

Inside: Overmarsh prepares for spring, missing dehydrator, letter from the president, and more!

THE ISLAND AGRARIAN

NEWS FROM SAN JUAN ISLAND GRANGE #966

**GROWERS, MAKERS, AND KEEPERS WORKING TOGETHER
FOR MUTUAL BENEFIT AND COMMUNITY BUILDING**

Send Kelp!

Learn more about seaweed's many uses and benefits at the Grange Third Thursday Lecture Series event **"Seaweed—Nutritious, Medicinal, Climate-Friendly Sea Vegetables."**

The evening program is the first of the 2026 lecture series and will explore local food independence through sea-based nourishment and kelp farming.

When: Thursday, January 15, 5:00pm

Where: San Juan Island Grange Hall

The Grange will screen



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It's Seed Swap Time

As seed catalogs begin to pile up, they come with the dream of warm weather, flowers, and fresh veggies.



Indulge the need for seed and come to the 2026 Grange Seed Swap. This year it's on National Seed Swap Day!

When: January 31, 2-4pm

Where: San Juan Island Grange Hall

Come empty-handed to pick up seeds, or bring your own seeds to swap. All are welcome.

Seed Swaps are about more than just exchanging seeds. By swapping seeds,

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SAN JUAN ISLAND GRANGE #966

San Juan Island Grange #966 is a grassroots, non-partisan advocacy group supporting a resilient community on San Juan Island.

The Grange serves San Juan Islanders with legislative programs and community activities, such as talent and craft contests, scholarships, and more. You don't have to be a farmer to belong, though many are. Our elected officers are volunteers, and our "work" is done through committees. The heart of our mission is fostering community well-being, and we enjoy gathering to celebrate this.

We are a 501(c)(8) organization, accepting donations towards our programs and to maintain Grange Hall, in downtown Friday Harbor.

Officers of San Juan Island Grange #966 may be found at
sanjuangrange.org/officers.html

Our bylaws and resolutions may be found at sanjuangrange.org/structure.html

San Juan Island Grange #966
P.O. Box 2013
Friday Harbor, WA 98250
(360) 378 6632

admin@sanjuangrange.org
rentals@sanjuangrange.org
facebook.com/SJIGrange966
www.sanjuangrange.org

Overmarsh Farm Commons—What's Growing in 2026

By Amanda Zee, Overmarsh Farm Commons Manager

Our first growing season at Overmarsh Farm Commons has been a huge success, and we're excited to build on that momentum in the year ahead.



As we reflect on lessons learned and update our five-year plan, we're energized by the projects already underway and those planned for 2026.

Community Garden Expansion

We are expanding the community garden and have already welcomed 24 new growers for 2026, who join the

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Letter from the President

Happy New Year Grangers!

The end of a year is always a busy time at the Grange, with electing and installing officers, proposing and adopting budgets, and creating or restructuring committees.

New Program Chair Liz Gadbois is putting together a good-looking series of free public programs, starting with one on Thursday, January 15 about growing and eating seaweed.

Our new Chair of the Family Living Department, Suki Boydston, and her team have put together a budget and a plan for 2026. This department has always been important to me because it works to build resilience in the home through the basics of food, shelter, and clothing. Their first event will be the Repair Fair, Sunday, February 1.

Amanda Zee and the Overmash Farm Commons team are preparing for their second year and drafting a 5-year plan to guide expansion in a way that promotes the growing of food while being respectful of the land we steward.

The Farmers Market Grange Booth has seen phenomenal growth this past year. Vice President Bill Severson and I are working with Booth Manager Scott Reynolds to create a committee to help him with policy work. The main tasks will be to jury items that Grangers want to sell at the booth and to re-tool the commission structure so that more of the cost of running the booth is borne by vendors.

The Grange Hall Building Committee will be meeting soon to go over the list of maintenance and improvements proposed for 2026. First on the list are a major electrical/lighting remodel of the main hall and the removal of the suspended ceiling. Contractors have been contacted and will be giving their assessments later this month.

