

Southwest Biodynamic Group Winter Newsletter

January 2025



Deep in the ground of the human soul
Of victory assured
The Spirit-Sun is living
All through the winter of the inner life
The faithful heart divines it .

Rudolf Steiner

From the editor:

There are a many members who have now requested that their newsletters get sent by email. This really helps in reducing the postage costs. However, with every mail shot, a few get sent back as undeliverable. If you have recently changed you email address, could you please let us know either by emailing our secretary Ros - ournegoodban@gmail.com or dianawhite35@hotmail.com.

I also received this contribution from Sarah who has for the past few years been pivotal in the organisation of our Spring and Autumn gatherings.

Coordinating Spring and Autumn Gatherings and other events

In making space for whom else would like to take this task forward, I step back. With much love to you all, dear friends for the year ahead and all our good work to come.

Sarah

If you are willing to help with this task, please contact either of the email addresses above. Thank you Sarah for all your care in creating very special events.

Thank you. Diana White (editor)

News From Teign Greens, Oxen Park Farm, Lower Ashton, EX6 7QW.

Around this time of year there's a brief pause for breath as all of the autumn jobs are finally of the way! The squash has been safely tucked away in straw, polytunnels have been filled with winter salad which will keep our members in fresh crunchy salad all through the winter months. The overwintered broad beans and garlic have been planted and mulched, and we've sown green manure in all beds laying fallow over the winter. We had a lovely shindig with our host farm Oxen Park Farm and On the Hill at the farm's inaugural **Ceilidh**- which felt like such a lovely moment to celebrate the season, and coming to the end of our autumn jobs. However this pause never lasts long because the pace picks up again pretty quick with all the winter jobs on our list!

We're so delighted that with the help of generous funding from some of our members, local councillors Andrew Swain and Stephen Purser, and a grant from the Halleria Trust, **we've secured £7000 for a new polytunnel**, which will make such a difference for our financial and climate resilience, aiming us to grow for more members and grow more of our own veg during the tricky hungry gap period.

Another thing keeping us busy at this time of year is crop planning, and Leonie will be tackling our 200 row, 6 tab spreadsheet, revising in light of our annual rotation, our learnings and of course, your feedback! We've been so heartened by the 58 responses we've received in our **Annual Members Survey** last month- many thanks for taking the time to complete it. Of course, there's lots to reflect on and we'll be deep diving into your feedback and revising our crop plan and growing methods accordingly based on what's important to you. We'll update you in the Spring with what we'll be changing in light of what you've said.



Our team is changing again! December means our fantastic trainee Bridgette is coming to the end of her 12 month Level 3 traineeship with us. Bridgette arrived at the farm last January in sub-zero conditions, and has lived here in a caravan on the farm since, studying Regenerative Land Based Systems one day a week at the Apricot Centre and spending the rest of her time getting stuck in to all aspects of Teign Greens- she's even mastered our tractor .Although as an Aussie, the rubbish summer and bitter winters have been tough, she never complains, and she's made herself pretty indispensable to our team! Which is why it's a good job that she's staying on as my Maternity Cover from next

March, after a couple of months of travelling- hooray! We'll be introducing our lovely new 2025 trainee Sam in our next newsletter. This month we also say goodbye to our wonderful delivery volunteer Mike, who has been ferrying your veg across the valley and beyond in his trusty white van for the last 18 months. Mike's got the best excuse ever- he's off to New Zealand with his family; we can't deny we a little bit jealous! Massive thanks Mike for all your help, we will miss you! **So we're on the hunt for another delivery volunteer.**



The weather's been keeping us on our toes as usual, one week last month we had snow, gales, floods and also warm sunny days too! It makes for a pretty picture- see our leeks standing proud in the snow, but lots of extra work for our team,

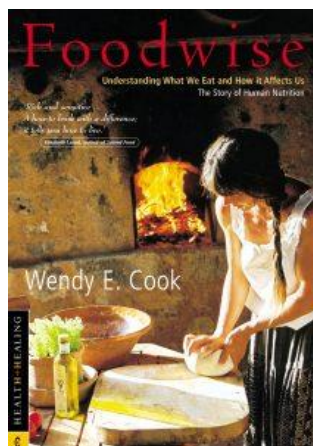
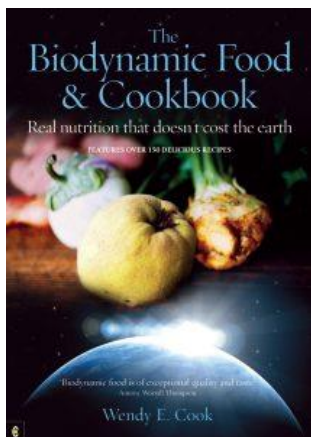
Our Volunteer days are

- **Every Tuesday 9am-4pm** Our weekly volunteer day where we pick and pack the veg bags is a great time to drop by. Don't feel like you need to stay for the whole day. We serve up a hearty veggie lunch for all volunteers at 1pm, and there's usually plenty of biccys and homemade cakes made by our wonderful volunteers at our morning tea/coffee break.
- **Saturday Morning 9:30-1pm from February 2025.** Come and join us for our Drop In volunteer day, usually on the 2nd Saturday of the month. All welcome, especially little gardeners. We always have a few kid friendly jobs up our sleeve.

