

Gift to Nature Newsletter

ISSUE 6: SUMMER 2009

Gift to
Nature

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WELCOME!

Welcome to the summer Gift to Nature Newsletter. As I am sitting here writing this it is drizzling a little but still warm, and just a few days ago it was 29 degrees and I even ventured into the sea.

This fantastic combination of wet and warmth has led to a real botanical explosion at our sites. I am having to send my strimmers into overtime to keep the paths clear at both Totland Meadow and in the Orchard at Sandown. I visited both last week and was greeted by shoulder high bracken and only a vague sign of the path, where some brave walker has beaten through the wilderness. Sandown wetlands are well worth a visit at the moment, even when the temperature was threatening to top 30, the wet woodland was still cool with that fantastic earthy wood smell.

When we took a trip to Ventnor to check on the Lizard population we spotted in excess of thirty individuals on just a short stroll to our wall and around the gardens. The best time to see them basking is in the morning, before it is too hot and they retreat back inside the walls.

We were really pleased to meet some of you at the Isle of Wight Festival this year. We attended again to promote our Give Bees a Chance project, which is supported by the Festival. Gift to Nature created a chill-out area named The Hive, we were joined by Taste of the Wight and some Farmers' Market stalls. Our hope is that in addition to the individual stall holders making a bit of money, we can showcase some of the great things about the Island to encourage visitors to return for a holiday.

We did our fair share of fund raising, selling fluffy bees and providing post cards for people to write which we then posted. Our efforts resulted in just over £3,000 towards the research project on the Chines and Soft Cliffs. As part of our Bee project we are helping Isle of Wight Pearl by developing a wildflower meadow between their building and the cliff edge. Alongside our additions there is a fascinating variety of plants popping up that were either there in the soil waiting for a relaxation in the mowing schedule or are creeping up from the cliff and chine. **SAM BUCK**



Bee image courtesy of Caroline Knox
Broadfields Farm, Merstone

THINKING OF THE ENVIRONMENT

We are still aiming to send as many of our Newsletters by email as we can in future, so that valuable resources are saved for you and us. This leaves more money to spend on our wildlife projects.

We will post to those without email of course. If you receive a paper copy because we do not have your email address, or it has changed recently, please contact:

Lin Watterson, our Administrator lin@gifttonature.org.uk (Our phone number is on page 6)

If you have received this by email then please do let Lin know that you have your newsletter as we worry that it might have been lost in the world of Spam Filters and Anti-virus! Let us know what you think of the content if you like or send us anything of local interest.

WE NEED YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS

Every penny sent to us, plus a substantial amount more if you sign a Gift Aid declaration, goes to our Isle of Wight projects so please consider making your subscription a standing order once a year.

This saves the stamps and paper used sending out reminders and only works out at less than 29 pence a week. A number of our members are generous in pledging more than the standard £15 and we owe a huge thanks to the Walk Leaders, who collect hundreds of pounds for us as part of the IW Walking Festival. We have our Knitting For Nature section where mobile phone and ipod covers and crochet hats have raised over £100 this year and are gradually being sold nation wide via our website. We are a tiny organisation with a big heart and lots to do, so please continue to support our work.

Tree Anoraks

Contributed by Rowan Adams

We continue tree-obsessive Rowan's guide to being a spotter the easy way, watching out for things so big and unmoving you can't miss them - trees. The quickest way to find a particular tree species is to know when to look, because most trees are easier to spot at particular times of the year.

In late spring and early summer, usually in May, most trees put out their leaves. Some trees have young leaves which are a distinctive colour. One of these is the walnut, and the best time to go 'hunting' for walnuts is in May. Walnuts don't make themselves conspicuous the rest of the year. From a distance they look a bit like ash trees, with their grey bark, thick twigs, and green pinnate leaves. But the leaves first come out in a beautiful shade of translucent purplish crimson.

Watch out especially for walnut trees near farmhouses, probably dating from the 1940s when East Malling Research Station in Kent encouraged people all over Britain to plant walnuts.

If Gift to Nature get the Local Food grant we've applied for, we hope to carry on that tradition with the Island Fruit and Nuts project, and to encourage people to plant lots of walnuts and other fruit and nut trees.

Watch this space...



Photo Lime tree in flower. By Rowan Adams

Green Mum

Continuing our series with a new Mum, Betty B.

Summer is a great time to get in touch with your arty side, while still enjoying nature. This year we came across my old flower press. We made Grandma a beautiful birthday card from the ancient squashed flowers found inside the press then set about gathering some new ones. It is best to gather flowers from your garden or pick ones that are really common and where there are loads in one place and just take a few.



