

Cumbria Organic Gardeners and Farmers



Keeping in Touch – April 2026



*Strands of toad spawn found in my pond – always a healthy sign!
As you can see it differs from frogspawn and isn't always easy to find – Ed.*

From the Editor

There are so many signs of spring now – and with more daylight hours, weather permitting, there's no excuse not to get out in the garden. Unless, like me you have a bad back from being too ambitious. Take care by easing yourself in to anything strenuous!

There are still some places left for the visit to **Growing Well at Tebay on 26th April**. See more detail on page 3 and in the January issue of KIT.

Don't forget our **plant sale on 10th May at Hutton-in-the-Forest**. Please let us have any plants, seedlings or cuttings. All plants welcome - favourites are edibles, such as tomatoes, cucurbits, brassicas and fruit plants or bushes. Anyone unable to come to the sale and would like to drop off plants beforehand, please contact a member of the Committee. Help on the plant stall on the day is also welcome. Contact a member of the Committee for any kind offers.

As it is International Compost Awareness Week from 3rd to 9th May this year a Garden Organic webinar – An Introduction to Home Composting is available on 6th May 7 – 8 p.m. to book:

<https://www.ticketsource.com/norfolk-master-composters/t-ejjrmkr>

Fermented Tomato Seedlings from a member

This is my very late tray of Verna Orange tomatoes coming up...I thought it may be interesting to see the variation in germination rates!

The central row were 2024 seeds 'fermented' before drying. The ones above were the same year as the central row, but not fermented. The ones below were 2021 seeds.

It may be just chance, who knows...? The next issue is, will they grow into the expected tomatoes plants or did I mis-label them all?



Here is some information from **plantgrowerworld online: "Seed fermentation is an ancient technique that has been used by gardeners for centuries to enhance seed germination and seedling growth. It involves soaking seeds in a liquid medium, allowing beneficial microorganisms to break down the seed's natural coatings and unlock its potential for growth. This process not only increases the chances of successful germination but also promotes healthier root development and more robust seedlings."*

Snakeshead Fritillaries

Each year some of my fritillaries come up white. I am certain the same ones are other times purple. I have been told this is due to some deficiency that the plant experiences. Can anyone confirm or deny this? Does anyone have an alternative suggestion?

Ed.



COGF's upcoming 40th anniversary

COGF would like to thank member a long standing member for the very generous donation towards the 40th anniversary celebrations. I showed her a small photo book I had made up of twenty photos of previous COGF events going back many years and this brought back memories of events and of members no longer with us.

She thought it would be a good idea to present everyone with a similar photobook as a memory of times gone by. If anyone out there has a photograph they think would be appropriate they can send it in so we can decide the final selection.

Caldbeck and District Gardening Club's Potato Day, Sunday 22nd February

On behalf of COGF, I would like to thank Caldbeck Gardening Club for allowing us to have a table at the Potato Day event. It is always a bustling day of people chatting and buying plants. The COGF table was well attended by your customers, some of whom were coming back to gardening due to retirement or house moving.

Composting was an ongoing topic. Thankfully the Master Composters were next to us with the necessary leaflets. Thank you to all who made it a wonderful day. See you again next year.



Committee members at the COGF stall.

Reminder - Future Event

Visit to Growing Well Tree Nursery, Tebay, 26th April 10.00 – 1.00 pm

You can book this event online by visiting our website <https://www.cumbriaorganic.org.uk/>.
Places still available.

Further details of the event are in the January KIT, which can also be seen online.

Report

Hedgelaying workshop, Sunday 15th March

A wet and windy day didn't put off a stalwart collection of interested people who ventured out for the hedge laying demo and workshop.

We were taken out to a field and shown a recent hedge that has been worked on and the method and reasoning was explained. The number and character of the questioning demonstrated the interest of the group. Our host responded intellectually and often amusingly.

The standard, or Midlands, style of laying is preferred; this involves driving in stakes at eighteen inch intervals (or, as demonstrated, forearm length) with willow binding along the top and laying the hedging material (pleachers) all in one direction, uphill and away from the prevailing wind when possible. This style differs from the Cumberland style.

Following a break and a welcome hot drink with some delicious treats, we set off again for some action. Our host first demonstrated his style, then encouraged the group to have a go. He uses an appropriate tool, which could be a billhook, a pruning saw or a chainsaw, depending on the girth of the wood, and chops into, but not through, the trunk towards the base. This allows him to lean the pleacher at approximately forty five degrees, weaving it through the stakes.

Thank you for a fascinating afternoon in your beautiful landscape.

Please see the next page for an extract from a piece that was written on hedgelaying for KIT two years ago. You can find the full text on the website under "Resources". There is also a resource sheet, available by emailing the editor.



Cutting the ligger



Detail of the cut



Laying the pleacher



The finished hedge, showing the staking and binding

“Almost any hedge can be regenerated by laying, although very deteriorated, ‘remnant’ hedges may be better off being coppiced, that is, cut right back almost to the ground. The ideal hedge for laying is one that is still fairly vigorous, with plenty of stems and a height of around twelve feet. This sort of hedge is rarely found, however, so we have to make do with what we are faced with!

