

# Summer Newsletter 2023



To paraphrase one of the songs in my choir's current repertoire:

Oh the summertime was coming  
And the trees were softly blooming  
And the wild mountain thyme  
(Well, the version in my garden)  
Has flowered for the last six weeks non-stop  
probably because there has been hardly any rain for that long and it thinks  
it's been relocated to the south of France!

So, due to the paucity of precipitation, watering seedlings  
and just-established plants has been a major operation for some time.  
A burden that is now somewhat relieved by ...  
Jake's Marvellous Irrigation System!



Via a cunningly devised drip-tape/pipe/pump combo water is now fed from the West Reservoir  
direct to some of the meadow beds. Supplier-willing this will be rolled out to the remaining  
beds.

Despite summer surprising us with its early arrival the orchard still delighted in May with fabulous flowers and lush greenery.



The quince tree, (which to my knowledge hasn't flowered in the last 5 years), astounded expectation.



Lord Lambourne was loaded, and Arthur Turner was particularly pretty in pink

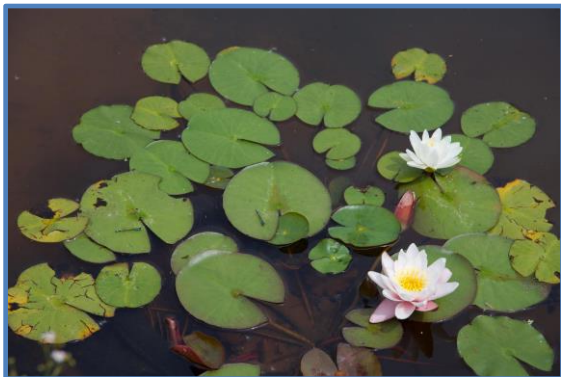
It was wonderful to see that we have cowslips at the bottom of our orchard.

Every variety helps ...





There has been plenty to interest in, and around, the Wildlife Pond, with the emergence of froglets, dragonflies, damselflies, newts, and flowers



**Are you sitting comfortably? Then here is the story of how Exeter Growers Co-operative began, as told by David and Richard.**

Many thanks to Nicola Belbin for archive material and for being there. Jx

## **Exeter Growers Co-Operative: did it arise from nowhere?**

Well, nothing does. Everything has origins. Here's an outline.

In July 2007, Nicola Beglin, David Mezzetti and Peter Hanson (the drivers behind Low Carbon Exeter - forerunner of Transition Exeter) met at Shillingford Organics, with Martyn and Andy Bragg, Jenny ?, Mary Quicke and Tom Langdon-Davies for a round table supper to answer the question from Emma Parkin "how can we turn the fields around Exeter into a supply chain for the City, instead of all the produce heading into the global marketplace".

Andy and Nicola took up the challenge. It was a period when Community-Supported Agriculture initiatives were taking off in parts of the UK. The CSA model is well embedded in America - its bare bones being a paid grower, subscribers for produce and a volunteer/member body giving their time and commitment.

What about land? Well of course Andy had a 27-acre field, Soil Association certified and became enthusiastic about renting off 5 acres for a community growing enterprise. This is a very long story of Andy and Nicola and a couple of others researching, finding out what has and hasn't worked, trips to projects in the west country, all to the beating voice of the oil price (Brent Crude reached \$149 per barrel by July 2008) while food price inflation was gathering pace and fears for the resilience of the food system were taking hold.

To cut a long story a bit short, in early 2008 a small group accompanied Andy and Nicola to Crossland's Field to take a look and imagine what was possible. It doesn't take much imagination to realise how inspiring that first visit must have been. The south-east corner of the field immediately became the focus.

Between the spring of 2008 and the autumn, the word was out that something could happen - community-led. Nicola fronted the preparations for a launch meeting. It took place with over 100 interested folk, in Alphington School Hall on Tuesday 16 September, the day after the largest collapse and bankruptcy in corporate history - Lehmann Brothers in New York.

## EXETER COMMUNITY AGRICULTURE



# COME AND SHARE THE HARVEST!

**An exciting new food partnership between farmers and the local community is setting up on the outskirts of Exeter.**

### LAUNCH MEETING

**Tuesday 16 September • 7.00pm**

Alphington Primary School, Wheatsheaf Way, Exeter

**COME ALONG TO FIND OUT MORE**

4 acres of high grade, organic land has been offered for rent on the outskirts of Exeter – the equivalent of 100 standard allotment strips.

As a member you may wish to subscribe and receive produce;  
or you may wish to help formulate the direction of the project and/or work on the land.

By joining this project you'll be able to know where your food comes from, support the local economy and help build a future based on sustainable agriculture.

