

Word from the secretary

As Arkwright would say, it's been a funny ol day – well – six months. SEEWEN has been active in our own way. We have watched awe inspiring films, held stands at local events, sold plants for all we're worth and watched our allotment blossom. But our head office has been quiet. We believe tumbleweed is present! Funding for our national organization is hard work and somewhere along the line it's believed too hard. We feel such a local active group like ours needs to know our head office is available to support us when necessary. A few long standing members are going for a day trip so we can find out what is happening.

On a lighter note, life by the railway line is good. How can it not be with summer here? The nettles, convulvulus and various berries make a lovely backdrop to my garden, which hosted a social evening in May. We managed to sit in the garden for a while until it was too chilly (and the pizza's had arrived). It was a pleasant evening with no business talk.

We have new residents in the garden. I am keeping hens again. After a heart breaking nine months without hens, I bit the bullet and upgraded my old chicken house and run for a larger one, so my three ladies have lots of room. I cannot let them Free Range here like I could before because of the high-density fox population, so a larger fox proof run was an essential. They are moved to a fresh patch of grass every three days and allowed out when I have some gardening to do or am in the garden for an extended amount of time. They even come in the front garden with me most weekends as the front garden has more upkeep than the back. It is most amusing to hear people's comments on seeing them on their way to town! I didn't just get them for eggs...they are excellent at food disposal. Too much pasta cooked? If there's no sauce on it the hens have it. Too much rice? Same thing. Left over veg, or veg that is on the turn is a treat to them. As for pepper cores, its one of their favorites! You have to be careful with how much bread they have though, as its packed with calories. Two of them are laying an egg a day at the moment, the third is yet to start – I have taken her to one side on several occasions about it, but it seems to fall on deaf ears! Maybe I should show her some Paxo? The eggs they lay are smaller than the ones from supermarkets, but taste so much nicer! The yokes are more yellow (too much sweetcorn). Their poo is fantastic for the veg patch, or as an accelerator for the compost bin as its high in nitrogen. It is not recommended for the flowerbeds 'fresh' as its too strong. I would recommend keeping hens to anyone with a garden. After the cost of the house and run, they are very low maintenance. You don't have to have a cockerel, and they bring great interest to the garden.

Text Alerts

If you wish to receive information on the next WEN event direct to your mobile, text 'Yes Please' with your name to 07941154166. You will not be charged for any texts you receive, and you can cancel at any time by texting 'no more' to the same number. It's a great way to receive a little reminder in the busy world we live in.



INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY – review by Kara MacKay

International Women's Day is held annually on 8th March, thousands of events are held throughout the world to inspire women and celebrate achievements.

On Saturday 5th March 2011, SEEWEN had the exciting opportunity to join in the celebrations of International Women's Day in the atrium of South Essex College. Hosted by the Turning Tides Team, there was a wide variety of entertainment and stalls. Entertainment was provided by the Essex Stars Cheerleading Squad, Louise Jordan and Blossoms on the Oasis belly dancers who also encouraged people to participate.

This was a great opportunity for SEEWEN to network and links were reinforced with the international food stalls, which we have worked with in the past. New links were also forged with other local groups like the WRVS and minds. Our stall had many visitors interested in SEEWEN and in particular the allotment. It was a great day out with everyone from the group volunteering there time on the day.

News from our travelling WEN...

Thought I would let you know that we can now reverse in the van - I have developed good muscles from pushing the van out of parking spaces but as from yesterday afternoon I no longer have to!!! We are in a site that is about 200 yards from the coast, called Argeles-sur-Mer. Having a lovely time, although being a popular place it is very noisy at night. There are always cons but the pros are good. We have been to a bar near here a couple of times that sells 80 different beers. Having a lovely time working our way through them. I had a smashing framboise beer. David and his girlfriend are with us so we manage 4 different ones at a time and then taste each others - so not such a headache marathon!! When David comes home we are heading further west and eventually aiming at Biarritz.

Jamming with Jelly

Simon who works in Southend Library is selling homemade jams and jellies in aid of SPANA (www.spana.org) which is a charity that works in some of the world's poorest countries, improving the lives of working animals and the people who depend on them. Perhaps you'd like to spread the word and spread the jam (couldn't resist that!). Please call Simon on 01702 311643 for information on what flavours are available!

