



# Spring News

Newsletter No. 43 April 2012

[www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org](http://www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org)

## Rite of Spring

In the last week of March we picked our very first new season radish. This is the first vegetable to be sown and harvested this year.

We have plenty of vegetables ready to harvest at the moment: purple sprouting broccoli, cauliflower, spring cabbage, leeks and salad, all planted in the late summer last year.



There aren't any other new season crops (besides the radish) maturing yet and as we go into May the over wintered crops will end. There is then a gap in the vegetable production between when the old crops end and the new crops mature. This gap is commonly called the 'hungry gap'. We use the polytunnels to bring crops on earlier but there still is a shortage during May and June. We buy in extra veg for the share during the hungry gap, vegetables grown in the southern European countries or in heated UK glasshouses.

With the very dry winter and early spring we have been able to get on and cultivate the ground and plant the potatoes, onions and early



crops. Hopefully it will rain soon to water them in and hopefully this very warm dry weather doesn't make for a very hot dry summer. We have a lot of seedlings in trays in the greenhouse in the walled garden at the moment. These are grown in trays on heated benches and will be planted out in the next few weeks.

Our non-edible crops are also growing well. These clovers and ryecorn grasses are coming out of their winter dormancy. We are grazing the sheep on the ryecorn at Brookthorpe and then we will plough in the stubble to provide extra fertility for the soil. The clovers will be left to grow for another year and will be mown a few times over the season to allow the green matter to breakdown in the soil and so improve the quality of the soil.

Let's hope we have a good season, with no extreme weather and no more challenges than normal.

*Mark*

## Farm Days – Saturday Afternoons

Farm days are held monthly, alternating between the two farms. They are a time for everyone to come together and help out with some jobs on the farm, and enjoy a social time.

The next farm days are 1.30 to 4.30pm on: **Saturday 28 April at Brookthorpe; Saturday 26 May at Hawkwood**; Sat 23 June at Brookthorpe; and Sat 28 July at Hawkwood.

There will be cakes and tea for an afternoon break. Everyone is welcome to come along, for as long as suits, to work, play or cheer. Look out for more events on email alerts.

## Variety, Season and Choice

At SCA we have committed to provide our members with a **weekly vegetable share** throughout the year. This determines the setup of our farm. It was agreed in the early days of SCA to buy in locally in case the farm can't provide enough vegetables to make it a valuable share.



Locally means from local organic farms or CSAs like the potatoes we had recently from the CSA at Watchoak Farm in Thornbury, or through our local Stroud based wholesaler Global Organics. We source our vegetables preferably from the southwest, UK, sometimes the continent, if it comes to carrots and onions to fill the hungry gap in May/June.

Our aim is to provide as many vegetables as possible within the range of **what is in season**. Of course most of it we grow ourselves.

Looking at the year we find a **7-month growing season** from April to October and a 5-month season of no to little growth from November to March. Normally our **stored winter vegetables** and those, which stay over winter in the field, last until April. The early spring vegetables are sown end of March/April if the weather allows us to work the land. It depends on the type of vegetable how long it takes until we can harvest, but we have to add at least 3 month growing time until we can start. That brings us up to July/August before there is a decent variety of a vegetable from our own land. Some items are a bit faster like lettuce, some stuff we **bring forward using polytunnels** like spring cabbage and beans. Other veg is sown in late autumn like broad beans to make it two weeks earlier into June. The overwintering of cabbages worked well

this year, last year it was a complete failure due to the long period of frost.

This brings us to the **influence of the weather** upon growing. Last year we had a very mild autumn, all our cabbages continued to grow into late November.

**Early purple sprouting broccoli** started in December, and we had purple sprouts in the share since January. Last year we had no purple sprouts because they were damaged by frost and pigeons in November already. The year before we lost the first lot of purple sprouts to the frost but had a reasonable amount in March/April. We usually plant our purple sprouts in July for to be harvested February - April or May if it is not too warm in March/April.

**Cauliflower:** We plant different varieties of cauliflower for harvest January to April. This year all goes to plan, last year it was a total loss, two years ago some were a bit early and got damaged by frost in December, but the late ones recovered from frost and were good.

**Carrots:** They are sown end of June for harvest from September onwards. This year we had carrots until 1<sup>st</sup> half of February but with increasing damage from carrot fly in spite of the fact that we had covered them with environmesh for protection. The harvest was half of what we get in a good year, because of the drought in July/August. Last year the harvest and quality was even worse, again due to drought in summer and damage by rabbits. We had less than a quarter of the usual harvest and had run out of carrots already in November. The year before we had a good carrot crop. We left them in the field protected with straw against frost and had our own supply until March.



That shows how it can vary regardless of our planning. Our plans can be changed by weather, wildlife such as pigeons, rabbits, deer and badgers or **pests like carrot fly or leek moth**.



Seasonality has another aspect. Some items we can grow **almost all the year through**. Spinach and lettuce/salads belong in this category. Both can be grown in the polytunnel when the outside season ends. (Even in the polytunnel there is no growth in December/January. But it starts growing 2<sup>nd</sup> week of February, is in abundant production in March and goes into flower in April).

