown bin! A short video on the BBC shows how. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06l8m1x>

If you are feeding the birds fat balls, why not buy them in a large plastic container next time and re-use it as a kitchen caddy to collect your veg scraps?

Jobs to do now

- Do some thinking about what you want to achieve this year and how best to start.
- Buy some seeds ready for sowing in March and April when the weather's warming up.
- Find some suitable containers for filling up in March when the temperatures rise.

Seeds are easily available:

- From all garden centres – check the offers.
- Wilkos do a cheap but reliable range.
- On-line from various outlets buy NB delays in dispatch due to covid.

Peat Free Compost

If you are unable to make your own compost, or not in sufficient quantity, you should be able buy (peat-free) locally.

Not all compost is the same through – you'll need to think about what you need it for. A good article on this can be found at <https://www.lovethegarden.com/uk-en/article/complete-guide-choosing-right-compost>

What's the issue with peat?

The key issues are climate change and flooding risk. Peatlands are carbon sinks and they cover 3% of the world's land but hold nearly 30% of its carbon. If they are damaged the carbon is available for release again and the peatlands don't continue absorbing CO2.

There are few lowland peatlands (where horticultural peat is found) left in the UK. Most of the peat used in compost comes from Ireland, Germany and Baltic states so there are "peat miles" to think about as well.

Peat-free compost has greatly improved over the years and popular brands to be found at garden centres include Westland New Horizon, Dalefoot, Melcourt's Sylvagrow and Verve Peat Free. For seedlings Biochar compost is very good.

The Staffs Wildlife Trust at Wolseley Bridge have started selling peat-free so let's support them. They offer click and collect - leave a message on 01889 880100 or email info@staffs-wildlife.org.uk.

Your input please

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

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 simon@ctmd.co.uk