With all our volunteering events, it's helpful if you give us a heads up if you can make it, but if you're feeling spontaneous, feel free to drop in too. **See you there!**

Holly Budgen, Teign Greens, Ashton Farm. teingreens@gmail.com

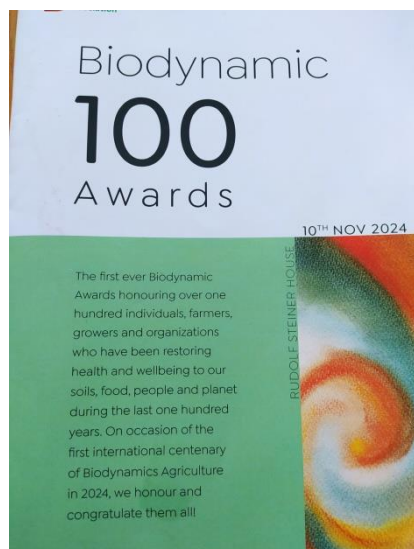
The Biodynamic Cookbook by Wendy Cook.



We nearly always put a recipe from Wendy's book in our newsletter. (see this quarter's one later on page 7). If you would like a copy of this book, you can order it through wendycook.org. On this website you will also order Wendy's other book 'Foodwise' with the subtitle of 'What we eat and How it Affects Us'. Wendy lives in Dartington.

The website also has other articles written by Wendy about aspects of biodynamics in a very accessible way.

100 years of Biodynamics



In 2024 it was 100 years since Rudolf Steiner gave the Agriculture Course of lectures in Koberwitz. The Biodynamic Association held an award ceremony in November 2024 at Rudolf Steiner House in London to celebrate. As part of this they produced a beautiful brochure outlining the history of Biodynamics in the UK, with short pieces about the significant people who helped get the movement going in this country as well as many people currently working.

Our own members Frankie van der Stok and Wendy Cook were mentioned in the Lifetime Achievement section as well as Huxhams Cross Farm/Apricot Cente, Craxon Combe at Diptford and Velwell Orchard in the outstanding

practice section.

If you want to read it you can see the pdf file on this link

<https://www.biodynamic.org.uk/bd100-awards-ceremony-honouring-the-stars-of-the-biodynamic-movement/>

or I have a copy which I am willing to lend – please contact me

dianawhite35@hotmail.com.

Devon Courses coming soon

Biochar Course at Velwell Orchard

Thursday 30th of January 2025, 9am - 4pm

With Jeremy Weiss

Cost: £50 (half price for BD group members!)

Time: 7 hours

We have been using biochar here on our land at Velwell Orchard for nearly 10 years and this is a good chance to see the wonders it can work in situ. It has improved our soil structure beyond belief. (See longer article below to learn more about Biochar)

We will be making the biochar from brash left over from our coppicing activities. You will learn how to make biochar using our Oregon Kiln and how this method can be simplified and scaled up or down to suit your personal needs. You will be able to take some home for your garden at the end of the day. We will discuss a brief history of biochar, how it can be activated, and how it can be used in the garden and on the farm.

All tools are supplied for this course but you will need to wear non-flammable clothing. Wool and cotton are best. The workshop is primarily practical so a decent level of fitness is useful.

To book a place please contact me direct:

T: 07962 432317

E: jeremydweiss@yahoo.co.uk

Or go to my website: properedges.com

Biochar - a revelation

I started working the land here at Velwell Orchard back in 1997 as a 14 year old. Derek Lapworth held the reins back then, and gradually he transformed a depleted field into a garden oasis where plants, animals and humans could thrive. Through the application on the biodynamic preps and a lot of love and care we were able to grow some pretty decent fruit and vegetables.

After I took over from Derek in 2009 I soon came to realise that our soil was depleted. It was too acidic and silty, with not enough clay particles to hold the nutrients and prevent it from drying out. Soil test results confirmed this. The growth of the vegetables depended on copious amounts of imported manure and a huge and time-consuming composting system. Something had to change in order for the farm organism to be more self-sustaining.

A few years before this I had been studying environmental science at Plymouth University and now, alongside working the land at Velwell I was working more and more laying hedges in the area and so when I discovered biochar it seemed to tie everything together very neatly. Here was a useful product that could be made from the waste left

over from hedge laying and coppicing. It could improve my soil structure and fix carbon in the soil.

Over the years I have worked out a system that has biochar at the centre and it has drastically improved the vegetable production. We now apply biochar to the soil and then douse with copious amounts of human urine, which charges the biochar, soaking into its micropores where it can be later accessed by plant root hairs and fungi. Urine contains the six nutrients that plants need in the largest quantities, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, calcium and sulphur, all in the right proportions as needed by plants. We mix the urine with comfrey concentrate which contains a lot of trace elements that have been brought up from the deep. Together the comfrey and urine produces a potent fertiliser.

