

Cumbria Organic Gardeners and Farmers



Keeping in Touch – January 2025



Mahonia x media "Charity" - such a wonderful aroma at this time of year

From the Editor

The Committee have worked hard to organise events for this year. Some dates and details are yet to be finalised and some are yet to be added. Please see the diary for those arranged. COGF will be taking part in Caldbeck Potato Day, as usual in February.

Those of you who have heard Kate Roberts speak may be interested in a non-profit-making organisation she is part of, known as Cumbrian Earth. Please see more information on the following page. Kate desperately needs help with this, do contact her to find out more.



Cumbrian Earth – can you help?

If you would love to use your energy in 2025 to make a real difference to the biosphere and everything in it, then read on...

We can solve multiple problems by growing food in healthy soil. If people were aware of the difference they could make by changing their diet to organic, regenerative produce, they would.

Just for the mental health aspects alone it makes it worth it.

Until people understand the connections between industrialised agriculture and their own health niggles and lack of well being, nothing will change. The food giants will increase their use of chemicals and our health will continue to deteriorate.

We also need to understand how fully functioning soil is giving our produce enhanced nutrition - everything from missing minerals to complex proteins and enriched fats.

Cumbrian Earth is aimed at giving this information to enable people to make better choices; to help them on their journey of reducing the harmful stuff and increasing the healing stuff.

We can only do this with an admin team to help run the website. There are no onerous jobs but we do need you. For example, you may be able to run the annual zoom call or share our website around social media.

We are grateful to PACT (Penrith Action for Community Transition) for giving us funding for the website, now we need people to take on roles in order to get Cumbrian Earth changing lives for the better.

If you think you could help then please get in touch and we will tell you more about the roles. To contact Kate, email: howtheearththinks@yahoo.com or ring 01931 715589 (mobile: 07790 481591 but there is not always a signal).

The website is found here: <https://kateroberts6.wixsite.com/cumbrian-earth>

PAN (Pesticide Action Network) – The Cocktail Effect

Readers may remember a past edition of the newsletter in which an article on The Dirty Dozen list of items of food was included.

After attending Kate Roberts' talk at the AGM of the North Cumbria Orchard Group, when she drew attention to the list of The Dirty Dozen, I make no apologies for repeating this item with an updated version of the list (see following page).

However, what PAN are saying is that what is as worrying as the chemicals in our food is the unknown effects of the interaction of those chemicals – what they call “the cocktail effect”.

Josie Cohen from PAN UK said, *“Because of the overuse of pesticides in UK agriculture, we are constantly exposed to a wide array of different chemicals which can interact to become more toxic creating a ‘cocktail effect’. Yet the Government continues to assess the safety of just one pesticide at a time. The truth is we simply have no idea of the human health and environmental impacts of long term exposure to hundreds of different pesticides.”* <https://www.pan-uk.org/the-cocktail-effect>

Neonicotinoids – Update by DEFRA 21st December 2024

A new policy paper has been produced by DEFRA for England on the use of Neonics. It would appear that the Government has finally banned their use.

From Cumbria Wildlife Trust on 21st December.... “in breaking news, you may have heard this morning that bee-killing pesticides, called neonicotinoids, will not be used in the future. Our Chief Executive, Craig Bennett, has said: “Today’s decision is a positive step towards the target of reducing dangerous pesticide use by 50% by 2030 – it must not be undermined by granting the emergency use of neonicotinoids in 2025.”

And an extract from Gov. UK’s website:

“Pesticides have an important role in agriculture and other sectors, protecting crops and other valuable plants from pests, diseases and weeds. However, pesticides may pose risks to people or to the environment. For this reason, the use of pesticides is subject to strict regulation.

The use of some neonicotinoid insecticides in crop production has the potential to harm bees and other pollinating insects. Because of this impact on a crucial natural resource, the general use of products containing these substances is not permitted.