The so called **winter vegetables** can be stored or kept in the field. All the roots belong in this category and cabbages and squashes. That extends their season into spring and covers the time of no growth. Nature herself uses root plants for exactly the same purpose: To keep them alive and vibrant until they can flower and set seeds in the next year.

Vegetables like **courgettes, cucumbers and beans** need to be picked every other day once they are in production. That means for a couple of month we are flooded with these items. We try to stretch the season by using early and late varieties or growing beans first in the polytunnel, later in the walled garden. Last summer the cucumbers did very well and yielded until October by which time some people had certainly enough of them.

We increase variety with plants that wouldn't grow naturally in our climate by growing them in polytunnels. That allows us to put **cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, basil, coriander** and in winter salad packs into the share.

The variety of items we can choose of for the weekly share changes throughout the years but stays the same as long as these items are in season.

**Winter share Jan- March is composed of:**

- Potatoes our own supply will be
- Carrots replaced by bought in
- Onions veg as we run out
- Parsnips, celeriac, beetroot, swede, parsnips rotates weekly, own supply
- Leeks own supply almost every week
- Cabbage, brussels sprouts, kale, kohlrabi, purple sprouts, own supply weekly change
- Spinach, squash occasionally, own supply
- Salad pack own supply, some components might be bought in

**Spring share (the hungry gap) April - June**

- Potatoes bought in
- Carrots bought in, own carrots from polytunnel in June
- Onions bought in
- Purple sprouts, kale, savoy cabbage, cauliflower until May own supply
- Spring cabbage May/June own supply
- Spinach own
- Rhubarb own
- Radishes own
- Spring onions own
- Salad packs/lettuce own
- Broad beans own from June

**Summer share July – September**

- Potatoes bought in, own earlies mid July
- Carrots own, partly bought in depending on weather
- Onions own
- Beetroot own
- Broad beans own until end July
- Beans own weekly
- Cucumbers own weekly
- Courgettes own weekly
- Spinach own
- Tomatoes own from August weekly
- Sweetcorn own from August
- Broccoli, cabbage own
- Lettuce own

**Autumn share October – December**

- Potatoes own
- Carrots own
- Onions own
- Beetroot, turnips own
- Parsnips, swede own from December
- Tomatoes own fading out October/November
- Peppers own
- Squash own
- Sweetcorn own until October
- Cabbages, broccoli own
- Spinach own ends with frost Nov/December
- Brussels sprouts, kale own from December
- Lettuces/salad packs own

That brings us to the question of choice. We grow what soil, weather, climate, fertility and rotation allows us to grow and share the harvest evenly amongst all members. There it meets individual people with individual dietary needs, likes and



dislikes. It meets individuals who are part of the greater society which is used to have the full variety available each day of the year due to globalization. There is no need to put up with celeriac, swede and beetroot because tomatoes cucumbers and peppers are there as well. To address individual needs there is the gift box in the packing sheds where people can leave the items they don't want and take vegetables other members have left. Quite a lot of people make use of it. Some people don't collect what they don't want without using the gift box which prevents other members to make use of this items.

Some members have suggested offering more choice. The question would be how to set up such a system. It would need some sort of ordering system, which needs to be administered and paid for. The other question would be what kind of choice? Our own supply, which is limited by season and region or choice of what is available on the market? The latter would mean to shift the focus from growing into trading. Some box schemes work like this.

To be continued next newsletter with "Quality, Ecology, Carbon Foot Print".

*Ute*

## Happy 10<sup>th</sup> Birthday SCA !



## Polytunnels

We are planning to put up another two polytunnels at Hawkwood, in the field below the existing polytunnels. The trustees of Hawkwood have agreed to the proposal and the next stage will be to obtain planning permission. We plan to site the tunnels in the lower corner of the field out of sight as much as possible. We will also plant a hedge to provide further screening.

When, in 2003, we first asked the Trustees of Hawkwood if we could erect some tunnels they were very concerned about the impact on Hawkwood and the landscape. It seems that they value our presence highly; there has not been as much concern this time.

This proposal sparked a lot of discussion at the AGM with the concern voiced that erecting plastic tunnels over the land is detrimental to the earth and its life force. To me, the benefits of the tunnels seem obvious. We would have more vegetables, particularly valuable in the spring and hopefully, more tomatoes and peppers in the

summer. We currently have a 4-year rotation in the polytunnels, where a different type of crop is grown on each plot of land each year. Having a 4-year rotation in 3 polytunnels as we do now means that we have to have a mix of crops in each tunnel. This can make it difficult if they have different needs for watering or warmth etc. If we could extend the rotation to 5 years and expand the area of land used then this would relieve some of those pressures on the land.

I don't know if the effect on the land is detrimental or not. There certainly is an alteration to the soil. The tunnels do exclude natural rain from falling on the earth and the quality of the sunlight and warmth of the air is altered by the plastic. There also is a visual impact on the landscape. But the tunnels also bring an added life to the land, with a thriving community of people caring for the land and cultivating the soil.

