

THE ISLAND AGRARIAN

NEWS FROM SAN JUAN ISLAND GRANGE #966

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

Overmarsh Farm Commons Potato Patch

By Bill Severson

Our team is very excited that the San Juan Island Grange has been selected to lease a 35-acre piece of the Beaverton Marsh Preserve from the San Juan County Conservation Land Bank to develop a cooperative farm project we are calling the Overmarsh Farm Commons (project update and photos on page 5). Now that we have “caught this bus we have been chasing,” what do we do with it?

Well, we had an island needed to grow away, the best would be

Overmarsh established best practice to is first to kill a technique "occultation."

turns grass and without tillage by putting a solid, dark material (tarp) over the grass during a spring and summer growing cycle. While the tarp does its work, we will grow potatoes in cages on top of the black tarp. Then in the fall we can harvest the potato crop, take up the tarp, and grow rows of garlic and winter vegetables.



Artist Vincent Van Gogh honors the humble potato as a garden and diet staple

thought if we emergency and food right thing to grow potatoes.

Farm is grass land, so prepare the soil the grass using called Occultation dirt into soil

Continued on page 4



**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

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Sign of Spring!

By Alice Deane

One of the most anticipated signs of spring, the WSU San Juan County Master Gardeners Spring Plant Sale, will take place on Saturday, May 18, 9am—12pm at the Mullis Center in Friday Harbor.

Nearly all vegetable plant varieties for sale will be heirlooms or open-pollinated varieties, much loved for their wonderful flavors and dependability in our short San-Juan season and marine environment. Most are not available elsewhere.

There will be 16 tomato varieties, including the heirlooms Stupice, Cherokee Purple, Little Napoli, and Principe Borghese as well as many favorite cherry tomatoes. Among the short season plants available are Marketmore Slicer and Suyo Long Slicer cucumbers and Costata Romanesco zucchini. Multiple varieties of other Master Gardener taste-test winners will include six kinds of peppers and herbs that work well in small gardens or containers.



Proceeds from the sale are used to support Master Gardener programs, such as the SJI Master Gardener Demonstration Garden, which provides over 1,500 pounds of produce every year for the SJI Food Bank. Funds also support community education programs; Plant Diagnostic Clinics on Lopez, Orcas, and San Juan Islands; the Orcas School Native Plant Garden; and the Lopez Heirloom Apple Orchard.

For more information on the sale and other Master Gardener events, go to

<https://www.mgfsjc.org/eventsnew.html>

Letter from the President

I am thrilled to announce that our proposal for Overmarsh Farm Commons has been accepted by the the San Juan County Conservation Land Bank!

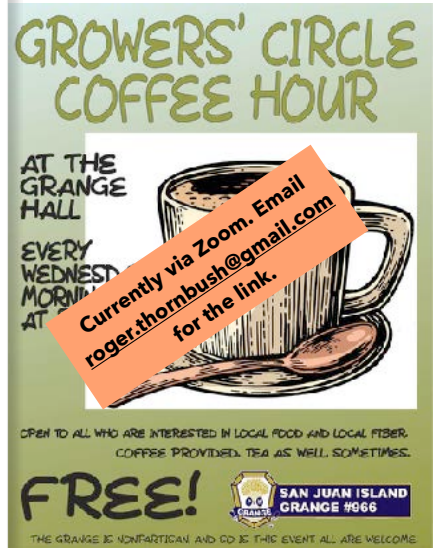
The name "Overmarsh" follows the tradition of naming a farm after a local geographic feature, in this case Beaverton Marsh. "Farm" recognizes the project as an integrated system of parts that work together to create a whole, in the way small diverse farms have always operated. "Commons" refers to offering community access to land and to opportunities for education, celebration, and building of resilience.

Leasing land from the Land Bank and offering suitably sized plots to island growers is a strategy to build resilience in our food system. Studies have shown that only 3% of the food eaten on our island is grown here—an alarming statistic considering how global climate change and the waning of the fossil fuel era are sure to lead to supply disruptions. We need more people growing food, and that means increasing access to land and education and creating opportunities to work with others to make our food system resilient.

We will send invitations to growers who may want access to land at Overmarsh Farm Commons—from a small plot for personal use or an [allotment](#) for family use to a larger parcel to grow for the [Food Hub](#) and [Farmers Market](#). Or a grower might want to collaborate with others along the lines of the [Orcas Community Participatory Agriculture](#) model. We would also like to assemble a team to create a [food forest](#) along Roche Harbor Road and install [silvopasture](#) plantings in the cattle and sheep paddocks.

There will be many opportunities to pitch in to make the Overmarsh Farm Commons a success. I hope you will join us!

