

Inside: Seed Bank, grafting workshop, lecture series, Grower's Circle Digest, and more!

THE ISLAND AGRARIAN

NEWS FROM SAN JUAN ISLAND GRANGE #966

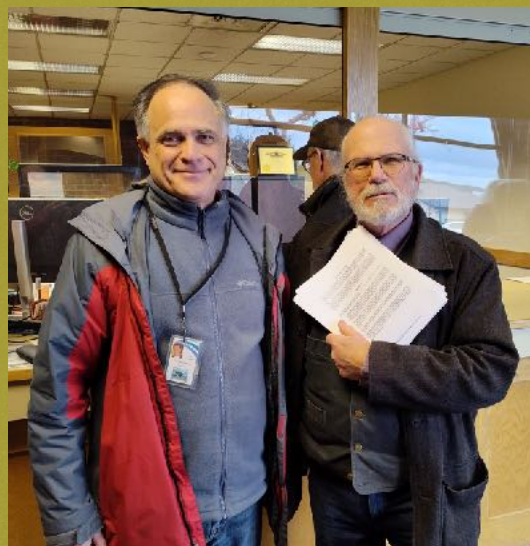
**GROWERS, MAKERS, AND KEEPERS WORKING TOGETHER
FOR MUTUAL BENEFIT AND COMMUNITY BUILDING**

Beautiful Beginnings

By Bruce Robinson

Two major recent events will help ensure the success of the Overmarsh Farm Commons project. The first is the signing of a 20-year lease by the San Juan County Conservation Land Bank and the Grange. The second is the selection of a Farm Manager.

The Overmarsh proposal was accepted by the Land Bank commissioners in April 2024, and work at Overmarsh has been proceeding under a user agreement. An actual lease could not be signed until the county council gave final approval, which occurred on



Signed, sealed, delivered. On March 12, Executive Director of the Land Bank, Lincoln Bormann, and Grange President, Roger Ellison, met at the county courthouse, where the Overmarsh Farm Commons lease was signed and witnessed.

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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

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Island Agrarian Classifieds!

The Island Agrarian is the newsletter of the San Juan Island Grange. *The Agrarian* informs Grange members of events, projects, and community issues; publicizes Grange activities; and celebrates the work of Grangers in support of the Grange mission.

The Agrarian features regular columns, news, and reports, as well as classified ads for goods and services offered by or of benefit to island growers, makers, and keepers. Classified ads:

- Relate to island gardening and ag, value-added production, services, and strategies for sustainability
- Promote community resilience
- Support regeneration and preservation of natural resources
- Should be concise
- May be edited
- May be rejected for publication

To submit a classified ad, please email snowberryfarm@rockisland.com.



Seeking Farm/Ranch Caretaker Position

Island residents and Grange members, with references, offering skill and experience in

Animal care. Natural Horsemanship and equine massage; goat husbandry and milking; care of poultry, sheep, and cows; chicken coop construction; brush clearing; fencing

Farming. Organic gardening and permaculture, greenhouse management, specialty green production

Building maintenance. Construction, remodeling, custom welding, electrical, plumbing

Contact Keith and Colleen at (360) 797 5133. See also www.keithchatham.com

Letter from the President

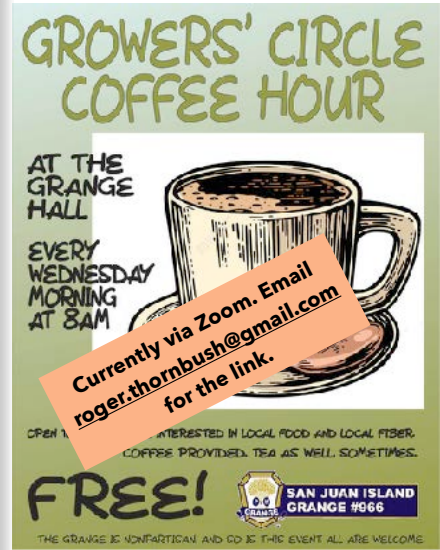
We had a great surge in membership in 2024, cementing our status as the largest Grange in Washington State. This increase has led to some growing pains, though. Often new members would join with enthusiasm and then wait and wonder just what it was they had joined. At the Vision Session in February, Heidi Corbett volunteered to contact new members to help them settle in. Roxy Wolosenko and Jeannette Chou offered to help, and the Welcome Committee was born. They have been hard at work welcoming new members, answering questions, and encouraging them to participate in Grange work in ways that match their skills and interests.