Pesticides legislation allows emergency authorisation of products that are not otherwise authorised. Emergency authorisation was granted for use of a neonicotinoid pesticide on sugar beet crops grown in England in each of the last four years under the previous government.

This government is committed to ending the use in England of those neonicotinoid pesticides that are known to carry substantial risks to pollinator populations, including through the use of emergency authorisations. The neonicotinoids in question are clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam.”

Let’s hope that is the end of them and we can see more bees and fewer harmful residues in our food.

DIRTY DOZEN

The UK government tests roughly 3,000kg of food for pesticide residues each year. Once the results are published, PAN UK analyses this data and makes it accessible to the general public by producing the annual 'Dirty Dozen'. The Dirty Dozen lists the produce most likely to contain residues of two or more pesticides (known as 'pesticide cocktails') to help inform people's shopping decisions. (see Dirty Dozen 2023). This year we looked beyond just fruit and vegetables to include all products of 'non-animal origin'. As a result, the latest Dirty Dozen includes bread at number seven – with rice just missing out at number thirteen.

The problem with UK government testing

Unfortunately, the government tends to select a different list of produce for testing each year. As a result, produce found to be high in multiple pesticide residues one year will often not be tested in subsequent years. This inconsistent approach means that it is impossible to establish long-term trends in terms of which produce is the most problematic. In order to provide shoppers with a clearer overview of problem produce, PAN UK has compiled a list looking at the worst culprits over the past six years (see Dirty Dozen 2018-2023 over the page).

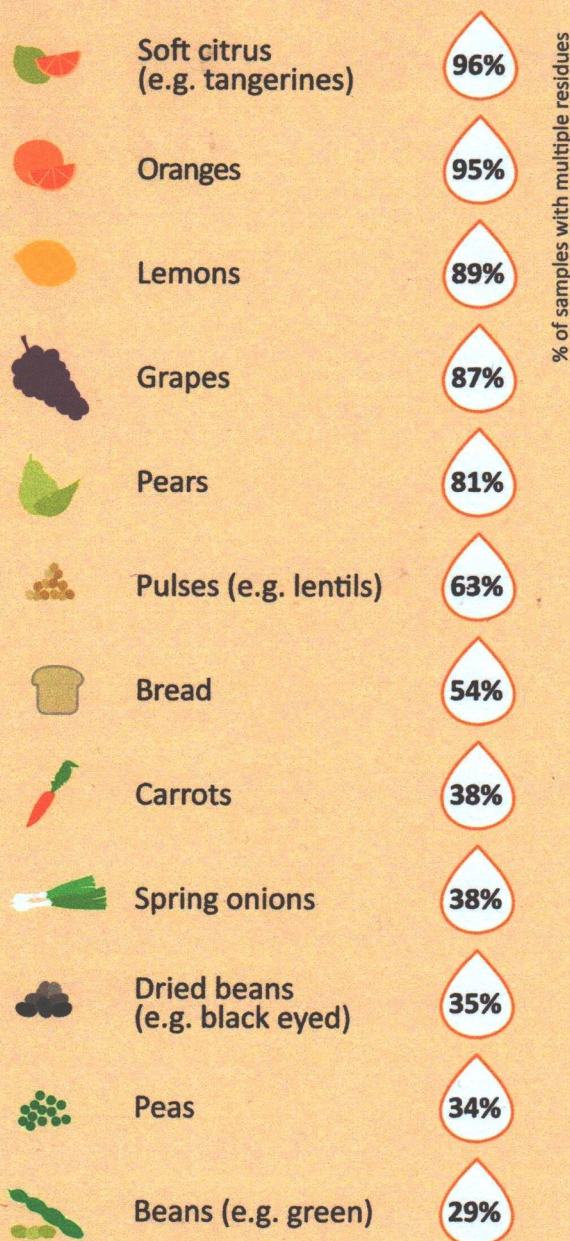
The cocktail effect

PAN UK's Dirty Dozen focuses on produce with multiple pesticide residues. This is because the government sets safety limits for just one pesticide at a time, ignoring the growing body of evidence that chemicals can become more harmful when combined (a phenomenon known as the 'cocktail effect'). This not only ignores the potential risks to human health associated with pesticide mixtures found on one item (an apple, for example) but also those found in one dish (such as a fruit salad) let alone an entire day's worth of food.