Roger Ellison, 2024 President



Notice Board

Master Gardeners Plant Sale
 May 18, 9am - 12pm
 Mullis Center,
 Friday Harbor

3rd Annual Grange Spring Plant Sale
 Sunday, May 26 2-4pm at
 Grange Hall!

Seed Lending Library Launched!

By Jessa Madosky

The permanent seed lending library is up in the San Juan Island Library lobby.

Sponsored by the Grange and hosted by the San Juan Island Library, the project aims to make seeds available to anyone who wants to grow. All are welcome to pick up seeds. We have veggies, herbs, flowers, and even some cover crops. Seeds will change with the seasons and with donations, so keep checking back!

There is no requirement to replace seeds, but if you have seeds to donate, we happily accept them. You can leave them at the library front desk, bring them to a Grange meeting, or reach out to Jessa Madosky. No self-saved squash or carrot seeds, please, for biosafety.

Thank you again to the San Juan Island Library for hosting and to everyone who has helped package up seeds for the lending library!

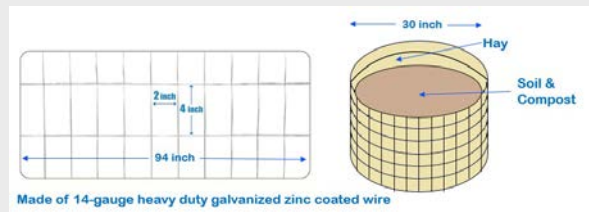


Granger Jessa Madosky and SJI Library Assistant Director Anthony Morris show off the new seed lending library

Overmarsh Farm Commons Potato Patch continued

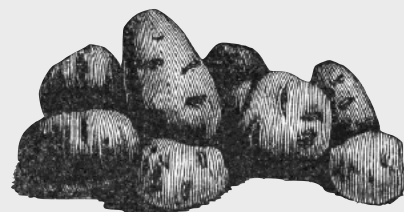
This quarter acre can then become a community garden P Patch or somebody's market garden. And then we can repeat the occultation process again and again.

For the potato cages we are going to use commercially made field fence wire, cut to length and wrapped around a blanket of old hay and filled with soil and compost.



We have bought the seed potatoes, cut the fence wire cages, and held a “Mow Down” work party on April 28 to mow the quarter acre and lay the occultation tarps. (See the project update and Mow Down Party photos on the next page.)

If you are so inspired, you can help us assemble and fill the cages and plant the potatoes! If you are interested, please be in touch at bill.fairhope@gmail.com.



Overmarsh Farm Commons Update

By Bruce Robinson with photos by Elaine Kendall

The steering committee of the Overmarsh Farm Commons is happy to announce that the Grange has received approval by the San Juan County Conservation Land Bank of our lease proposal. The farm is located near Friday Harbor on 35 acres of the Land Bank’s Beaverton Marsh Preserve, adjacent to Roche Harbor Road.

The project will provide community members the opportunity to raise food in a variety of ways: gardening, market gardening, raising livestock, and growing perennial trees and bushes.

Though the final lease development is likely to take several months, the Land Bank has drawn up a user agreement to allow work to begin immediately. As a matter of fact, the first volunteer event

was conducted on April 28, when 16 Grangers met at the Commons to mow the grass in the area that will be planted with winter vegetables in the fall. The mowed space was then covered with tarps to eliminate the grass in preparation for fall planting.



On the following day, members of the steering committee met with staff from both the Land Bank and San Juan Islands Conservation District to discuss general plans and take a soil sample from the initial project area.

Looking forward, through the summer there will be many volunteer opportunities

focusing on the development of infrastructure, such as fences, gates, and water systems. Announcements of volunteer work parties will be made through “all calls” by a volunteer coordinator, yet to be named. Interested?



Continued on next page

Overmarsh Farm Commons Update continued



To oversee the many facets of the farm, the Grange will be hiring a Project Manager by mid-summer. In the meantime, we will be planning the layout of gardens and livestock areas. A strong set of advisors is in place to help develop these plans. We will also be looking for (volunteer) operational managers to work with the Project Manager to get the project rolling.

There will be a celebratory and informational gathering on Sunday, June 2, where more details will be shared. On that day, we will meet at Grange Hall at 1pm for a general orientation before carpooling to the Overmarsh site for farm tours. This will be the chance for community members to get excited about producing food locally and

to find out how they can participate in the project. We hope you share our enthusiasm and will get involved with Overmarsh Farm Commons!

Grange Spring Plant Sale

By Lois Moore

Save the date; but most importantly, save your extra spring starts! And join us on Sunday, May 26, 2-4pm at Grange Hall.

In planting for this year's garden, you may have tucked in a few extra seeds. Please save those surplus young starts of vegetables, herbs, and flowers and donate them to the Grange's Spring Plant Sale!

