

Cumbria Organic Gardeners and Farmers



Keeping in Touch – June 2026



Primula Auricula Old Mustard - Thanks to a member for sending in the photo of this beautiful flower.

From the Editor

Some members made a fascinating visit to Growing Well at Tebay. See report on page 5. I took away two things in particular from this event. First, the term “air pruning”, which involves keeping a potted plant away from any contact with the ground so that it doesn’t try to root into it. Here, plants were all stored on crates lifted above the ground for this purpose.

A member says: “When the roots are exposed to air, they dehydrate and stop extending. This triggers new growth of smaller roots within the soil mass.”

Second, when you plant a tree you should think of it in twenty five years’ time. Our guide for the day talked about the importance of planning ahead, which at present involves considering the effects of climate change and what trees will survive in twenty or more years’ time.

COGF will have a stall, as usual, at Susan’s Farm Open Farm Sunday on 7th June. The focus for the stall is wormeries. Plants left from the plant sale at Hutton will also be on offer. More plants are welcome from members.

***Otiorhynchus sulcatus*, commonly known as Vine Weevil**

Evidence of the vine weevil is usually signs of nibbled edges of leaves, often of ornamental plants. In my garden *Bergenia* seemed to be worst affected. The weevils came into our garden via some Box plants I bought at a large garden centre in Ambleside.



Since that time, I spot the odd adult, but have more often discovered the larvae in potted plants I have around the garden. They seem to be attracted to plants with soft roots, easily nibbled. I have found them in pots with *Sedum* plants, for example. Having spotted one or two adult weevils in the house, I suspected they may have emerged from Spider plants I have, which have particularly soft roots.

Vine weevil larvae are distinctive as small, creamy white grubs, around a centimetre long, with a dark head, and can be found in pots during summer/autumn. As pupae, they are creamy white and a similar size.

Treatment can involve using nematodes, but it is tricky as it needs to be done at the correct time. The best method is to be watchful – looking for signs of plants wilting or dying for no obvious reason and checking the compost for the larvae or the pupae.

I recently spotted two pots with nothing growing in them and, wondering what I had lost, tipped out the compost to find pupae. They must have eaten the roots completely as there was nothing but the compost left. Care needs to be taken with how the larvae and pupae are dealt with. If they are left to develop into the adult stage, the whole process can start again. I search the compost thoroughly and then squish them.



Vine weevil larva



Vine weevil pupa

Editor

Move over, Christopher Wren.....



I thought that you might like to see this photo of the nest that our wren has built on top of a swallow's nest in our lean-to. The swallows don't seem bothered and are nesting further along.

I read that the male wren builds several nests (up to 10!) and then lets the female choose which one she fancies. I don't think that our female wren has chosen this one. My brother remarked that he didn't realise that some birds live in flats! I'm glad the wren system doesn't apply to humans!

The source of the report that wrens build several nests was Dominic Couzens' RSPB book "The Secret Life of Garden Birds". See the relevant extract attached at the end of the newsletter.

A member

Member's joke:

Time flies like an arrow.

Fruit flies like a banana

Worms

"Worms are more powerful than the African Elephant and are more important to the economy than the cow" - Charles Darwin

Worms are so resourceful. We have many leaves to collect in our garden, which is great because it means lots of leaf mould. However, along one of the stony paths in the garden, I didn't get round to collecting the thick layer over winter. When I came to check them, they were all but vanished apart from small tufts of leaves showing (see photo). These are clusters of leaves being pulled down by the worms. They have, in effect, almost done my work for me. How splendid is that? Worms truly are the gardeners' friend in many ways!

I feel that what is being said about how reliant we are on bees applies to worms. Where would we be without them?



Close up of leaf cluster in a stony path



Later stage, almost disappeared

There are around thirty species of worms in Britain, sixteen of which are likely to be found in gardens. They vary in size and colour and all help to keep good soil structure and fertility. I suspect the worms responsible for the above are earthworms, which live deep in the soil.

Eisenia fetida, also known as brandling worms or sometimes, tiger worms are the worms you are likely to find in your compost bins or leaf litter. They are reddish in colour and smaller than earthworms, which live deeper down in the soil. The focus for the COGF stall at Susan's Farm on Open Farm Sunday (see page 7) will be using wormeries.

There will be more information on worms in a future issue of KIT, including some of the information that will be available at the open farm day.

Editor

Report

Visit to Growing Well Tree Nursery, Tebay, 26th April

We were met by our guide for the day, who oversees all the Growing Well sites in Cumbria. For the first hour he talked to us about the history and aims of Growing Well before we were taken round the site to see the dedicated growing of Cumbrian native trees from seeds or cuttings.

People who could benefit from working outdoors here are referred by GPs, other health organisations, or themselves. A year is recommended but is not always needed for them to move on. Others are welcome to come and help on Fridays for a full or half a day. There is a structure to the day that helps everyone.

The site used to be a caravan park, so handily has water and electricity laid on and level areas well surrounded by protecting trees and sturdy fencing. Because of the phytosanitary rules plants must not be grown directly in the ground, so the whole growing area is covered with mypex or with lined raised beds. This aspect is not organic but everything else is as nearly as possible, the big exception being the chemical to eliminate vine weevils, also in the rules.