Laying works as a regeneration method by encouraging new growth from the base of the hedge plant. This is achieved by cutting the stem of the hedge shrub about 80% through, and bending the stem over to lock into place with the plants already partly cut. The cut and bent stems form a sort of living fence, which can thicken the hedge and make it stockproof (although in practice, almost every hedge also has a wire fence as the primary method of excluding stock). The cut stems – liggers in Cumbria, pleachers or plashers in other parts of the country - will usually also throw up new shoots which will in a few years create a mass of new stems and branches. The new shoots that grow up from the partially cut base of the ligger will effectively form new shrubs, and it is this regeneration that keeps a hedge alive for many centuries.

The way in which a hedge is laid, the height and finish of the finished hedge, and how (or if) stakes and binders are used - varies throughout the country. These various styles have developed partly in response to predominant conditions of soil and climate in particular regions, partly due to availability of such things as binder material, and partly to suit other local conditions, the presence or absence of hedge banks, for example.

Cumberland has its own distinct style, which has evolved to produce a hedge stock-proof against sheep and lambs in conjunction with a hedge bank (locally called cests). The Cumberland style works quite well with older, less vigorous and tired hedges, although it is a brutal style and leaves just a line of liggers lying along the cest top, with almost no protection for birds and other wildlife until after at least the first year (and more like two years). Most hedges that are laid in northern Cumbria are completed in this style.”

Report

Seedy Saturday 28th March, Penrith Methodist Hall, Penrith Action for Community Transition

COGF had a last minute booking for this PACT event. Each year, there are not just seeds to swap, but there are plants and gardening items to take away.

In addition, several organisations hold stalls with interesting information, such as North Cumbria Orchard Group, Garden Organic – Master Composters, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Eden Rivers Trust, Bumblebees*, and more.

Lovely cakes and coffees/teas were also on offer. No charge was made for entrance or goods, just voluntary donations. An excellent day for everyone.



COGF held many conversations and handed out information sheets and membership forms. It was good to see the interest of young people there.

* One COGF member and bumblebee ambassador, had the adjacent stall to COGF. It sparked a lot of interest, and Jane's message is clear – bumblebees need help! Here's some advice from The Bumblebee Conservation Trust:

“Bumblebees do an amazing job pollinating our crops and wildflowers. But as our towns and countryside change, there are fewer flowers to feed on, so bumblebees need a helping hand to survive. These crucial pollinators are key to biodiversity and the production of many fruits and vegetables we enjoy. Yet, with fewer flowers to feed on and limited nesting spots, bumblebees are facing tough times and need our support.”

Over to you.....

www.bumblebeeconservation.org



Report

Windermere Food Farm and Holehird Gardens Sunday 12th April

The predicted showers mainly held off during our visit. We began with a welcome warm drink and cake in the conference room at Holehird Gardens, where the speaker delivered his illustrated talk on his journey to his present role of heading up the Windermere Food Farm.

His philosophy on food sustainability is deep rooted and driven from his life experiences. Determined to demonstrate what is possible in any community, his focus is on Windermere where he has lived for a number of years. Here, he suggests, the focus for planning decisions is, as yet, more on the development and needs of tourism and second homes, than on promoting the feeding of the community with local, healthy food.

However, his experience is that, at community level, there is a wealth of altruistic interest in his project, from leasing of land on peppercorn rent, to volunteers giving hours of work, tools and materials, to be found in the community. His long term aim is that the success of this project will become a business model for sustainable production of healthy food for communities anywhere.

He advocates that small, sustainable units of community food growing could supply locals through a variety of distribution methods from social media to food banks, cyclical delivery/collection and more.

We visited his new site in Bowness, in its early stages of a first season of food production, where some early crops are already growing and others have been and are to be planted as more beds are established. The mature orchard area, new fruit bushes, a new polytunnel and an important and integral composting area are all part of the plan for this first season.



The speaker with COGF members.....

.....and contemplating his comfrey

Following the site visit, it was back to Holehird Gardens, for a packed lunch and a stroll around its diversely planted gardens showing lots of spring colour, which did not disappoint.

With National Collections of Meconopsis, Astilbe and Daboecia (yes, we had to look that up too!), it was an impressive, well established and well cared for ten acres with excellent views across the Windermere Valley.

I can't wait to revisit in the summer to see what will be in flower then.



One of the many paths through Holehird



A dramatic sky



Some of the many spring flowers

Member's joke:

One swallow doesn't make a summer,
but a frog can make a long spring.



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 26th April, 10.00 am – 1.00 pm

Seeds to Saplings workshop at Growing Well, Tebay

Sunday 10th May, 10.00 am – 4.00 pm

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

Sunday 7th June 11.00 am until 4.00 pm

COGF at Open Farm Sunday at Susan's Farm

Sunday 20th September, 10.00 am – 4.00 pm

COGF at Apple Day, Hutton in the Forest

Sunday 15th November Time TBA

COGF Annual General Meeting and Committee meeting



Treasurer and Membership secretary

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