

Gardening Advice - Chepstow Open Gardens Tour - August 2010

JULIANS

First stop, Julian's amazing garden & greenhouses in Caldicot, growing all sorts of delights & impressive well hung cucumbers!

French Beans don't need assistance with pollination but Julian suggests growing by the door
Each year Julian adds soil improver to the soil in the greenhouse but doesn't remove the existing soil, he instead ensures he swaps the veg around – this year the tomatoes are growing where the cucumbers were.
Julian grafts his cucumbers and tomatoes

Jostaberry – a cross between a gooseberry and a blackcurrant.

Chinese Wine berry, very yummy.

Mustard can be grown as a green manure but can promote clubroot.

There is a Red potato variety that slugs don't like to eat – ask Julian for more info.

MARK & NIGE'S

Then back to Chepstow to a wonderful insect oasis tucked between the houses & an amazing bee hotel!

Some of the notable plants we saw:

- Phacelia – is a good green manure, dig it in before it flowers. It is very easy to grow.
- Burnet Saxifrage, a small umbellifer which is good for flies & hoverflies
- Scabious – can get a white variety
- Bergamot
- Evening Primrose is good for moths
- Golden Beetroot – has leaves like Swiss chard that can be eaten, & golden fruits rather than the pesky red ones that stain everything!
- Sweet Mace Herb
- Siberian Catmint. Mark & Nige source their herbs from Jekkas Herb Farm in Bristol.
- Nasturtiums – the flowers are great in salads

Bee Houses:

- You can use untreated or old treated wood (that has lost its 'treatment'). The older the wood the better.
- Drill different size holes, even tiny ones with the smallest drill bit you have
- Can use old bamboo canes tied together or Oxford Bee Tubes.
www.birdfood.co.uk/pages.php?area_id=3&nav_id=121
- You need a roof over the tubes to keep the rain off.
- In the winter move the bee house & inhabitants into a cool dry place such as a shed & bring them out again on 1st March. Don't keep them in the warm, the bees will desiccate.
- Leafcutter bees will clean out their old tubes and reline with leaves for them to use again!
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Mini greenhouse

I think this is the company that sell those lovely wall standing greenhouses;

<http://www.garden-products.co.uk/customer/home.php>

ALI & TIM'S

Apart from the good crop of weeds, the star attraction was the chickens.

If you are interested in getting chickens, check out the Battery Hen Welfare Trust (now British Trust) www.bhwt.org.uk. They are bald for a while so not always the best looking hens, but they have hens coming out of farm every month & always looking for new homes. They are approx 1 year old when they leave, hens generally lay for a few years but it really depends on the individual.

On sunny days, they will each lay an egg so are fairly productive.

If they are confined to an area of the garden, they do tend to turn the area into bare earth but if you want them free ranging, it is supposed to be possible to train them to stay out of an area!

For a small number of hens, I don't think you can keep them for economical reasons; the set up costs are the biggest expense (hen houses cost from £200 but you can pick up second hand ones; just clean them well first).

Food for 4 hens is approx £10 for 4/5 weeks supply; ex-bats can be given greens, kitchen scraps (except meat & raw potato peelings) but only as a treat otherwise their egg production drops.

If you want a productive 'pet', with lots of character & have fresh, tasty eggs each day, they are a delight. Happy to answer questions, if anyone is thinking of getting them.

BRYONY'S

An amazing fig tree, some unusual ivy topiary & of course, having lunch with stunning views over the River Wye.

Some of the plants we saw were;

- Blaisdon Plum Society – a special type of Plum found in the Forest of Dean.
- Quince Tree – fruits in October
- Fig Tree – Figs require the best possible site in the garden to take advantage from the sun's heat and, with some winter protection, will crop regularly for centuries if looked after. I found this website seemed to have some good information? www.readsnursery.co.uk/cultural-advice/fig-trees.html
- Hydrangea Paniculata – a climbing hydrangea

We also discussed that some of us are interested in getting flowering lawn seed, where the flowers stay close to the ground so mowing them won't ruin a stunning display. Mark is looking into a bulk order – contact Mark if you would like to be included in an order.

MARCUS'S

Up the hill to learn all about wormeries and see the sorry looking vandalised apple trees which Marcus is nurturing back to life.

Marcus had located his wormery by the shed. The key is to get the mix of 'ingredients' right and not to overload the 'system' with all your kitchen waste – the worms get swamped otherwise. Including a few bits of garden clippings, toilet roll inner tubes and paper from an office shredder can help.

You then drain off the liquid from the bottom regularly as plant feed.

I found some more information on wormeries here; <http://www.originalorganics.co.uk/wormery-questions.htm>

GLYN & ROSEMARY'S

What can I say, the yummiest apple & blackberry pie & a lovely place to stretch out on the lawn in the sun!

Glyn wanted some advice on what to put in a shady, sloping damp area at the bottom of the garden. The advice was fruit bushes such as blackcurrants which won't mind the shade or the slope.

The hedgehog home was going to put a halt to the plans until a new home was found elsewhere in the garden.

Glyn & Rosemary also showed us all the hazel trees that keep appearing from their neighbours old tree.

Julian managed to solve the mystery of the unknown plant. It was a rootstock of squash

SWAPSIES!

FROM	SPECIES	TO
Julian	French Bean Seed	Marcus
	Logs/wood from apple tree	
Ali & Tim	Blackberry plants	Bryony
	Chicken Manure	Julian
		Glyn & Rosemary
	Also Metal Corrugated Sheets	Anyone that wants 1 or 2
Glyn & Rosemary	Gooseberries	Ali & Tim
	Raspberries	Ali & Tim
	Hazel Trees	Ali & Tim
	Strawberry plants	