PHOTO Sage Blossom by Lin Watterson

You need to put the flower or leaf between two bits of white paper and separate each one with blotting paper. If you find some large specimens you can press them in a book, make sure you have enough paper so you don't mark the book. Set your flowers then load up with more heavy books and leave for a couple of weeks. Another great way to make use of the summertime bounty, especially if you don't mind getting a bit messy is to use flowers and vegetables for painting.

Experimentation is great fun but to get you started try: beetroot, carrots, green leaves, coffee grounds, flower petals, strawberries, grass. Some can be squidged straight on to paper. With others it helps to mash them up bit in a pestle and mortar with some water.

Cradle to Cradle

First in a series of book reviews by Rowan Adams: Spring and the cycle of new life

Snowdrops and daffodils, Easter eggs, new lambs bouncing round the fields on long legs - spring is the time of new life coming back after the seeming death of winter. Everything in nature is recycled round and round, endlessly renewing itself. There isn't any waste, because everything can be broken down into the nutrients needed to make new life.

How do human creations compare? Have we learnt how to make all our waste into a resource that can be re-used not just once (polyester bottles into polyester fleece jackets, for example) but for ever? No, not yet, but we could. A new paperback book could help us to imagine how to do it.

'Cradle to cradle: remaking the way we make things' by Michael Braungart and William McDonough (Vintage, 2009, ISBN 9780099535478) is a challenging book. Not because it's hard going - it's short, and an enjoyable and easy read. But the authors, a chemist and an architect, challenge the basic assumptions most of us have about waste. They point out that when we talk about throwing something away, that actually there is no 'away'. We've only got one home planet, and all our waste is still here with us until we find a way to re-use it. So they have started to work out how we can make things differently, so that right from the start we're planning how one day they can be disassembled and their ingredients re-used. Their guiding principle is 'waste equals food', and that we need to understand that manufacturing uses what they call 'technical nutrients' or 'industrial nutrients' such as metals and plastics, just as living beings are made from 'biological nutrients'.

Read it and start disassembling all your assumptions about recycling.

LOCAL PRODUCE: OIL OF WIGHT

by Caroline Knox

Oil of Wight: There's oil in those fields!! As I write this the Parish is highlighted with bright yellow fields as the Oil Seed Rape has come into full flower brightening the landscape. The crops are patchworked with the green wheat fields and the brown soil awaiting cauliflower plants. While most of us realise where cauliflowers are sold, and that wheat is milled to flour to give us bread, cakes, pasta, sauces and so on, sometimes it's hard to remember why we grow Oil Seed Rape. The yellow flowers are fertilised by myriad bees that benefit from the plentiful nectar. The flowers produce shiny, black oil rich seeds in pods which, like wheat, are combine harvested in the summer then processed to produce the end product. The seeds are sold to be processed into vegetable oil where a combination of heat and solvent extraction produces the maximum yield of oil for sale as 'vegetable oil' or 'cooking oil' in generic containers.

By employing a simple cold pressing technique a lower yielding, but highly attractive and flavoursome oil, is gently extracted from the seeds. The process ensures a pure, healthy oil retaining all the natural goodness of the seeds. Small scale cold pressing plants have sprung up throughout the country and the Isle of Wight has its very own 'Oil of Wight' plant in Merstone. This local rapeseed oil is grown, cold pressed and bottled in Merstone by Caroline Knox and is sold in many outlets including Farmer Jacks, Briddlesford Farm Shop, Hamiltons Butchers, The Garlic Farm and Godshill Cider Barns among other Island-wide outlets.

Rapeseed Oil is often compared to Olive Oil and it is certainly as flexible as its Mediterranean cousin with a comparably distinctive flavour. It has additional health

benefits with half the saturated fat of Olive Oil and ten times more Omega 3.

The ratio of Omega 6 to Omega 3 in Oil of Wight Rapeseed oil is the ideal ratio for the bodies needs to protect the heart and lower cholesterol. The oil is also a natural source of Vitamin E. It's good for the environment too. It is grown using sustainable farming practices in fields that can be seen from the pressing and bottling plant and, being sold on the Island, it has very low food miles. Rapeseed oil has a multitude of uses. You can create dressings or marinades as the nutty back note compliments many dishes. It has a higher smoke point than olive oil so is great for stir frying and produces wonderfully crispy roasted vegetables. It can be used as a substitute for butter or margarine when you bake, or make bread. In fact I have been told it adds an extra day's shelf life to home made loaves.

Recipe: Courgette Cake

250g courgettes, 2 large eggs
125ml Oil of Wight 150g caster sugar
225g self raising flour 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
1 tsp baking powder 2 x 21 cm sandwich tins
Preheat the oven to 180C /Gas mark 4

FILLING

200g cream cheese 100g icing sugar (sieved)
Juice and zest of one lime

CAKE

Coarsely grate the courgettes
Put Oil of Wight, eggs and sugar into a bowl and whisk until creamy.
Sieve in the flour, bicarb and baking powder and mix.
Stir in the courgette.
Pour mix into tins and bake for 30 mins.
Turn out onto wire rack after allowing to cool for a few minutes.