The potatoes are then covered in a thick layer of grass cuttings, of which we have plenty from our scythe activities. We use this mulch on all our veg beds where it acts as a blanket, protecting the soil life from the heat of the sun and the cold of the frost. The final, and vital, part of our system is our ducks, who gleefully search the mulch for slugs.

Biochar is nothing new having been used in the Amazon basin for hundreds of years where it was able to create soils fertile enough to support huge civilisations. There is also a history of it being used in Japan. It's only recently though, that it is being rediscovered and books and scientific papers are being written on the subject.

If you'd like to find out more, and how to make and use it, you can come on our course and learn.



If you are interested in other training locally, the Apricot Centre runs accredited courses in Regenerative Farming and Permaculture. See their details on their website www.apricotcentre.co.uk

Step by Step Biodynamic Gardening Course

Starting in February at Whites Farm, Lower Dean. Buckfastleigh, TQ11 0LS
The tutor will be Frankie Van Der Stok

Session dates: Saturdays 8th Feb, 8th March, 12th April, 10th May, 14th June, 12 July 2025

Programme Outline –

Session 1 – Seed connects with soil

Session 2 – Planning our garden

Session 3 – The plant between the sun and earth

Session 4 – The biodynamic preparations

Session 5 – Tending the garden

Session 5 – The garden as an organism

Comprising of 6 x 1-day sessions from **Feb to July 2025** this course is a great way to learn about all the biodynamic principles and practices and enable you to put them into action in your own garden or allotment.

The total cost for the course (6 sessions including a simple lunch) is £180 which is **exceptional** value, working out at just £30 per day session including lunch. Places are strictly limited so we advise booking early!

ONLINE BOOKING IS NOW LIVE! Go to the Biodynamic Association website biodynamic.org.uk to book. (You need to scroll down the home page till you find the list of courses). You can also book over the phone Tel 01453 759501 (office hours 9-1 Mon to Fri)

Seasonal Recipe - from The Biodynamic Cookbook by Wendy Cook polished by Clairview

Celariac, Apple Slices with Gruyère – serves 6



Ingredients:

1lb/450 celeriac, when peeled cut into rounds approx. ¼ inch thick
1 medium-sized tart apple such as Brambly (approx. 1/2lb/225g) peeled, cored and sliced
4 oz/110g Gruyère cheese, grated
1tsp chopped fresh rosemary
½ lemon

Method.

- 1) Poach the celeriac rounds in a good flavoured stock with a squeeze of lemon juice for 5-8 minutes or until al dente. Drain and keep the stock for sauces and soups.
- 2) Arrange in a buttered ovenproof dish. Drain the apple slices and put on top of the celeriac. Season lightly with pepper.
- 3) Finish off with grated gruyere cheese and chopped rosemary.
- 4) Cook for 15-20 minutes in a hot oven (200°C/gas mark 6) or until the cheese bubbles and becomes golden.

BIODYNAMIC PRODUCE FOR SALE

BIODYNAMIC BEEF from our freezer from our biodynamic South Devons, various cuts and joints but all the sirloin, rump and fillet steaks have been sold.

Please contact Tristan Bertie 07836 591 847

Lordswood Churchstow Kingsbridge

Or e-mail me at lordswood.biodynamics@btinternet.co

GREENLIFE SHOP, TOTNES. 01803 866738. Some Demeter products, Biodynamically grown vegetables in season and Seed Cooperative organic open pollinated seeds.

TEIGN GREENS, OXEN PARK FARM, Lower Ashton, EXETER, EX6 7QW – in conversion to BD. Contact for availability of produce. www.teigngreens.co.uk email teigngreens@gmail.com

VEGETABLES FROM APRICOT CENTRE/ HUXHAMS CROSS FARM: We deliver weekly vegetable bags or boxes. The boxes contain Huxhams Cross Farm own produce as well as several small BD and organic growers who will be providing vegetables at certain times of the year. We can add eggs, flour, fruit and meat. You can order online at www.apricotcentre.co.uk

BD FRUIT JUICE CORDIALS for SALE - All with organic apple juice

Contact Derek Lapworth on 07747 120 669

Hemp and other Tinctures (all homemade)

The CBD tincture is made by Nick Read from hemp grown at Dartington and is the only UK organically grown CBD.

Please see website for costs and purchasing information. <http://www.englishhemp.co.uk>

South West Biodynamic Group

The South Devon Biodynamic Group's purpose is to inform those interested in BD methods of gardening and farming of what is happening in the area. As a member you receive

- A quarterly newsletters and seasonal gatherings where we make the biodynamic preparations. These are then made available to members free of charge.
- A library of Biodynamic books kept at The Apricot Centre.

We charge an annual subscription of £15 per person and £20 for a couple. We offer a concession of £10 a year if needed. Sort Code 20-60-88 Acc. No. 13509680 South West Biodynamic Group

Preparations are available from Whites Farm, Lower Dean, Buckfastleigh. TQ11 OLS. Contact Denise deniselaurenj@icloud.com

If you wish to join, please contact Diana White (Treasurer) at dianawhite35@hotmail.com or write to 12 Apple Wharf, The Plains, Totnes, TQ9 5QL 07747398839