**Mark**

## Hello Helen!

During my early years I lived in many different places in the UK, as dad was a civil engineer and moving on to the 'next project' was common for our family. After going to Sheffield University to study Genetics, I finally settled down in Sheffield where I lived for the following 15 years. After my degree I worked in research at Sheffield University, and soon discovered that spending my days working in a lab was not for me. I changed career to train as a Chartered Accountant, and after 5 years qualifying with my original firm, I then worked for Sheffield Hallam University. Even while I was still studying for the Chartered Accountancy exams I was planning my route out of the rat race, and 12 years ago, while still working full time, started my own business buying houses to renovate and sell or rent long term. The business was very successful and with the growth in property values over the subsequent years this allowed me to give up



working for other people (which I'm not designed for). I currently own property in Sheffield and Middleborough which I rent out.

In 2007 I met Gerald and we lived in Derbyshire where our little angel Olivia was born in July 2009. The following year we visited Cheltenham and just knew that the Cotswolds (and in particular the area around Stroud) was the place for us to live. Everything worked perfectly for us, Gerald then got a job based in Cheltenham and we moved to the heart of Painswick in May 2011. We felt at home immediately and love everything about the area. Olivia will start at Wynstones this September.

We became members of the SCA as soon as we moved and when I saw the request for a treasurer in the July newsletter, thought I would offer my services. I find being part of the SCA and being able to make a contribution to the running of the business rewarding and hope to be part of the SCA for many years to come.

Come along to  
**HAWKWOOD OPEN DAY** Mon 7th May 10-5



**HAWKWOOD  
OPEN DAY**

MONDAY 7th May 10am-5pm  
**FREE taster workshops, Fun,  
Music & Maypole**

Hawkwood College, STROUD GL6 7QW

**01453-759034**  
[www.hawkwoodcollege.co.uk](http://www.hawkwoodcollege.co.uk)

We hope to see SCA farm members at Hawkwood College Open Day on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> May. A full programme will soon be on our website, but meanwhile, be prepared for an impressive range of free taster workshops in creativity, arts and crafts, personal development, health and music. Many tutors will be on hand to tell you about their work. It's great day out for all the family and includes storytelling, music and singing during the day, as well as a herb walk, treasure hunt (12.30pm £1 per child), raffle and Maypole dancing (about 3.30pm).

Delicious snacks and meals, a BBQ, cakes and ice cream will be available. Entry is free, but there is a small £2 per car parking charge on the SCA field (thank you Sam and Mark!). Call for more information and open day timetable. Tel: 01453-759034 [www.hawkwoodcollege.co.uk](http://www.hawkwoodcollege.co.uk). Hawkwood College, Stroud GL6 7QW.

**Volunteers** are welcome to help with car park direction, setting up, clearing up etc. If you feel part of Hawkwood and all we do here, please get in touch and we will happily put you to work on this fantastic community occasion!

Happy Spring and see You Soon!

Katie

Katie Lloyd-Nunn, tel 01453 759034

email: [katie@hawkwoodcollege.co.uk](mailto:katie@hawkwoodcollege.co.uk)



## **Biodynamic Preparation Making**

**Wednesday 9th May 2012  
10.00 - 16.00**

at

**Stroud Community Agriculture - Brookthorpe**



*Cow horns - Photo: Ute Schossmacher October 2011*

We will spend the day digging out the biodynamic preparations we made last autumn. These include horn manure and many of the compost preparations - dandelion, yarrow, chamomile, oak bark.

These preparations will supply Stroud Community Agriculture, the Severn Valley regional group and the national BDAA store at the Grange in Newnham which provides preparations for biodynamic farmers and gardeners across the UK. Those who were present in October will remember the large number of horns we buried!

We also plan to make horn silica preparation and yarrow and of course see something of the farm during the day. Please bring a packed lunch and outdoor clothing. We will be working outside but can take shelter in the barn if it rains.

**Everyone Welcome**

FFI please contact Bernard Jarman  
Tel. 01453 757436 or email: [orion@phoncoop.coop](mailto:orion@phoncoop.coop)



## Stroud Community Agriculture

Everyone is welcome to join in and enjoy the farm, including non-members.

We are looking for new members for the farm. Please tell everyone you know about us. If you know of an event or somewhere that you think would be good for us to promote the farm, please let the core group know. We work to the following principles:

- *To support organic and biodynamic agriculture.*
- *To pioneer a new economic model based on mutual benefit and shared risk and ensure that the farmers have a decent livelihood.*
- *To be fully inclusive. Low income shall not exclude anyone.*
- *To be transparent in all our affairs. To make decisions on the basis of consensus wherever possible. To strive towards social justice.*
- *To encourage practical involvement on all levels.*
- *To offer opportunities for learning, therapy and re-connecting with the life of the earth.*
- *To network with others to promote community supported agriculture to other communities and farms and share our learning (both economic and farming).*
- *To encourage Stroud Community Agriculture members, in co-operation with the farmers, to use the farm for their individual and social activities and celebrations.*
- *To develop a non-exclusive sense of community around the farm.*

### Core Group

The core group meets one evening a month. For dates, venues & times, contact Sue Dance.

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For more information please contact Jade on [jadebashford@hotmail.com](mailto:jadebashford@hotmail.com)

*Photos by Ute & Francis*

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