FILLING

Combine all ingredients. Fill cake when cool and refrigerate. Dust with icing sugar and ENJOY!



POTTERING

Lin Watterson Gift to Nature Honorary Administrator

We have just completed a major overhaul of our pond as the liner sprang a leak in early spring. With the help of a keen young neighbour the water was saved in a large bucket and the primeval slime at the bottom was carefully sifted to gently remove anything wriggling and visible to the naked eye. Lots of Freshwater Shrimps were returned to the pond. It was established in 2000 and this is the second overhaul. Last time the pond was pierced by a bamboo root! In the intervening years the technology has improved and it is now possible to buy a “stab-proof” lining which will even fend off bamboo spears underground!



Over the years the pond has housed several frogs and a resident toad, which lived for several years under the large damaged pot on the right of the photo. However the biggest surprise was that we found 28 adult newts! The largest number were Smooth Newts but there were a good number of Palmate newts which are easy to spot as their back feet are darkly webbed as if they are wearing gloves! This made me concerned as I have found out that Palmate Newts hibernate in piles of leaves (another reason for not being a fussy gardener!) They emerge from hibernation in early March and the breeding season continues until late May so I needed to get them back into the pond as quickly as possible and try to make sure that they had food. The area around my pond had to be tidied so I came up with the idea of a Newt Haven at the edge of the pond to provide holiday accommodation and meals! Newts are friendly to gardens as they eat small slugs and other invertebrates that they find such as woodlice. Of course they also eat tadpoles, fish eggs, snail eggs and other tasty treats in the water and if you have a mixed pond they will control other species. They need to get in and out of the water so I gave my newts a log to climb out onto while we hastily remade their pond.

I collected up a wheelbarrow full of broken and damaged terra cotta pots which could be piled to give Newt-friendly damp and dark corners. I also planted some damp-loving potted plants which could spread over the pots including Ferns, Hostas, Erigeron daisies which tumble over other plants. I planted Clematis to ramble over a stump and provide seed heads and left in place several Sedum spectabile (Ice Plants) which will feed bees in late summer. To stop too much slug and snail damage I coiled scrap copper wire around a piece of dowelling and tucked the coils under the Hosta leaves and around other susceptible plants. (Scrapyards often have offcuts of copper wire and this is much cheaper than buying copper rings and recycles useless lengths of wire instead of using new materials.) So far this has worked well. Other slug deterrents include sharp sand, crushed egg shells and Holly leaf litter. The confused and irritated slugs are readily devoured by the Newts!

During July the adult newts will leave the water, males absorbing their crests and tail filaments and becoming more drab in appearance. They are fully terrestrial during August and September, preparing for hibernation by feeding on worms and other small invertebrates. With a little help the cycle will continue for many years to come.

Climate-friendly Gardening.

Contributed by Rowan Adams, Fruit and Nuts Project Volunteer

First article of a series on climate-friendly gardening for Gift to Nature early summer 2009

Doomed! We're all doomed! Those of us who grew up on Dad's Army may have acquired some immunity to extreme pessimism from the vaccinating effect of Private Fraser's catchphrase. But it can still feel sometimes as though there's nothing much that small individuals can do to help prevent climate change. Al Gore in his film 'An Inconvenient Truth' says that people often move straight from denial to despair about climate change, instead of actually doing something.

So in the next few newsletters we'll include some of the things we can do in our gardens to protect the climate and protect ourselves from the despair of feeling helpless. Everything is connected, and there isn't



necessarily one place to start that's better than any other, but let's start with mulch, the loft insulation of gardening, because it keeps soil temperatures stable, warmer in winter and cooler in summer. It stabilises soil moisture as well - soil just underneath mulch is moist even in hot dry weather.

Mulches made from organic materials also add organic matter to the soil, directly by adding new organic matter, and indirectly by protecting the organic matter already

there in the soil. Organic matter is broken down more quickly in exposed hot soil than in cooler soil protected by mulch.

Most gardeners know already from experience how a good thick mulch of compost, bark chips, or composted wood chips can help their plants to grow and stay healthy.

But what not many people have heard about yet is that the biggest store of carbon is reckoned to be the organic matter, or humus, in soil - as much as there is in all the living organisms, on land or in water, both in the UK and worldwide. Most soils contain somewhere between 2 and 15% organic matter, and we can increase the amount by how we manage the land.

So when gardeners look after their soil and plants with mulch, we're also using one of the most powerful ways of absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere - protecting soil carbon stores with mulch.

PHOTO : ROWAN ADAMS

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