

Cumbria Organic Gardeners and Farmers



Keeping in Touch – January 2026



Billbergia nutans – or Queen Anne Tears (also known as the friendship plant), an indoor plant in flower, unusually at this time of year – see p. 4 for outdoor plants in flower at this time

From the Editor

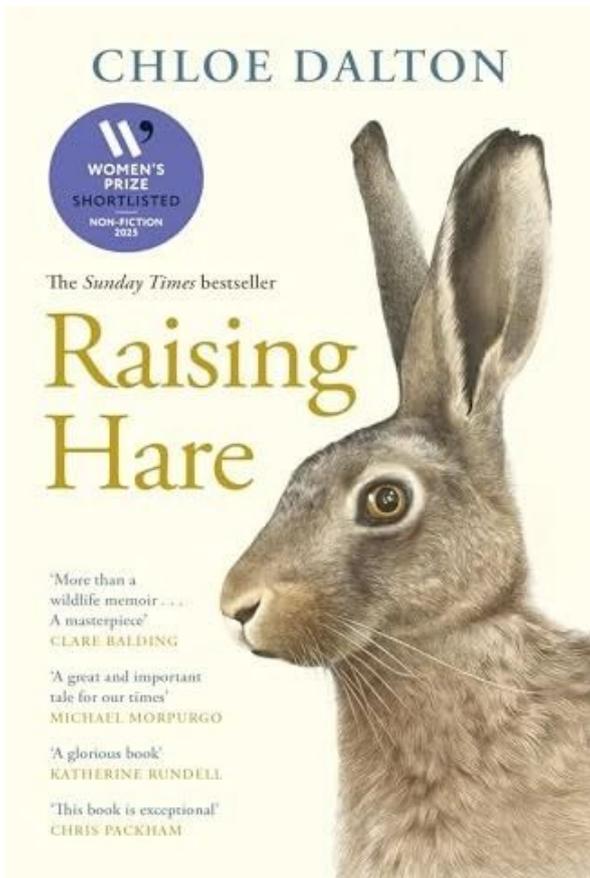
As you may know if you attended the AGM, Susan, our Chair, will step down at the end of this year. She has served five years in the role and feels it timely for a change of leadership. We shall need someone to replace her, so please consider offering to fill the role. Support can be given if required.

Member's joke: A house plant is something that dies if you don't water it and rots if you do.....



Book Review

'Raising Hare' by Chloe Dalton Canongate Books published 2024 (Paperback 2025)



I would recommend this book to everyone who would like to re-connect with taking the time to 'stand and stare'. The author, transplanted from her high intensity work as a political adviser and replanted at her countryside home by the dictates of Covid, becomes involved and increasingly absorbed with the life of a leveret that, by chance of nature, is born and probably left orphaned in her back garden.

As she doesn't try to make a pet of it, anthropomorphise it into a creature with human characteristics, or allow sentimentality to influence her actions towards it she is able to give us a beautifully written and detailed account of a very rare relationship with a wild and free animal – and to give us the benefit of her very thorough research through the wealth of available anecdotal, scientific and folklore reading she pored over in trying to understand more of the hare's physical and behavioural traits.

I think she learns most, though, from the hours of patient, quiet observation she makes whilst going about her work on her laptop and adjusting her pace and 'sound' of living in her home and garden.

Without bustle, invasive noises and constant changes she finds that 'hare' will use her home as a place of contented rest, including her in its inquisitive world and development from leveret to hare.

She shares her journey with us and she shares the thinking she does on the value of allowing ourselves to take time to be part of nature, assessing the impact of our human activities on nature (and, in particular, hare) and how resilient it has to be and somehow continues to be in order to survive.

Her detailed descriptions of leveret and then hare are lovely and give us a mental picture of this special creature, which our usual fleeting glimpses of a hare turning on a sixpence in a gateway or pelting down the middle of a road before vanishing into the safety of undergrowth, never give us a chance to have.

A thoroughly lovely read which will keep me evaluating what I do and what I change (and why) in my own little bit of nature.

