

THE ISLAND AGRARIAN

NEWS FROM SAN JUAN ISLAND GRANGE #966

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

Inside: Spring fever at Overmarsh, lost coats and scarves, Grower's Circle Digest, and more!

Don't Panic, Prepare!

With the next Big One in the headlines, recents cuts to FEMA, and an ominous economic climate, awareness is growing among islanders of the need to look after each other in emergencies.

Brendan Cowan, Director of the San Juan County

Department of Emergency Management, addressed a crowded Grange Hall on April 17. He covered the gamut of emergencies from storms, fires, earthquakes, tsunamis, and long-term ferry disruptions, and how to be prepared before concluding with confidence that the islands will come together to address emergency needs because "that is what we like to do."

Island Resilience: A Community Lecture Series

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

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





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

Island Agrarian Classifieds

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

From Granger Joe Tein

I need someone to water my garden while my wife and I are away traveling, mid-May to mid-June. There is a garden bed with 126 garlic plants, three small potato beds, and a very small pea patch. This shouldn't take more than one hour, at most, per week. Payment can be in cash or crops (my garlic usually turns out really nice!). Please write to me at jtein@centurytel.net

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

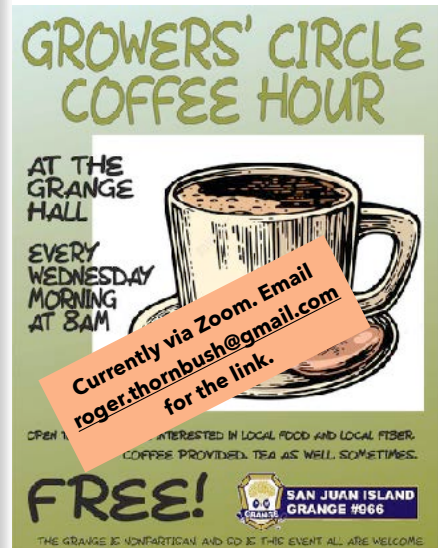
San Juan Island Grange has been having a conversation on community resilience and the ability to predict, respond to and recover from disasters, usually physical ones such as wildfire, windstorms, and earthquakes. I encourage every Granger to become resilient by stocking up on food, fuel, and medicine; making household systems robust; getting to know neighbors; and learning to work with others for mutual assistance.

Not all disasters are physical. We are currently in a political disaster that is quickly becoming an economic one that could lead to disruptions usually associated with physical disasters, like supply disruptions and blackouts. The current political disaster is particularly dangerous because it threatens our ability to predict trouble, create solutions, and work together to recover. Authoritarians have used disasters as excuses to consolidate power. Witness the aftermath of 911 or Hurricane Katrina. Where no convenient disaster is available, a despot will make one up as an excuse to gain power. Witness the current declarations of emergency in order to justify executive orders.

In response, our Grange must put extra effort into our ability to respond to political and economic shocks. Organizing, lobbying, protesting, testifying, and voting are all going to be very important. Mutual aid will help to blunt the power that landlords and bosses have over us. Working together in barn-raising parties, group cooking sessions, and cooperative purchasing campaigns will allow us to regain some autonomy that we have given over to the market.

The Grange Hall itself must be made more resilient, with better insulation, an improved fireplace or a wood stove, more solar panels and batteries, and stores of emergency food, water, and essential tools. With these improvements, the hall can be a place of refuge and warmth during a disaster and a rallying point for efforts to help our island community.

Roger Ellison, 2025 President



Notices

Land Available at Overmarsh Farm Commons

To learn more, go to

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfDNkxDXazm8fFeZRq9VR6HbXB6Xk3M1_Pq83SgRYGXAAJEQ/viewform

We have accumulated a lovely array of coats, scarves, and other items left at Grange Hall after events. We are cleaning up the space and reaching out to see if you have misplaced something. We hope to give the items away in a couple of weeks if they have not been claimed! Please either reach out to me or stop by the Grange to look over the items.