Summer Cycling news.

Lisa finally got round to getting her bike 'tagged' at an event run by Southend CDRP at Chalkwell station. It only takes about 10 minutes to get your bike tagged. The friendly team take a picture of your bike, remove the saddle and put your tag down the seat tube, take your details and that's it! A few days later you get your copy of the registration form. If the bike is now stolen / recovered then the chip inside is traced back to you. Not bad for a free service! There is a bike tagging event is being held at Manchester Drive allotments on the 6th August. Why not pop along to the plot afterwards!

Friends of the Earth have launched a range of Eco Friendly products for your bike. They are 100% biodegradable and in packaging that's easy to recycle. Buy from FOE shop and all profits will support their campaigns. For more information, go to www.foe.co.uk/shop

www.netmums.com if you haven't heard of it, is an information centre for mums (and dads). The easy to use website has lots of different areas covering 'things to do', 'local information', 'lifestyle' as well as recipe ideas and a very active forum area. Would anyone be interested in contribution to the website on behalf of WEN? Maybe in line with the allotment? Please email for more details.

Home made wormeries by Gwen Simpson

Working with a small group of service users at Trust Links, Growing Together Project, we set out to construct a wormery, without spending any money on equipment.

We used, a large storage box slightly larger than veg boxes.

2 bricks on end to support veg boxes

3 plastic veg boxes

cardboard box

newspaper

composted soil



The base of the wormery and the two stacking tiers are discarded vegetable boxes. We lined the sides of the bottom one with cardboard cut to fit, in order that the worms and initial layer of soil would not fall out. Underneath the 2" layer of soil we placed a layer of newspaper soaked in water, then the kitchen waste was added.



Subsequent boxes are placed on top and as the worms eat their way through the kitchen waste of the bottom one, they will eventually migrate up into the next layer, through the holes in the base of the next tray.



These trays have been balanced on two bricks placed inside a plastic container. This is to allow any liquid that is produced to drip through (and saved) and keep the worms from drowning.

Though we were able to construct the wormery itself from found items, we have not as yet received the worms that were promised us by various people, so we might be forced to purchase them. Though we have sited the wormery in a cool place under a tree, it is not keeping the torrential rain off, and the lid constructed from a cardboard box is proving extremely ineffectual, what is really needed is for a lid slightly larger than the vegetable box made of plastic or wood.



As this is a new experiment, only constructed a few weeks ago, it will be some time before I can report how well or badly this experiment has gone !

Some wormeries can be made to go under the kitchen sink, or kept out on a balcony. If you are contemplating making one yourself, there is a wealth of information on how to construct wormeries on the Internet, and it is worth looking at you-tube videos on making wormeries, one or two are extremely amusing.

National WEN news

Have you paid your membership yet? Remember, joining is easy and all monies raised help keep National WEN running.

Please access the WEN website from www.everyclick.co.uk to raise even more money.

DigIn News

Now in its 3rd year the Dig In is definitely a 'home from home' for some of our members who are enjoying the lovely surroundings at the plot and also the fruits –and veg!- of their labours.

Sharon is developing a herb area with planters which are to be made from recycled wood. Gwen, one of our new members has been ably assisting with this.

Dave has been the usual trooper doing a lot of the heavy digging and helping Pauline during our "drought" period with the watering every day.

We are missing Carol and Bill –not just for their hard work and expertise but also their lovely company- whilst they are away in France.

We were very pleased to have new members join up to the plot. Jackie and Alma have been a real asset as they knuckled down to any task that was suggested and have also taken over responsibility for the Wildflower border.

We have battled with the weeds using a lawnmower donated by Rob Bates and the loan of a strimmer by Eileen's neighbour.

THE ALLOTMENT SITTING AREA - Work on the pond and quiet sitting area is coming along nicely, if a bit slow! My son has agreed to make a bench to go under the willow 'shelter' but he has chosen to move house this summer so the bench has been put on the back boiler for a while. We have, however, been given some lovely oak planks by Southend Parks Department so they are waiting patiently to be lovingly turned into a beautiful seat. We also have a wood carver ready to carve a few words on the back rest, so if you can think of some suitable words (just a very short sentence) then let us know and we will have a vote on which we'd like to use. So far we've had a couple of suggestions - 'On a day like this anything is possible' and 'Be still and enjoy the moment' and other similar ideas Let's be hearing yours.

