

Spring Newsletter 2024



This issue covers Spring (not surprisingly), history and recipes. As they say in hospitality ‘enjoy!’

Fifty-One Words for Rain

*It is said the Eskimo
Has fifty-one words for snow
But the British brain
Holds fifty-one for rain*

Excerpt from a poem by Brian Bilston

The beginning to this year has been interminably inclement. But despite the persistent precipitation Spring has finally started to peer round the clouds. As witnessed below by blossom, lambs tails, greening currant and frogspawn.



Just remember, when sheltering indoors from the relentless rain – if life gives you lemons – preserve them! **Recipe from Dee**

Preserved Lemons

A perfect addition to a tagine, add to sauces, chop finely and mix with yoghurt and herbs or make a pickle using chopped with dates, ginger, garlic and chilli. They can also be chopped and blended into mayonnaise.

This recipe can also be used for preserving oranges for use in cakes. (May be desirable to wash off the salt before use).

Ingredients

7 unwaxed lemons +
1 lemon for juice

70 – 80g sea salt (aiming for a 10-15% salt ratio)

Optional spices: bay, chilli, fennel seeds, rosemary sprigs, thyme, pink peppercorns

1 Ltr Kilner jar

6 Week Process

- Wash lemons and trim both ends off 7, trying not to cut into the flesh
- Slice them as if cutting into quarters BUT don't cut all the way through
- Place them into a bowl and sprinkle with salt (about 1 heaped tbsp per lemon). Leave for 30 mins to draw out juice.
- Then pack into the Kilner jar with any remaining salt from the bowl.
- Press down gently but firmly, releasing more juice.
- Juice the 8th lemon and pour into the jar.
- Weigh down with a fermentation weight and leave for 6 weeks. These will keep for over a year at room temperature.

10 Week Process

Speedier as the lemons are sliced thinly instead of used whole.

- Slice 7-8 lemons thinly
- Weigh them and calculate 10% for the amount of salt to use
- Mix salt and lemons in a bowl and then pack tightly into the jar
- Weight down and seal jar.
- Ferment for 10 days.

Exeter Growers Co-operative 2016 –

In July 2016 we had a meeting to consider the future of the field. Below is a snap shot, a prelude to that meeting describing how we thought we were faring those 7 years ago. manageability within our current capacity has long been a key issue.

‘Acknowledging our average age and physical limitations, we need to take this into account and look to the next 5 years as we work on a practical vision for the evolution of the field.

Generally, there are less ‘member hours’ on the field than there have been in previous seasons. Membership recruitment will be slow – inevitably – possibility a couple a year that might make up in younger energy what we may begin to lack ourselves. Although there may still be untapped sources that we have yet to reach to find new members, we should acknowledge the reality that accessibility to the field as well as time availability are likely to be barriers for younger membership. We need to take this reality into account as we look to the next 5 years.

Despite all this, we are somehow managing the vegetable growing, bringing new projects into play (eg composting and easier ways of keeping beds in shape via green manures) and developing our (shared) knowledge with other members. We are now considering the benefits of having 2 blocs in our rotation down to green manures, to rest the soil and build fertility (as we did in 2009 -11). This would involve either reducing our current growing area or moving out westward to provide it.

A few keep an eye on the orchard, though we don’t yet have a plan for the ‘waste’ area at the top of it.

Fortunately, our grassland (better described as pastureland – after all this is a field) does not take up our efforts, due to grazing and the odd hay-cut. Instead it offers an unrivalled landscape space from which we all benefit. Is it necessary to regard the pastureland as ‘not paying its way’ in terms of rent? We just have to care for it, as with the rest of the field.

Were livestock ever to become part of our mixed holding (eg hens, goats or sheep) then we need to be aware of what impact this would have for our land use.

Perhaps the most important element for the field’s future may be to keep all options open for plans that we have yet to formulate. Above all, we should always keep in mind our Aims, with food growing at their forefront’.



Planting a cherry tree in memory of Liz Hoare, an early member of EGC (Feb 2016). Her tree is currently at the western edge of the new wildlife pond, which is greatly enlarged compared to the original (shown above).



Prize-winning vegetables were produced (Jul 2016). Communal projects (2017) included the first (now East) reservoir and a pizza oven (rarely used it has now been absorbed into other projects on the Field and a bay tree takes its place).

Current communal activities have included the Wassail in January, the regular lunchtime get-togethers (view across the new wildlife pond) and growing delicious and weird veg. (That's purple sprouting broccoli and a leek?)



We were able to share some of our spectacular squash with St Sidwell's Bakehouse.

Grey/green lichen (possibly *Ramalina farinacea*, Shaggy Strap Lichen) shows the air purity is good

A variety of dragonflies were welcomed back to the pond



Cucumber Pickle

This recipe is borrowed from Riverford Cookbook and was a favourite made by Gillian Watson. Used on family picnics in sandwiches or pittas with cream cheese. It is, allegedly, 'good with a strong, hard cheese or with terrines and cold meats, especially ham.' (Guy Watson, Gillian's son).

'Easy to make as pickles go - just be sure the cucumbers are good and fresh and leave plenty of time to salt the cucumbers and onions.

It should be stored in the fridge once opened. Makes 2-2.5kg.

Ingredients

- 5 cucumbers
- 1kg onions, halved
- about 80g sea salt (or cooking salt)
- 500ml distilled malt or cider vinegar
- 350g granulated sugar (or soft brown)
- 4 tsp mustard seeds
- generous ½ tsp ground cloves (or use a few whole cloves instead)
- generous ½ tsp ground turmeric

Method

Prep time: 20 min

Cooking time: 30 min

- *Step 1*
Slice the cucumbers and onions very thinly (a mandolin is ideal for this). Layer them in a bowl, sprinkling with the sea salt as you go, then weigh them down with a plate and leave for a few hours or overnight. Drain off the liquid, rinse the vegetables well and drain in a colander.
- *Step 2*
Combine the vinegar, sugar, mustard seeds, cloves and turmeric in a pan and bring slowly to the boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar.
- *Step 3*
Add the well-drained cucumber and onion mixture and bring back to the boil for 1 minute. Transfer the mixture to sterilised jars, using a slotted spoon.
- *Step 4*
Bring the liquid back to the boil and simmer until slightly reduced for about 15 minutes, then divide it between the jars, filling to the brim. Put on the lids and label. The pickle will keep for several months.

Tried and trusted recipe supplied by Rachel.

Thank you to Dee and Rachel for recipes and photos, to Martin, Theyazan for photos and to David for the third instalment of EGC history.

Make the most of the sunshine and dry weather when it arrives!

Janetx