Editor's note: I, too read this book recently, and completely agree with everything our member says – well worth a read.

Are you doing anything different this coming year?

Organic seed save – by doing nothing

Two years ago I planted some spare kale and broccoli plants in upcycled compost bags filled mostly with spent soil/compost which I keep in a separate pile in my compost area and leave for a season or so for sun and frost to sort out any nasties.

I intended the resulting 'crop' to add to my winter stock and tried to remember to water the bags during the dry, hot spells of summer. Against the odds, they survived and created large plants during the winter – which I didn't get round to using.

Clearing old dumpy bags (upcycled raised beds – not recommended) and setting up new recycled plastic raised beds took up all the available time for the new growing season and the now woody looking plants in the compost bags were left quietly doing their own thing set on a bed of composted old bark at the end of the polytunnel.

Every now and then, when I needed to get by, I would chop off a bit of their overgrowth and consign it to the compost heap, noticing the pretty yellow flowers they were now laden with. I might have noticed some pods of seed later on – but not enough for it to register.

When it was time for some sort of late autumn clear-up I got down on hands and knees to weed out the worst of the encroaching weeds from the bark pathways around the polytunnel and raised beds – and discovered tens of young kale and broccoli plants happily growing in the damp undisturbed bark.

I transplanted a few into my now empty onion bed and gave others to a friend who had lost her winter veg crop overnight to a marauding band of rabbits which managed to get through her defences. The plants are doing well in the winter sunshine and frost now and will be a good crop by this coming spring.

My grandfather, a market gardener, created his own cycle of organic crop and following seed for much of what he grew. I haven't followed his diligence or care. I see the growing imperative to regain and use those skills which ensured an organic and cyclic form of growing food and applaud everyone who manages to do it properly. For now, though, I am very pleased to find that sometimes leaving quiet corners to do what comes naturally can also work.

COGF member

Using Garden Compost

I have recently seen a blog by a compost maker (and *Influencer?*), who suggests not using valuable home made compost as a winter mulch, but to delay until the spring, due to possible nutrient loss with heavy rain.

He suggests using leaf mould (I have plenty of that) or other organic matter. This is something that has bothered me for a while, so I am going to try it.

Something (mice?) ate most of the field beans that I sowed as a green manure, so I need to do something to protect the soil in my beds during this winter.

Other organic materials he recommends are; composted bark, grass clippings, chop and drop bits.

COGF member

Flowers in Winter

It's easy to think that at this time of year there is nothing much to look at, or for the insects to feed on. I did a tour of my garden and was surprised how many flowers I could find.



Vinca major or Periwinkle



Lonicera fragrantissimo or winter flowering honeysuckle



Viburnum tinus



Erysimum or Wallflower



Helleborus orientalis



Galanthus nivalis or Snowdrops

COGF member

Future Event

Annual Seed Swap and Winter Social, Sunday February 8th (preceded by Committee meeting)

We will hold our usual event for swapping saved and spare seeds. We don't just share seeds, we share growing ideas and techniques.

This year we shall be serving soup at the start of the event, instead of the usual shared tea at the end. If you would like to bring some soup along to share, please feel free to do that, but don't worry if not as there should be sufficient for everyone.

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.

After refreshments, we will have a short video, relevant to our interests, to watch together, which will hopefully promote some discussion.

Future Event

COGF at Potato Day, Caldbeck Parish Hall, 22nd February 10.00 am until 2.00 pm.

Caldbeck Gardening Club will again be holding its Potato Day in February. The seed potatoes will be provided by Brighter Blooms as in previous years. It is expected that about 80 varieties will be on sale including some organic seed potatoes. There will also be other seeds, bulbs and fruit bushes on sale. There will be a café, in the side room. Children are welcome. There is a small charge for entrance. Proceeds go to charity.

There will be a COGF stand again which also serves as a meeting point for the considerable number of our members who attend this event.

Future Event

An Introduction to Hedge laying, 12th March

Numbers for this event will be limited to ten.