To help guide this process, committee chairs have been asked to send to the Welcome Committee two or three sentences describing where they could use additional volunteer help. A thank you to the committee chairs who have done so, and a reminder to other committees to please send in your requests!

We are also looking into creating a member directory, listing skills and interests of members, so that we can better help each other or share knowledge. An "opt-in" will be required and our data will be kept behind a secure digital wall opened only by member ID numbers. I hope that a directory will encourage more mutual aid among Grange members and increase our community resilience.

Speaking of which, the new Mutual Aid Committee has been working on their Isle Supplies Lending Library. Lori Boyd and Jessa Madosky have been organizing donations and storage space for the library. The fundraiser is at [Help Launch Isle Supplies Lending Library](#) and also on [Facebook](#).

Roger Ellison, 2025 President



Land Available at Overmarsh Farm Commons

- Community garden patches 100-400 sq ft
- Medium plots 500-1000 sq ft
- Allotments 1000-2000 sq ft
- Market garden up to 1/2 acre
- Collaborative farms up to 2 acres
- A share in a community orchard
- Pastures for grazing animals
- Custom growing? Just ask!

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfDNkxDXazm8flFeZRq9VR6HbXB6Xk3M1_Pq83SgRYGXAAJEQ/viewform

Come vote on the selection of the Overmarsh Farm Commons Manager at the regular Grange business meeting, Wednesday, April 2, starting at 7pm!

Beautiful Beginnings continued from page 1

February 11, 2025. With a lease signed, the Overmarsh community is prepared to move forward with gardens and grazing this spring.

The second big event is the naming of the Overmarsh Farm Manager. The steering committee is happy to announce the selection of Amanda Zee for this important position. Amanda comes with years of experience at Sweet Earth Farm, where she practices the regenerative and organic approach to agriculture that is encouraged at Overmarsh. She has also been the coordinator of the San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild Farmers-to-Farmland program, which has given her a strong understanding of how to connect beginning gardeners and farmers to leased land. Amanda's hiring will be formalized following recommendation by the Grange Executive Committee and ratification by Grange members at the April 2 business meeting. Please come vote on this key role!



Amanda is "thrilled to be offered the role of Farm Manager of Overmarsh Farm Commons. This exciting project is an important step in helping to build our food system and community resiliency, and I look forward to helping it flourish."



Tools for Overmarsh

Overmarsh Farm Commons is gearing up for the growing season, and we are looking for donations of garden tools and equipment. If you have any of the items below that you would like to donate, you can drop them in the wooden

box in front of Grange Hall or arrange a pick-up by emailing

sanjuangrange@gmail.com. **We need shovels, garden spades, hoes, rakes, hand trowels, hori hori knives, plastic buckets, spading forks, pitchforks, hoses, watering cans, wheelbarrows, garden carts, a chipper, electric fence netting and/or solar charger, a walk-behind tractor, and mobile tool shed(s).**

News From the Grange Seed Bank

By Nancy Best

Resiliency is a guiding mission of our Grange. Hoping for the best and planning for the worst, the Grange has created a seed bank.

Ensuring that there are vegetable seeds available on San Juan Island is one of the ways that we can make sure we have some of the food we would need for emergencies.

We have chosen seeds of vegetables that grow well here, that provide year round nutrition, and that people enjoy eating. The original idea was to amass enough



seed for fifty families to have a year's supply of vegetables, but we haven't stopped there.

So far the seed bank has included only open pollinated seeds, so that if the island remains isolated or dependent on itself for food, we can rely on the seed from the plants we grow. The seed bank is held in a freezer, which should extend the viability of the seed for four to five times its usual life.

There are some locally grown and heirloom



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TREE GRAFTING WORKSHOP

Saturday, April 5, from 12:30-2:30
at the stage area of the
Farmers Market.