Why does PAN not provide a list of 'safe' produce?

PAN UK does not produce a so-called 'Clean 15' list of produce with the least residues. This is because the government testing programme is so limited that we would not want to give the impression that certain produce is guaranteed to be free from pesticide cocktails. It is also possible to grow food using hazardous pesticides without the chemicals in question appearing as residues in food. As a result, an absence of residues should not be taken as assurance that there have been no pesticide-related harms to human health or the environment where the food was grown.

Dirty Dozen 2023



The results of the government's residue testing programme are only available for the preceding year. The results above are, therefore, based on the most recent data available.

Cumbria in Bloom – a Journey

Cumbria in Bloom is the county organisation for our region and part of the The Royal Horticultural Society's Britain in Bloom.

When I was first asked if I would be interested in being involved in the judging for CiB, my first reaction was to say I wasn't interested in floral bedding and hanging baskets full of plants that are potentially imported and may well have been treated with a range of chemicals that could adversely affect our wildlife!

A quick retort explained that things have changed and now the focus is targeted on the likes of community, heritage and biodiversity as well as horticulture. Having agreed to join them, I spent the following three seasons undergoing training and gaining experience of the judging process.

It has been an interesting time, during which it is evident that the results of your efforts need to match the aims of the RHS, which don't always sit entirely well. One of my aims during my time with them has been to try to exert a small influence in recognising the growing of edibles as an important contribution to horticulture. Just imagine if every town or village that entered Britain in Bloom was encouraged to include edibles in their displays, what could be achieved! Sadly, many of the volunteers, who work hard with their entries, concentrate only on floriferous blooms.

I have made suggestions in our village and to the local school – just simply growing some beans would be a start in getting villagers and pupils interested in growing their own food. I even approached one of the RHS top judges with my thoughts on including edibles as part of the judging in the horticultural sector. Indeed this could only benefit biodiversity, so why not?

Time will tell whether Cumbria in Bloom or the RHS recognise the benefits of actively encouraging the growing of edibles, but it could be a start towards achieving in various pockets, and in a small way, what was done in the WW2 Dig for Victory campaign!

Meanwhile, last year was a busy one for our village, Wreay. Having been honoured with a top gold award, we qualified for entry in Britain in Bloom last year, and at the awards ceremony in Manchester, we were awarded silver gilt. Although not disappointed with the award, I did wonder if the judges hadn't quite appreciated why we had planted redcurrant and blackcurrant bushes, a clump of rhubarb and two large herb beds in the village hall grounds.... With any luck, a small seed was planted in their minds....

Assistant Judge, Cumbria in Bloom



The herb beds at the village hall – could this be the start of something?

Scent in the Winter Garden

As someone with a keen nose, smells are really important to me. I have been determined to grow things in the garden that will stimulate my olfactory senses. I would also hope that it would benefit insects that may be drawn by the perfume.

I think this might be particularly helpful in the winter, and as such have endeavoured to use plants with winter fragrance when possible.

I have *Mahonia_x media* Charity (see the picture on the front page), which is intoxicating whenever I venture into the garden. With its beautiful yellow flowers, followed by dark coloured berries (both of which are edible according to one of our members). It is a joy to have.

Another wonderful fragrance, as its name suggests, comes from *Lonicera fragrantissima*, known as Winter Flowering Honeysuckle. Its blossom is quite delicate but heady and it is a good gap filler, happy to grow in partial shade.

A more subtle, yet lovely aroma comes from my Witch Hazel, *Hamamelis* Arnold Promise. It is quite precious, with its wiry yellow flowers. It has long been my ambition to have other *Hamamelis* shrubs planted alongside to give a variety of colour, but this is yet to be achieved.