This will be the third year for our plant sale, and we hope for an even greater



Granger Sherri Phelps swoops in at the 2023 Plant Sale

number and variety of plants than previous years. Your young plants will be welcome contributions. So plan to come, share, and go home with varieties new to you.

Proceeds will support our Seed Bank and the new Seed Library. And as a bonus, the plant sale can help you choose plants to grow on as a member of the Master Gardener's

"Share Our Bounty" program (see the March newsletter). Plants not sold at the plant sale will go to the San Juan Island Food Bank.

All New Sheep-Shearing School on San Juan Island

By Katy Nollman

A grant of \$400 from the Grange scholarship fund was awarded to Rex and Lisa Guard’s farm to support training for two students in the art of sheep shearing. With experienced sheep shearer Don Burt as instructor, students were Candace Richter and Jeremy Jennings, both residents of San Juan Island. The following is a report from Lisa.

The school was a huge success! Both students learned basic skills of handling sheep for the purpose of shearing off the wool, which is necessary to keep the animals healthy.

The class began at 8:30am. Don went over equipment usage and settings and the care

of the specialized shearing machines. Then the students got right into hands-on learning: how to hold the animal in a way that is comfortable for them and causes the sheep to relax and not fight the process. They learned specific steps to removing the wool and maneuvers to aid both the sheep and shearer.

Both students worked hard. Both seemed excited and happy to have taken the class. Candace said that she would like to do this again and that she planned to volunteer her new skills at the Island Haven Animal Sanctuary. Jeremy wants to offer his services to other farmers and his own flock.

Rex and I thank the Grange for your support of island agriculture. We all agreed after the class, over meatloaf sandwiches, that we would like to offer Shearing School again next year.



Instructor Don Burt (right) and students Candace Richter and Jeremy Jennings



Students hard at work while receiving tips from the instructor

See a Swarm, Save a Swarm!

If you see a honeybee swarm, and wish to have it re-homed, please get in touch immediately! Text me a picture and location pin. I will do my best to gather them.

Useful details include the duration the swarm has been in place, how high it is from the ground, and whether the landowner had given permission for its removal.

Scott Reynolds
Bee Positive
[360.622.9247](tel:360.622.9247)



Friday Harbor Film Festival Best of the Fest

Each month through September, Best of the Fest is offering award-winning documentaries along with livestream Q&As. Programs begin at 7 pm. Some are in collaboration with the San Juan Island Library; others are at the San Juan Island Grange.

The May film is *Elemental*. Filmed across the West the documentary takes viewers on a journey with top national experts to better understand fire, focusing on how we can all reimagine our relationship with wildfire and keep our homes and communities safe.

Here's the upcoming Best of the Fest schedule:

- *Elemental* – May 10 at the Grange
- *Mama Bears* – June 14 at the Library
- *Patrick and the Whale* – July 12 at the Library
- *Covenant of the Salmon People and Our Sacred Obligation* – August 9 at the Library
- *Common Ground* – September 13 at the Grange

Details at fhff.org.

MAY 10
7:00 PM

FREE FILM
SCREENING • NO TICKET REQUIRED

ELEMENTAL
REIMAGINE WILDFIRE

You don't have to live in a concrete ammo bunker to live with wildfire. by Scott Reynolds

A FILM BY TRIP JENNINGS AND BALANCE MEDIA
MARKED BY DAVID OYELWODU PRODUCED BY RALPH BLOEMERS
PRESENTED BY SARA QUINN WITH NICK JAINA
SPONSORED BY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, PATAGONIA
117. 84 MINUTES

2024 BEST OF THE FEST

Join us for a thought-provoking evening at the SJI Grange on Friday, May 10th, at 7 PM for a FREE film screening of *Elemental: Reimagine Wildfire*. Directed by Trip Jennings, this 84-minute documentary delves into the question: Can homes, communities, healthy forests, and fire coexist?

VENUE
SJI GRANGE
152 First St N
Friday Harbor, WA

FHFF.ORG

Presented by **Save the Salmon** and **KCTS9**

Tree Grafting Success

By John Latimer

About 25 people participated in the April 6 Tree Grafting Workshop at Grange Hall. Instructors Madrona Murphy of Kwiaht and Greg Meyer of The Planted Pantry instructed us on how to graft new trees. They then supervised us doing it ourselves.

Madrona had rootstock for us to use, and both Madrona and Greg had a variety of scion wood to graft new trees. Greg (www.theplanted-pantry.com) also had grafting tools and equipment for sale. Lori Brakken of the Home Orchard



Society and Temperate Orchard Conservancy was also on hand and had a huge selection of her own scion wood for people to use to graft.