Madrona Murphy of Kwiaht, Lori Brakken of the Home Orchard Society, and Greg Meyer of Planted Pantry will teach how to graft trees, have rootstock & scion wood available, and tools to buy. Feel free to bring your own scion wood and grafting tools.

**Island Resilience:
A Community
Lecture Series**

**3rd Thursday of the Month,
5:30-7pm at Grange Hall**

This Grange lecture series features local speakers who will share how our community can prepare for, adapt to, and withstand diverse and changing conditions on the island.

April 17: *Good News for Anxious Times: Disasters in the Islands* with Brendan Cowan, Director, San Juan County Department of Emergency Management


May 15: *A Historical Perspective on San Juan Island Resilience* with Boyd Pratt, local author and historian

Seed Bank continued

seeds in the bank, including a generous donation of seeds from Louisa and Brook Brouwer of Ferry Boat Seeds, on San Juan Island, as well as several pounds of Waldron McNaught kale.

For the thousands of years, farming and gardening skills included how to save seeds. Our next step towards island food resiliency is to encourage gardeners to think about saving seeds for the Seed Bank. Another might be for the Grange to provide education and support for growing at least some of the easier vegetables. If you grow beans, peas, or tomatoes, there will be information coming soon! Till then, here's a place to start.

If you have vegetable cultivars you would like to suggest for inclusion in the bank or to donate seeds, please



contact me, Nancy Best, at Nancyb1133@gmail.com

Grower's Circle Digest

Reported by Roger Ellison

On February 26 we talked about what to plant in milk jugs: arugula, lettuce, cilantro, scallions, cauliflower, napa cabbage, peas.

In March, you can start a lot of seeds like tomatoes and cabbages indoors.

Linda Gilkeson is a great resource for planting times. Check out her website and get on her email list at [Linda Gilkeson || West Coast Gardening || Organic Year Round Gardening](#)

Gardening

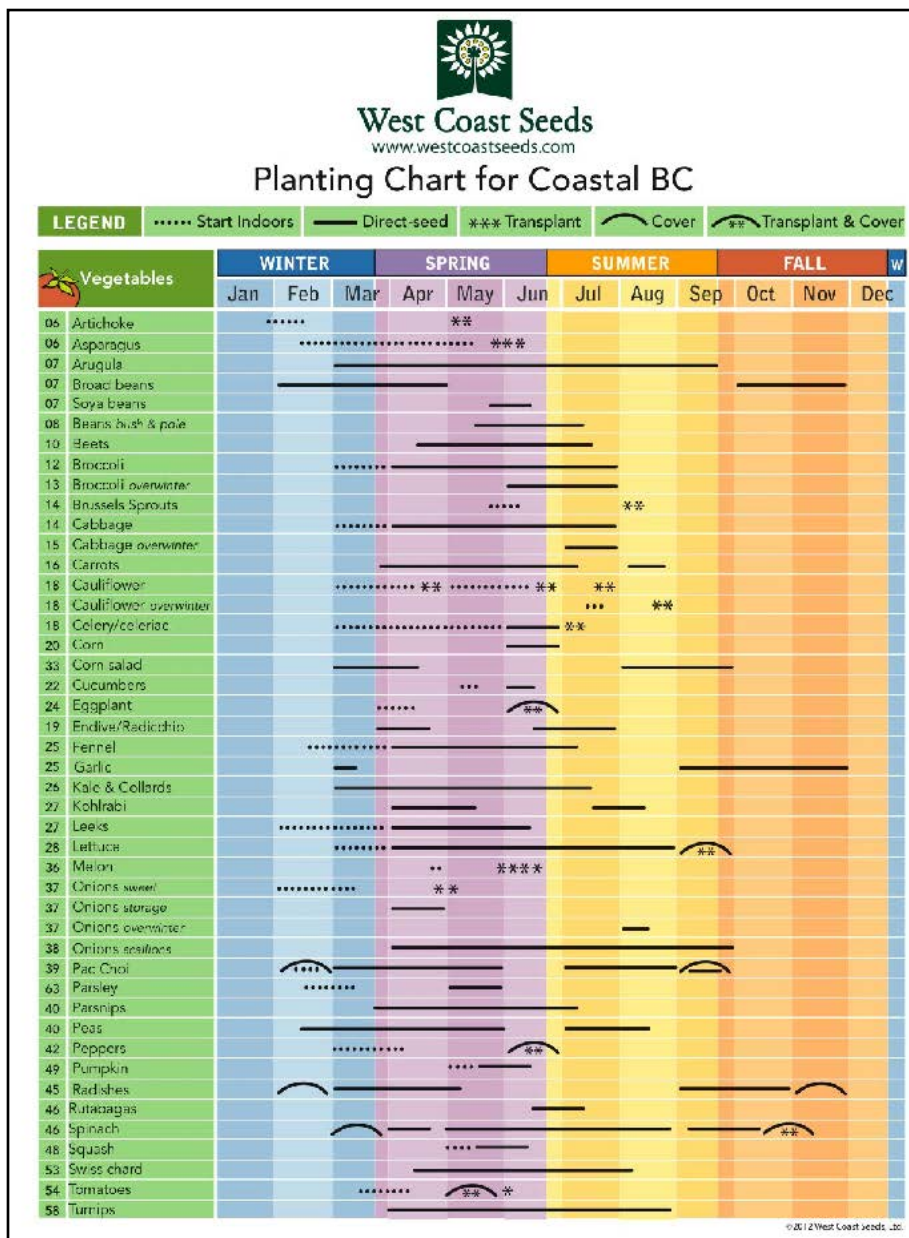
Here's a very useful chart from West Coast Seeds in BC.