Thanks!
Cynthia Burke
cynthiasofcourse@gmail.com
(360) 317 7178

Spring Fever at Overmarsh Farm Commons

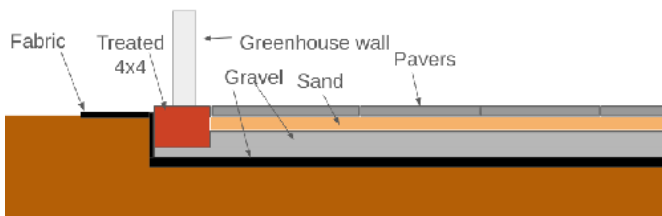
By Bill Severson

Now that we are getting some nice weather, the work parties are coming fast and furious at Overmarsh Farm Commons: tarps moved, plots laid out, grass mowed, and finally construction of the new greenhouse funded by community donations during the San Juan Island Community Foundation SJC Cares campaign at the county fair last summer.

There is nothing level at Overmarsh, so first important steps were to clear the dead grass and



sod and move dirt around to level the area for the foundation. A team of about 14 volunteers gathered on a recent Saturday morning with shovels and racks. Under the supervision of Loren Soland, we moved dirt from high spots to low. Loren used a technique with string stretched tight to crisscross the 10'x40' area and string-mounted levels. All the while a volunteer operated the noisy dirt compactor.



As you can see from the adjacent drawing, the dirt moving was the easiest step. The next Saturday work party laid down the fabric and moved,

by hand, several yards of gravel that was then spread across the foundation area. Once again Loren strung up his levels and, with a constant frown on his face, ordered us to move gravel

Continued on page 7

Why Swarms Matter

By Scott Reynolds, Bee Positive

Although not native to many parts of the world, honeybees have become essential pollinators in our food systems, supporting the growth of fruits, nuts, and vegetables.

Yet honeybees face multiple pressures, from habitat loss to pesticide exposure, which threaten their survival and our agricultural diversity. Without a beekeeper, only one in four swarms are likely to survive in the wild.

Beekeepers, the stewards of domesticated honey bee colonies, are grappling with challenges such as Varroa mite infestations, climate change-induced stress, and the high cost of colony management.

These pressures not only threaten the livelihood of beekeepers but also jeopardize the health of eco-systems and the stability of the many crops that are reliant on bee pollination.

In 2024, the first swarms of the season were sighted at the end of April on San Juan Island. Please help me help the bees by reporting a swarm via beeswarmed.org or by calling (360) 622 9247.

Report Bee Swarms

Save Bees, Support Local Beekeepers!

Spot a honey bee swarm?
Report the bees at:

beeswarmed.com

A free way to easily connect with local beekeepers to safely relocate honey bees.



Editor's note:

The potential for domesticated honeybees to compete with native bees for food has been raised among Grangers as a topic for future discussion in *The Island Agrarian*.

Stay tuned!

What's Up at the San Juan Island Farmers Market?

By Samantha DeChristopher,
Market Manager

The San Juan Island Farmers Market has been a beloved community hub since 1987, bringing people together over fresh produce and local goods.

Over the last few years, there has been a decline in the number of farmer vendors at the market. This has sparked

concerns about whether the market is maintaining the spirit of a true farmers market. Recognizing the need for revitalization, the San Juan Island Farmers

Market is taking exciting steps to support our local farmers and connect them with the community.

One of the most significant steps is the addition of a cooperative farmers booth. This space will allow small-scale farmers and home gardeners to sell their goods, interact with



customers, and connect with the community. This cooperative venture will share the load of staffing a booth and also expand opportunities for meat producers to sell at the market.

We're also thrilled to announce the return of the Fresh Bucks program, which makes it possible for community members with incomes below 200% of the poverty level to receive \$40 to spend on fresh, locally grown fruits, vegetables, cheese, meat, fish, eggs, teas, plant starts, and seeds. This program is a fantastic way

to support our island community while boosting revenue for our hard-working farmers. Starting May 25, 2025, we will be helping community members sign up for Fresh Bucks at the market and

distributing market bucks from our co-op booth.

Join us as we work together to create a vibrant marketplace that values and supports our local farmers, ensuring that our farmers market remains a treasured gathering place for everyone on San Juan Island!

Spring Fever at Overmarsh continued from page 4

around until the foundation area was exactly level. And once again a volunteer operated the noisy compactor to make the surface smooth, level, and solid.



The next work party will undertake bolting together the treated 4"x4" timbers, and then assembly of the greenhouse can begin!