A big thank you to the instructors and volunteers who made the event such a wonderful success. And thanks to WSDA for the Specialty Crop Block Grant that made the event possible. If you are still looking for root stock, scion wood, or heritage tree information, go to www.kwiaht.org to contact Madrona.



Growers Circle Digest—A Compendium of Recent Topics

From reports posted by Nancy Best

March 27

So do you soak your **peas** overnight to get them to swell, ready to germinate? Or do you place them between sheets of damp paper towel and let them soak up the water slowly? Members of our group do it both ways, and other ways as well. Jars with screens over the mouth, as used in sprouting seeds for cooking, are a method used by growers.

Sowing in flats of vermiculite is a successful method, as the vermiculite allows the roots to be teased apart easily. Perlite works as well as vermiculite. Roots should not be allowed to get tangled. Many of us transplant into beds or rows in the garden when the roots are just emerging. How long does it take? One grower reported two weeks, which we figured was a sign of old, tired seeds. It should take less time than that.

Acorns from our **native oaks** appeared in abundance last year, in what is known as a [mast year](#). Acorns can be sprouted much like peas and then grown in pots for "a bit" before being planted into their permanent home in the landscape. "A bit"

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Anyone need some mason bees?

I have maybe 50 bee cocoons in my fridge, and they need to be re-homed!

Mason bees are excellent pollinators, even better than honey bees (sorry Scott!). These are bees I have been saving over a few years now, so they are a native bee and adjusted to my corner of the island.

Mason bees like a water source and some clay. Of course everything is in bloom right now, so there is plenty to eat.

You want to control where they live. You can clean them, put them in the fridge and move them where you want next season. They need some tubes and a good location. I'm all out of tubes, but I could easily set you up with some clay. CrownBees.com is an excellent source for all the info. and gear you need.

Feel free to call if you would like bees and/or more info: [360 317 5912](tel:3603175912)

Growers Circle Digest continued

depends on the size and shape of the pot. Oaks grow a long taproot, which has led to some innovative pots such as the [Rootrainer](#) or the [Air-Pot](#).

Having trouble finding a mate for your **Asian plum**? Here's a [pollination chart](#) for you. You can plant a compatible tree near yours, or you can snip some blooming branches from a compatible tree and put them in a bucket of water near your tree.

April 10

We talked about **artichokes**. You can start with seeds or starts or [divide an existing artichoke plant](#).



When do we put the **tomato plants** outside? [When the nighttime temperatures are consistently above 55 degrees](#). You can replot the plants into larger pots while they grow and bring them into your house at night, until nighttime temperatures reach the 55 degree target.

What is eating my **Asian pears**? Maybe rats, maybe birds. Rat traps can be put in boxes at the base of the tree. The boxes will keep birds from getting caught.

[Asianpearpollinationchart.pdf \(burntridgenursery.com\)](#)

[And here is a pollination chart for all fruit trees.](#)

April 17

We talked about companions for **asparagus**. Parsley maybe, lettuce maybe, NO GRASS! Cedar roots can get into a bed and form a dense mat that chokes out the asparagus. Heavily mulching with straw or wood chips can protect the asparagus crowns over the

Continued on next page

Growers Circle Digest continued

winter and keep weeds from establishing. The mulch can be removed in mid April or so. What kind of soil does it want? What are good companion plants or does it want to be alone? [Here's some advice from the Illinois extension service.](#)

So, what's the difference between a **hoop house and a greenhouse**? From the web: The main difference between a high tunnel (hoop house) and a greenhouse is that a greenhouse is a permanent structure with some type of climate control. In contrast, hoop houses are a tool for season extension and are semi-permanent. We grow tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers in our greenhouses, and use them to start seedlings or shelter potted plants over the winter. Solexx greenhouse panels were recommended by one grower.



Scott has more **bee hives** looking for hosts! He can be reached at stormkrow@gmail.com. One beekeeper recommended the film [My Garden of a Thousand Bees](#), which is available at the library. What impact might a nearby beehive might have on **native pollinators**? Beekeepers in attendance said that an area would have to have a lot of beehives to make much difference. A google search turned up a lot of information, if any growers want to do some research.

Tomatillos grow really well on our island. You can easily start them from seed. In fact, dropped fruit will set seed and grow the following year.

Can **corn** be started in pots? YES!

April 24

On April 24 we talked about growing **St. John's wort** from seed. The species *Hypericum perforatum* is listed as a noxious species by the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board ([good pictures here](#)). The alternative groundcover *Hypericum calycinum* is propagated asexually, not from seed.

The presence of **wasps at a hummingbird feeder** might deter the hummers. Solutions discussed: a bowl of extra sweet syrup nearby for the wasps; a hummingbird feeder that is not yellow, which attracts wasps; and moving the feeder. [7 Natural Ways to Keep Bees and Wasps Away From Hummingbird Feeders](#)