The scale of the operation is impressively large. What does an area of 1,000 young trees look like? Well, look at a bed approx. 4' x 12' and see 800 trees. Most are sold on at one to two years old; they have orders for several thousands at a time



Our guide showing us the Alder cuttings



COGF members outside the seed store

Seeds are collected from all over Cumbria, cleaned and dried, stratified when necessary, then stored at 3 – 5 degrees C. There are three categories of seed; scale (e.g. from cones), wings (e.g. birch) and stones or fruit, each requiring different germination and stratification processes. Some trees can be readily produced from cuttings, notably from willow hard wood, or Alder as seen in the photo above.

Propagation and growing on takes place in polytunnels before planting in the open. Small seeds are scattered in trays, seeds large enough to handle singly are individually planted into propagation trays taking 8 x 12 (= 96). These trays are plastic and will last many years, being very sturdy and specifically designed on short legs to allow free flow of air and water. Our group planted several trayfuls. (I wish I had such equipment.)

Growing trees fits in very well with vegetable growing because the workload comes at different times of the year; most tree labour is from autumn through the winter to spring and most vegetables and fruit in spring to autumn. Because of the growing system the trees are sold wrapped in bundles and bare rooted.



We got to see inside the vegetable growing polytunnels



Getting ready to plant the tree seeds



Tree seeds sprouting, bought by the kg.



Tree seed modules planted up in 8 x 12 trays

I found this a fascinating visit with lots to see, learn and do. Perhaps at a suitable time of year we could see their vegetable operation.

Future Event

Open Farm Sunday 7th June, 11.00 am – 4.00 pm, Susan's Farm, The Croft, Houghton, near Carlisle CA3

Susan's Farm will be open to all, free of charge, no need to book. There will be free guided farm walks, particularly related to regenerative farming. See Susan's Farm website: www.susansfarm.co.uk

There will be various stalls relating to organic farming, natural history and the environment, the emphasis being on information and education, not on commercialisation.

COGF will have a stall at Susan's Farm with information boards, leaflets and advice on wormeries. We will also be selling plants not sold in May. If you can help, please contact a member of the COGF Committee.



Future Event

Visit to Growing Well, Cross Side, Egremont

We have arranged a visit to Growing Well, West Cumbria, where they work with clients and volunteers to grow organic vegetables for their crop share scheme.

Please arrive by 11:15 for refreshments and a tour of the site.
Lunch will be at 12:30.

You may also choose to stay for a practical session in the afternoon, working with their activity leads and volunteers on the field.

Here's the link to their website
<https://growingwell.co.uk/west-cumbria/>



Recipe

Golden Syrup Loaf Cake

This delicious cake was served up at a recent Committee meeting and the member who baked it was asked to supply the recipe. She says it is a recipe from Sarah's Slice (see link below) and was featured in Cumbria Life. She finds her recipes reliable and easy to follow.

Ingredients

125g butter
60g White Sugar
60g Soft Brown Sugar
200g Golden Syrup
225g Self Raising Flour
1 Large Egg
150ml Milk
2 Tbsp Golden Syrup (for glazing)



Method

1. Preheat the oven to 160 degrees centigrade (140 fan) Gas mark 3.
2. Line a 2lb loaf tin.
3. Melt the butter with the sugar and syrup in a pan. Heat until sugar has dissolved. Set aside to cool for 10-15 minutes.
4. Beat the milk and egg and mix together.
5. In a large bowl mix all the ingredients together until you have a smooth, quite runny batter. Adding the liquid to the flour a bit at a time help avoid lumps.
6. Pour the batter into the prepared loaf tin.
7. Bake for 60 minutes or until a cake tester comes out clean.
8. Brush the 2 tbsp syrup on the top of the cake and then leave to cool.
9. Wrap it in parchment paper or tin foil and keep in an airtight tin for at least a day. It will keep for at least a week and improves with keeping provided you wrap it up

<https://www.sarahsslice.co.uk>

Sarah's
SLICE

What is this?

Does anyone know what this lesion is? A member asks. It is on an apple tree in her sister's garden near Bristol

It is thought it may be the tiger moth. If anyone has any information, please contact the editor



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 7th June 11.00 am - 4.00 pm

COGF at Open Farm Sunday at Susan's Farm

Friday 24th July 11.15 am

Visit to Growing Well, Egremont

Sunday 20th September, 10.00 am – 4.00 pm

COGF at Apple Day, Hutton in the Forest

Sunday 15th November 11.00 am – 2.00 pm

Annual General Meeting with speaker followed by the AGM, then lunch followed by a Committee meeting



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The Secret Lives of Garden Birds

Wrens as Property Developers

WRENS ARE SMALL birds with big mouths.

the result of all this early spring shouting is to

MARCH



really the shells of nests, the outer walls of a Wren-style dome built up of moss, grass and dead leaves. They could really do with a little subtlety, especially for the inner décor. If our Wren were a person we would say that his work needed a feminine touch.

Funnily enough, the Wren agrees. With his

very close to the nest that forged their bond.

As it turns out the female is wise to be choosy about home rather than home-maker. She won't see much more of him from now on, unless he's the overseeing type. Some males are; some aren't. Either way, she won't be expecting him to share