What are often overlooked for their very delicate perfume are snowdrops – the scent is not always easy to pick up, but we have so many here that it's possible.

I have planted *Sarcococca*, which for some reason hasn't really taken off. However, the perfume of this plant is not one I have taken to. I suppose it's a personal thing.

Finally, more in early spring than late winter, comes the blossom from *Skimmia japonica*, which sits in pots by the back door to greet you as you go out – wonderful.

Of course there are many plants with super fragrance that can be grown throughout the year, but there is something about that stop-you-in-your-tracks perfume in the winter that is rather special.

A COGF Member

Millipedes in the House

I asked in the last issue if anyone else is finding these little creatures around the house. Here are some millipede facts:

- * Attracted by light, the millipedes will enter houses through tiny cracks and climb up internal walls and across floors and ceilings.
- * They like to feed on rotting vegetation which is rich in the calcium they need.
- * Millipede experts believe the explosion in numbers could be attributed to a succession of milder, wetter winters which have allowed more eggs to survive to hatching time.
- * They are not harmful to humans.
- * Simple measures such as switching off outside lights, drawing all the curtains and putting draft excluders on the external doors can help to eliminate them.

Annual Seed Swap and Winter Social, Sunday February 2nd 2.00 pm until 5.00 pm

We will hold our usual event for swapping saved and spare seeds and have, again, surplus seeds from Garden Organic's Heritage Seed Library. Do come along as we don't just share seeds and a lovely tea, we share growing ideas and techniques.

As there will be a shared tea, please bring cakes or savouries if you have something available (organic or otherwise, home-made or otherwise). There is usually plenty so don't worry if you can't bring something with you. Tea and coffee will be provided.

A member has offered to bring along a quiz, as she did last year, which is always fun.

As the Committee will be meeting prior to the event, it would be helpful if one or two members are able to arrive a little earlier to set things out and sort out refreshments.

Cumbrian Farmers' Market

Houghton to be added

- **Brampton** – last Saturday of the month
- **Brough** – 3rd Saturday of the month
- **Carlisle city centre** – 1st Saturday of the month
- **Carlisle Borderway** – 2nd Saturday of the month
- **Cockermouth** – 1st Saturday of the month
- **Egremont** – 1st Saturday & 3rd Friday of the month
- **Houghton** – 2nd Saturday of the month
- **Kendal** – last Friday of the month
- **Keswick** – 2nd Thursday of the month
- **Milnthorpe** – 2nd Friday of the month
- **Orton** – the second Saturday of the month
- **Penrith** – 3rd Tuesday of the month
- **Sedbergh** – every Wednesday
- **Ulverston** – 3rd Saturday of the month

Produce can also be ordered from the Open Food Network's website:

<https://openfoodnetwork.org.uk/cumbria-farmers/shop>

Diary of COGF Events in 2025

Sunday 2nd February, 2.00 pm

Seed Swap and Quiz (preceded by Committee meeting at 1.00 pm)

Sunday 23rd February, from 10.00 am until 2.00 pm

COGF at Caldbeck Potato Day

Sunday 2nd March, from 10.00 am until 4.00 pm

Potato Day and Green Fair, Borders Events Centre, Springwood Park, Kelso

Saturday 3rd May, from 10.00 am until 4.00 pm

Visit to three gardens in the Solway

Sunday 11th May, from 10.00 am until 4.00 pm

COGF at The Plant and Food Fair, Hutton in the Forest

Sunday 8th June, from 11.00 am until 5.00 pm

COGF at Open Farm Sunday, at Susan's Farm, Houghton; Low Stanger and Low Netherscales near Cockermouth

Sunday in July – date TBC

Visit to Threave Gardens

Tuesday 9th September, 2.00 pm

Visit to HMP Haverigg

Sunday 16th November, 2.00 pm

COGF AGM

Committee

Chairperson

Susan Aglionby

Membership Secretary

Frankie Kennett

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Newsletter Editor

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