We will look at why hedges need to be laid and at the various styles and techniques. We will look at hedges in different stages around the farm - un-managed, recently laid, and in-between layings. Then we will do some practical work (on an easy hedge). There will be a break around half-way through.

You will need to bring suitable clothing and gardening gloves. The tools will be provided.

Future Event

Visit to Growing Well Tree Nursery, Tebay, Cumbria, CA10 3SB

A half-day session with Growing Well Tree Nursery at Tebay Northbound, which will look at growing trees from seed to being ready to plant out. An opportunity to talk to the growers and try seed sowing, pricking out and potting on in the tree nursery.

The session will start at 10 am and end around 1pm. Tea, coffee and snacks will be available throughout the day.

You can book this event online by visiting our website <https://www.cumbriaorganic.org.uk/> or by emailing Clive Mapp (searemapp@gmail.com). We are looking for a minimum of ten and a maximum of twenty persons.

- Notepad and pen or similar to make notes
- Warm clothes including hat/gloves
- Gardening or work gloves if you would like to get some 'hands on' experience!
- Clean footwear for walking around the site (walking boots or similar: please ensure that they are clean to ensure biosecurity is maintained at the nursery).
- Extra food/drink as required.

A Short itinerary:

From Seed to Sapling:

- Native tree seed collection and timing
- Processing, storage, and propagation techniques
- Choosing species suited to local conditions and habitats
- Group discussion and practical demonstration: Hands-on look at tools, trays, compost mixes, and germination techniques

All persons need to sign in with their name and vehicle registration as then no fines will occur and security will know as this ensures you won't be charged for parking (which is restricted to 3 hours across the site).

Growing Well

Growing Well, Tebay is a 1.4 acre kitchen garden at Tebay Services Northbound on the M6 near Shap. It is their first “replication” project after nearly twenty years successfully supporting hundreds of people with their mental health at their Low Sizergh Farm site near Kendal in South Cumbria.

The site is a partnership project with services owners Westmorland Family, who have provided a rent-free site, funded the site build and horticultural and other infrastructure, and purchase all the produce grown here for their Farm Shops and Kitchens.

Growing Well at Tebay Services does not currently offer a Crop Share scheme like at Growing Well Kendal. Instead, freshly picked salad and other vegetables are prepared, cooked and served to services customers every day.

The site, a former static caravan park in a beautiful and secluded area at the southern end of the services, has been developed from scratch. Due to the hardstanding nature of the site, there is no growing in open ground – it's all in polytunnels and raised beds.

Half-day sessions with Growing Well Tree Nursery at Tebay together with People Plant Trees look at growing trees from seed to being ready to plant out. People Plant Trees is an organisation that collaborates with tree planters, foresters, landowners and sponsors to host community events focused on planting trees. Their mission is to promote sustainable forestry practices and enhance local ecosystems through tree planting initiatives. They believe that even small actions, like planting a single tree, can lead to substantial environmental benefits.

Cumbrian Farmers' Markets

- **Brampton** – last Saturday of the month
- **Brough** – 3rd Saturday of the month
- **Carlisle Cathedral Close** – 1st 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** – 2nd Saturday of the month
- **Penrith** – 3rd Tuesday of the month
- **Sedbergh** – every Wednesday
- **Ulverston** – 3rd Saturday of the month

Diary of COGF Events in 2026

Sunday 8th February, 2.00 pm

Annual Seed Swap and social (preceded by a Committee meeting)

Sunday 22nd February from 10.00 am – 2.00 pm

COGF at Caldbeck Potato Day

Sunday 15th March, 1.30 – 5.00 pm

An Introduction to Hedge laying

Sunday 10th May, 10.00 am – 4.00 pm

COGF at Plant and Food Fair Hutton-in-the-Forest

Sunday 26th April, 10.00 am

Seeds to Saplings at Growing Well, Tebay

Other events are in the process of being arranged, details in following issues of KIT



Committee

Treasurer and membership secretary

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