I've got some camomile coming along nicely at home - hope to put some down around the seat although in the past I've had little success growing camomile.

THE POND - We have had the problem of plastic lining still showing round the edges of the pond. . The pond plants are slowly spreading round but the 'beach' area (left shallow for creatures to venture in for a drink) still looks very plasticky. John Longhurst who is advising us on the pond suggested we get a couple of grass turves and put them along the 'beach' upside down which is what we have done. We should now get some wild flower seed specially chosen for damp places and sprinkle them along. That's on the 'work to do' list! The turves will sort of act like wicks and keep wet and, hopefully, we will be rewarded by a fine display of water edge plant-life.

Our wildlife spotting at the pond has so far identified several damselflies who were mating – the male on top of the female and forcing her down into the water so she would lay her eggs under the duck weed. (So, from now on we'll have to stop using our little fishing net to keep the duckweed under control).

Pond skaters' whiz about on the surface and snail trails show up in the mud at the bottom of the pond. John has suggested we might like to introduce a few more snails and perhaps some daphnia to attract wildlife.

The Summer Solstice celebration is always a special time at DIG IN (our community allotment in Leigh) so once again we set the date for Saturday 25th June to get-together to celebrate mid summer, our vegetable beds bulging with produce and the fun we all have together. This year we were lucky in that it was a bit warmer than last year (when we sat and shivered!) but we were not so fortunate in the number of people who were able to come along. Dates always clash, some people had other things on, and then there were those who had not been to DIG IN before but set out to join the party only to discover they couldn't locate the allotments!

Still, few in number we might have been, but we had a lovely evening with shared food and drink and we were joined briefly by an adjoining young plot holder and her mum, new to food growing, who were enthusing about how their crops were coming on ... what a pleasure it is to share news about how prolific your courgettes are and how well the tomatoes are coming on!

We'll be having our next social get-together at the plot at the end of the season to celebrate Nov 5 - be good if you could come and join us for that.

LET'S 'RECLAIM' CHRISTMAS

In a recent newspaper feature, someone when asked 'What makes you unhappy' replied 'Christmas'. That really made me think: Just what has happened to Christmas?

After all, when people are asked 'what makes you unhappy?' you would expect them to say something like 'world poverty' or 'cruelty to children' but 'Christmas' is supposed to be a time of joy and goodwill.

So, does Christmas make some people feel unhappy, and if so, why?

A quick check among family and friends gave me the impression that Christmas, while being jolly for many, with good times spent with loved ones, also brings with it lots of stress, financial hardship and loneliness. After all, aren't we all supposed to be enjoying the festive season in the bosom of our families when in reality many folk spend their Christmas Day alone.? Aren't we all encouraged to spend time tracking down just the right gift when in reality we end up with a massive credit card bill which hangs over us well into the New Year? And, isn't the spirit of love and joy which is the basis of the Christmas season just swamped by the mad dash of consumerism.

A festival which is supposed to be centred around love, joy and togetherness has been taken over by the market and turned into a competition where we are encouraged to buy bigger and better Christmas trees, decorations, gifts and food. Just go into a supermarket a couple of days before Christmas to get a sense of the frantic scrabble which has come, for many, to epitomise Christmas. A festival in the dark days of winter pre-dates Christmas: even those who are not Christians feel the need for an uplifting festival to help us through the dark days of winter. So, how can we begin to focus on the true meaning of Christmas? How can we begin to look for those who are on their own and feeling left out of the festivities? How can we encourage less consumption and competition and more creativity and collaboration?

We are setting up a working group to look at ways in which we can take small steps to 'reclaim' Christmas from the market. .If you would like to join us please call.

Eileen on 078 1369 3107

Diary dates

4th September – opening day at the allotment. Why not come along and see what we've been growing? A great time to be inspired ready for next year.

19th September – SEEORG are hosting an Essex Bee night! Contact Carole for further details - caroleshorney@hotmail.com

29th September – Roots of Change meeting. Venue to be arranged.

15-16th October - Apple day, with SEEORG – watch this space for further details!