Grangers in Action



Nancy Webb organized a grafting workshop, held on April 5 on Brickworks Tokitae Stage during the San Juan Island Farmers Market. Teaching community members to graft their own fruit trees were Madrona Murphy of Kwiaht and Lori Brakken of the Home Orchard Society. Madrona

is an expert on grafting techniques and had root stock available for grafting onto the wide varieties of fruit scion wood that Lori had on hand. Also joining the event was Greg Mayer of The Planted Pantry, who demonstrated grafting and had tools and supplies available to purchase for those who needed them. Congrats to everyone who helped make this workshop such a wonderful success!

Grower's Circle Digest

Reported by Roger Ellison and AI!

On March 26, we noted dramatic weather the previous day. Lightning, thunder, hard rain. Here is easy to read climate data for Friday Harbor: [Yearly & Monthly weather - Friday Harbor, WA](#)

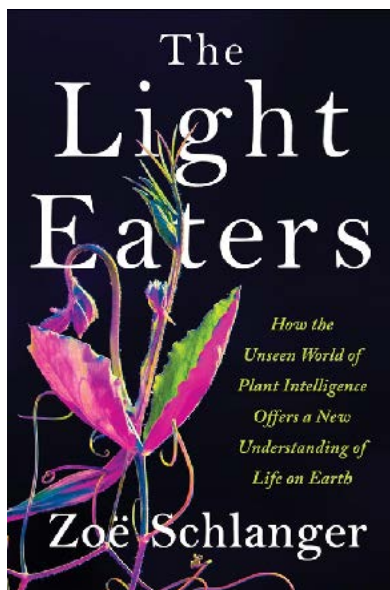
Was it strange that one grower's celery made it through the winter? Celery is actually a perennial, dying back each winter and returning come spring. Over-wintered celery is likely thin, leafy, and strongly flavored, and best used for soup stock—more like herb than vegetable.

Sarah asked about bird netting and got advice on stronger and easy-to-use options. For offerings, type in "heavy duty bird netting" in the search engine on Ebay. A good net looks like this:

When should we move plants off the grow mats? That depends. Cool season crops can be moved sooner than warm-season crops. If you have cucumbers growing in flats, you may move them to the greenhouse now.

It's time to put your mason bees out for the season!

Eliot recommends a book called [The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth.](#)



On April 2 we talked about what we are planting now.

Peas and brassicas started in milk jugs are headed to the garden. So are onion starts, beets, and carrots from seed.

When do we remove mulch from asparagus beds? Consensus: pretty much never. Mulch suppresses weeds and the asparagus shoots can push right through.

Hay as mulch? It depends on whether you can either hoe out the grass seedlings or whether they are in a spot that will not bother you.

It's time to harvest nettles! Uses for the ubiquitous plant included tea, pesto, soup, and fermented plant juice. Elliot freezes blended nettles in ice cube trays for use in smoothies or soups. Jill makes nettle pesto, and Kat and Sarah create fermented plant juice using nettles and sugar as

a plant fertilizer. Sarah also does a second extraction with vinegar for the same purpose. Anita makes tea from the fresh leaves and then blends the leaves into soup. Eliot makes anaerobic compost tea. Kat sprays nettle juice everywhere! Kat suggested that only the top three inches of the plant should be used. Per Roger, Anita uses half a grocery bag of tips for each gallon of tea.

Continued on next page

Grower's Digest continued

What about the fertilizers we use, and how we would do without shipments from the mainland. Kelp is available off the beach, with a permit. Kelp Fertilizer—A Gardener's Guide—Gardenia Organic Don't gather seaweed during the time when it is a home for herring eggs!

Nancy recommends testing your soil to help you with a fertilizer plan. Roxy's seedlings are a bit yellow. Maybe add diluted fish fertilizer? Or real soil?

Elliot calculated that a 20"x20" inch grow mat uses 88 cents per week of electricity.

Finally, we talked about how to save these notes in a form that is usable and yet safe from system collapse. More on that later...

On April 9 the team discussed the best location for native rhodies, ideal conditions for planting them, cover crop choices, and weed management, as well as the possibility of growing coffee locally. We talked about alternative beverages and food sources in the event of supply chain disruptions, as well as uses for nettles and ground cover options. Lastly, growers shared approaches to maintaining their vegetable gardens.