Here's to a happy and productive new year in 2026!

Roger Ellison, 2026 President

GROWERS' CIRCLE COFFEE HOUR



Notices

Missing!
A Cosori ten-tray dehydrator has disappeared from the Grange Hall kitchen or basement storage area. Please return, no questions asked, or contact Suki at sukib56@gmail.com



***Send Kelp!* continued from page 1**

Send Kelp, a documentary by filmmaker Blake McWilliam. *Send Kelp* spotlights kelp farming on Vancouver Island and features stunning cinematography and a distinctive score that incorporates the natural sounds of kelp. The film offers an engaging look at regenerative ocean farming and its potential role in sustainable food systems.

The film will be preceded by a short presentation by Kristy Bredin of Mermaid Botanicals (hailing from Waldron Island) to discuss nutritional and medicinal benefits of seaweed, issues affecting both wild and cultivated seaweed ecosystems, and sustainable seaweed harvesting practices. There will also be a seaweed tasting before the film, catered by Rolling Sushi!

Seaweed is a highly nutrient-dense food that delivers essential minerals and micronutrients. It is also a fast-growing crop that absorbs carbon dioxide and can



Kristy Bredin harvesting seaweed in the San Juan Islands

improve water quality by reducing ocean acidification. Seaweed is a promising component of climate adaptation strategies.

For more information on the lecture, contact Elizabeth Gadbois at (360) 622 9602. For information on commercial kelp production and its potential for the Salish Sea, go to <https://sji.events> or email grange966.programs@gmail.com. This event is sponsored by Friday Harbor Film Festival and Rolling Sushi.

It's Seed Swap Time continued from page 1

we are living our values of sustainability, diversity, and self-sufficiency. We are building our independence from global food supply chains. We are reducing the carbon footprint of commercial seed production.

Some of the seeds at the swap may be heirloom seeds worth saving for future generations. They may not necessarily be found in catalogs. They may be adapted to local growing conditions after many years in island gardens. Or they may be hybrid varieties that we know work here. Hybrids are welcome!

If you bring home-grown seeds to the swap, please label them to indicate whether they are from open pollinated or hybrid (F1) plants (see page 8).

Many plants require isolation to avoid cross pollination, whether by distance, by timing of flowering, or by containment. Please bring seeds from plants that have been adequately isolated.

For obvious reasons, please do not bring seed from genetically engineered, poisonous, or noxious plants, or unknown seed from volunteer plants.

At the swap, seeds will be displayed on tables, and you may choose from among them. Please take only as many as you need for this year. We will be back next year with more!



There will be Master Gardeners at the swap to answer your gardening questions.

At the end of the swap, unclaimed seeds will be available free of charge at the Grange Seed Library, located at the San Juan Island Public Library, or they will be deposited in the Grange Seed Bank.

Overmarsh Farm Commons continued from page 2

30 returning growers from last season. We hope to continue expanding garden space to meet community interest and demand. If you're interested in growing at Overmarsh, applications are still open: <https://forms.gle/MiWNSCx7cqzYRRcR7>

Blueberry Patch

This year marks the addition of perennial offerings on the farm with a new blueberry patch. The space is filling quickly with large transplanted bushes—88 in total,



each individually owned by a participating grower. An additional block will be cover-cropped later this spring, with the potential to expand the blueberry patch next fall.

Heritage Orchard & Teaching Nursery

More perennials are on the way! This spring, we'll be planting a heritage orchard and teaching nursery, along with a demonstration espalier planting. These plantings are an exciting step toward our long-term goal of sharing free fruit trees with the community.

Pasture & Silvopasture Development

We will not be grazing livestock on the pasture this year, as we shift our focus to pasture renovation and establishing silvopasture—the integration of trees into pasture systems. Thanks to a generous contribution of 100 free trees, we'll be preparing the site this spring and summer, with tree planting planned for the fall.

Farm Plot Program

We're thrilled to welcome our first farm plot

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Overmarsh Farm Commons continued from page 6

grower this season. While she is starting with a small plot, we hope to expand the farm plot program next year and welcome additional small-scale farm participants in the future.