**For further information please contact Nicola Beglin on 01392 277490 or [nbeglin@ukonline.co.uk](mailto:nbeglin@ukonline.co.uk)**

As with these initiatives, almost too many creative ideas were put forward to deal with! We had no name or organisational/legal identity. That would come after follow-up meetings - which maintained the momentum created by the launch and in early 2009 Exeter Community Agriculture (ECA) was registered as a Co-Operative under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1965.

The CSA model (a paid grower with community membership and buy-in) remained within the DNA of the founders, but before anything could take shape or demonstrate viability there was land that needed to become 'our own'. A 27-acre, south-facing pasture field out of which we were to take a little bite of 5 acres. What needed to be done and how did we manage it? This is the story of 2009/10 when we were so keen to get going, the fencing would have to come later.....



The view, early 2008 looking South from the middle of Andy's field. ECA's 5 acres are down the slope to the left.



Our first potato crop.



An Express and Echo article about us.



October 2009 ECA received a grant from the Co-op Community Fund for £1780.00 This helped us to erect the North and West fence and to plant a hedge.



We also received £500.00 from the Grassroots Fund to start planting out the orchard.

We must have had a small but good year in 2009 and felt we had huge potential. So, in 2010 we hit the road running. We had two potato strips ploughed down to the bottom of the field.





The harvest was too much for us to cope with, so most of the bagged potatoes were taken by Sara to be stored in Shillingford Organics cold storage.



Harvesting other crops



Trialing a delivery scheme to get produce to members in Exeter.





Winter 2009, planting broad beans in frozen earth, Peter having to use the heavy iron bar to punch through the frozen ground.



A view of the field, on a snowy December day in 2010, from Shillingford Wood.

2008 - 2010: this was the start of the venture. We will work through the story - the ups and downs - with each of the next 3 newsletters.

**David and Richard**

## Beginnings ...



## Plus Hard Work ...

Middle: Laura, and Stephen with Yaz



## Equals Fruition ...



**Top:** Richard and apprentice, seedlings germinated in the small polytunnel, unidentified green veg (celeriac?)  
**Bottom:** A melon-that-you-use-as-a-cucumber, coriander seed, splendid lettuce (Courtesy of Laura, Rachel and Emma)

## **Anyone for Tea?**

At EGC Acres we are very fond of our tea. Especially the communal cup at lunchtime. But we also rely on some seriously smelly brews to nourish our plants; comfrey, seaweed and dung (Black Gold), are all natural 'starters', which steeped in water and left covered\* for several weeks provides a liquid fertilizer to dilute and delight our crops.

A recent article, by Claire Ratinon, gleaned from a weekend supplement, suggests using willow leaves, chopped and steeped, to make a solution which encourages strong root systems in young plants and can be used to soak softwood cuttings, to help them take. Apparently, it contains two substances, Indolebutyric acid (a hormone that promotes the growth of roots) and Salicylic acid (that stimulates plant's natural defence systems).

Now if there is one resource, we have in abundance it's willow, so a trial of willow tea may soon appear on our menu.

\*(a cover is a necessity – to hide the awful aroma)

## **A Further 5 Minutes**

I happened upon a most interesting video about making liquid fertilizer, as one does, in which it was shown that a summer feed made from cleavers\*, comfrey and nettles – pack a bin with them, submerge in water, loosely cover with lid, leave for weeks – can be poured (undiluted) onto beans, courgettes, melons, tomatoes, aubergine and peppers to promote healthy growth.

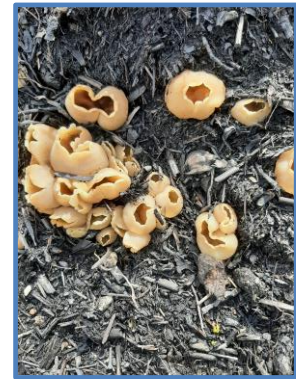
The very pleasant, Australian presenter also suggested a winter mix; animal manure, coffee grouts, seaweed, which are layered in a strong black sack, loosely 'turned' over many weeks and then used straight onto beds being prepared for spring sowing. It uses no water, does have to be covered with mypex, but would certainly make the supply of expensive manure go much further.

If only I could find re-usable containers other than black sacks ... and a substitute for the seaweed.

\*(goose grass or sticky weed) Black Gold Fertilizer by Organic Edible Garden

**Janet**

Some things just get on and grow:



Sage in glorious bloom, Cornflowers by the West Reservoir and an unusual fungi, which made its home on the black stuff ...

As usual, many thanks to all who contributed photos and special thanks to David and Richard for their article. Some items were omitted from this edition so it could be kept to a reasonable size for distribution, but may be included at a later date.

Janetx