On February 5 Elliot reported that the arugula he grew with supplemental light weighed three times as much as plants grown with natural light alone. Grow lights were used for two hours in the morning and two in the evening. So, what about temperature?

Where can we find a meter that measures the amount of light that falls on an area over time? This might do the trick: [SunCalc® Sunlight Calucator Meter](#)

Kat ran an experiment that subjected native

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Grower's Digest continued

plant seeds to cold stratification for varying lengths of time and involved wet or dry methods. [Different Seed Stratifying Methods – Wet Cold Vs. Dry Cold Stratification | Gardening Know How](#)

Should grow bags sit in tubs of water? Many growers use that technique, especially in the summer. Nancy W., Nancy B., and Roger use kiddie pools.

Sarah says grouping spuds in bags allows her to cycle through the soil, like rotating the garden rather than the crop.



Elliot asked if natural fiber grow bags were available. Bill described the wire cage and hay bags for growing potatoes at Overmarsh.

Book recommendations: Alice recommends *Nature's Best Hope* by Doug Tallamy. Jill suggests *Founding Gardeners* by Andrea Wulf.

On March 5, we talked about Cream peas, "part of a group of beans called southern peas. They are small, cream-colored beans that can be eaten fresh or dried. Cream peas cook up creamy and tender, with a slightly sweet and nutty flavor. Southern peas include three types: crowder, cream, and black-eyed. Crowders have a robust flavor, cream peas are more mild, and black-eyed peas fall somewhere in between." Source: Microsoft Bing.

Nancy Best has surplus mason bees that she is offering at 30 for \$30, discounted to \$25 for Grangers. We discussed whether bee tubes can be made from local materials. Commercial suppliers make them from the stems of phragmites reed grasses. *Phragmites australis*, the non-native common reed phenotype, is on the San Juan County Noxious weed list, so harvesting it for bee tubes would help with control. [Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board](#)

Elliot reported that in his continuing supplemental light trial, arugula under lights have twice the mass of the control group, but are quite lanky.

A favorite productive green bean for our region is Provider, an open-pollinated bush bean. [Provider Bean - Seed Savers Exchange](#) Open-pollinated seeds are better for seed saving and come true, whereas hybrids do not come true from seed.

Some varieties of Swiss chard do better over the winter than others. For Dennis the silver chard outshined the rainbow chard. Several of us have seeds from Dorothy Linzee's chard, a survivor of Idaho winters. For Jill, a red chard does the best.

Succession planting of potatoes works with short-season varieties like Yukon Gold.