Infrastructure Improvements

We've also received cost-share funding from the SJI Conservation District to expand our water system. This project includes adding an additional water tank and installing a curtain drain, which we hope will reduce early-spring water saturation in the garden area and improve growing conditions.

We're excited to step into the 2026 growing season and grateful for the community support that continues to make Overmarsh Farm Commons



Above, the Overmarsh Farm Commons garden is expanded using tarps laid over sod and cover cropping.

Below, garden rows are mulched, to protect the soil and discourage weeds.



a thriving shared space for islanders to learn, grow, and connect.

THE EDUCATED GRANGER

Hybrids, GMOs, and Open-Pollinated Plant Varieties—What's the Difference and Why Does It Matter?

By Frank Morton, [Wild Garden Seed](#), excerpted with permission

Hybrid—an offspring of two plants of different varieties, species, or genera. F1 hybrids require some control or manipulation in the pollination process.

GMO (Genetically Modified Organism)—organisms containing genes from unrelated species that were artificially inserted using genetic engineering techniques. GMO plants can be hybrids or open-pollinated.

Open-Pollinated—an openly breeding population of plants with more or less uniform traits, appearance, and adaptations that produce progeny of like qualities.

Commercial F1 hybrids are the kind of hybrids available to commercial farmers, often referred to in discussions of "hybrids vs OPs." In commercial hybrids, all of the breeding work goes into the parents of the intended F1 end product. These parent lines achieve a specific genetic uniformity by repeated cycles of family inbreeding in the hope of creating only ideal F1 offspring. Commercial F1 hybrid seed is intended to produce one crop of genetically uniform offspring. Seed from hybrids does not produce uniform offspring.



Hybrids are created in nature and in breeding projects whenever unlike kinds, varieties, or species successfully inter-mate.

The hybrid itself (the F1 generation) is a "genetic

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average" of the parents that created it, and they generally look that way. When hybrids have offspring (the F2 generation), they don't resemble the



hybrid as much as they display an assembly of traits from the original parents of the hybrid, including some genetically recessive traits that were previously invisible. At the end of six to ten generations of mating "like kinds to like kinds," varietal families become genetically stable and will "breed true" to the type. At this point, each kind is now

an open-pollinated variety, with some genetic uniformity.

This is where all open-pollinating varieties come from—new, heirloom, commercial, organic. Except for rare mutations, all the diversity we see in our cornucopia has arisen from the co-mingling of an ever-evolving array of varieties under changing conditions.

OP varieties are uniform enough to be clearly recognizable but contain enough genetic diversity to maintain vigorous growth and adaptability under changeable conditions.

Conversely, inbred parent lines easily fail when conditions don't suit them, and hybrids do not adapt to changing conditions.



Don't Buy it, Borrow It!

See below for Grange-owned equipment available for you to borrow, with the contact info. for the Grange member who can set up a loan:

- Dehydrators: Suki Boydston at sukib56@gmail.com
- Poultry-equipment: Bruce Robinson at brobinson@rockisland.com
- Cider-presses: John Latimer at jt_latimer@yahoo.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

SAVE THE DATE!

San Juan Islands Prepares is offering a free eight-hour, in-person, DHS/FEMA-certified course in **"All Hazards Preparedness for Animals in Disasters," April 25 at the Marie Boe Building, San Juan County Fairgrounds.**

The course will cover safe animal handling, animal evacuation, animal sheltering, humane euthanasia, and carcass disposal, as well as integration of animal management into existing ICS structures, federal support for disaster recovery,

jurisdictional assessments, and mapping of evacuation routes.



The course will provide livestock producers, emergency managers, veterinary staff, extension agents, community leaders, health personnel, and fire and law enforcement with tools to protect against, respond to, and recover from disasters involving animals in rural areas. To pre-register, email SJIPrepare@gmail.com or go to www.SanJuanIslandsPREPARE.org/ events for more information.