Next steps for growers:

- Sarah will plant crimson clover on a newly created hillside area, and Nancy will give Sarah lacy phacelia seeds if she wants to try them with the crimson clover.
- Elliot will be more careful when weeding around blueberrys to avoid damaging their root structure.
- Growers will consider straw or other mulch to control weeds in vegetable beds.
- Kat will organize a nettle-harvesting field trip for those interested.

Sarah, Lenore, Alice, Roger, and Elliot agreed that rhodies prefer dappled sunlight. And they need good, moist native soil. Sarah moved a rhody to a shadier location, where it thrived. The group concluded that rhodies can handle partial shade and moist soil conditions.

Local Coffee? With input from Nirmela who grew up near coffee plantations, the group concluded that the local climate is not suitable for commercial coffee production, which led to discussion of alternative caffeine sources, followed by Alice's success with indoor banana trees, Amory Lovins's energy-efficient greenhouse, implications of relying on non-local products and the need to adapt to potential future changes in global trade.

Ways of preserving fruit—dehydration, freezing, and canning—should be compared for energy costs and food security advantages. In a food-scarcity situation, people may be more willing to eat preserved foods. Concentrated apple juice can be used as a sweetener and can be frozen in ice cube trays for year-round use. Kat tried to freeze concentrated apple syrup, but it didn't solidify due to freezing point depression. Growers agreed there wouldn't be enough honey on the island to replace sugar.

What are alternative beverages and food sources in case of potential supply chain disruptions? Dandelion root tea, nettle tea, and cedar-infused water?

Sarah's flow hive didn't work this year, and she will paint the frames with wax to encourage bees.

Continued on next page

Grower's Digest continued

What are the ground cover options for Sarah's sloped area near her beehives, which gets full sun? Suggestions included ground-cover geranium, crimson clover, white clover, and creeping thyme. What about attracting bees? Laura Jo asked for advice on planting wildflower seeds and creeping thyme, and Roger suggested starting them in flats and transplanting.

Kat has found clover, particularly crimson clover, to be a beautiful and easy-to-grow ground cover. It could be a good option for the hillside. Nancy has used lacy phacelia, a cover crop with beautiful pink-purple flowers, and offered to share seeds with Sarah. The group also discussed their approaches to weeding.

Gardeners shared various approaches to maintaining their vegetable gardens and different methods such as mulching and weeding. Certain weeds, like buttercups, call for early detection and removal.

The group discussed onion planting, timing, and methods, and differences among using sets, starts, and seeds. Onions must be planted by mid-May to develop properly. Alice recently planted Patterson onion seeds in her greenhouse, while Sarah considered starting onion seeds in milk jugs to protect them from pests. Greenhouse planting offers protection and earlier starts, which helps with day-length issues in onion growth. Alice and Jill start onions from seed in greenhouses or milk jugs, then transplant them outside. Lenore grows hers from starts and plants them directly outdoors in mid-March. Lenore reported her March-planted onions are doing well, despite cold temperatures, and some Walla Walla onions she planted last fall are starting to bulb up. Slugs have eaten Alison's directly seeded onions, while her garlic is thriving.

Alice grows leeks and scallions year-round, with some overwintering. Cool-season crops like cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, radishes, peas, and potatoes can be planted now, while warm-loving plants like tomatoes, peppers, squash, and cucumbers should wait until May.

Alice's has weeds choking out her asparagus. John has successfully lifted, weeded, and replanted asparagus without delaying harvest. After thoroughly cleaning the bed and replanting, he had a great crop the following spring. For John, mulching with straw and compost helps keep weeds at bay.

Growers reported issues with seedlings grown in milk jugs. Some of Jill's plants, particularly cauliflower and bok choy, are not growing past one inch, while others like broccoli and cabbage are doing well. Perhaps lack of rain and cold nights are the issue. Maybe the seedlings could be transplanted and watered more frequently. Jill is now trying diluted fish fertilizer on them.

The group discussed availability of Ceanothus in local nurseries. How to Grow and Care for California Lilacs. Roxy is looking for sizes and types for her rock wall. The conversation then shifted to Oso berry (Indian Plum), with Roger sharing his experience growing them.

