

Inside: Free McKnought Kale seed, next Island Resilience event, 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**

Happy Customers at the Repair Fair



SAVE THE DATE!
Next Repair Fair:
October 19





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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Locally Adapted Kale Seed Available!

By Nancy Best

Mid June is a good time to start some plants for winter harvest. Several years ago, the Grange was given a large amount of McKnaught Kale seeds, and they are still germinating like a champ!



March planted
McKnaught Kale

To get us all started with our winter gardens, free McKnaught Kale seeds will be available at the First Wednesday potluck, at the Grange board meeting on June 4, and at the Third Thursday Series Winter Harvest Workshop with Keith Keyser on June 19

McKnaught Kale has adapted to our islands over decades of growth here. Its story as I know it is that seed was brought to Waldron by Fred McKnaught, a Scots-Irishman, who moved to Waldron perhaps in the 1950-60's, and it has been grown there ever since.

These kale plants have medium green, tender leaves that are excellent cooked or in salad. They manage our winter weather just fine, take a freeze well, and come on strong in spring with new growth. Started in mid June, the kale plants have plenty of time to grow large and hearty for the following winter, when other greens are on their seasonal hiatus.

Letter from the President

Last month I encouraged all Grangers to get ready for natural disasters like earthquakes and storms by keeping a supply of food, water and medicine on hand. Because finding sources of good bulk food can be difficult, we are developing a program to purchase them as a cooperative. Watch for more information.

May's Repair Fair fixed bicycles and lamps, torn clothing and broken zippers. People went away with renewed items, yes, but perhaps also with a renewed faith in our ability to take care of ourselves. I was encouraged to see dialog between repairers and clients that often included some gentle instruction on tools and methods, so that we are improving skills as well as objects.

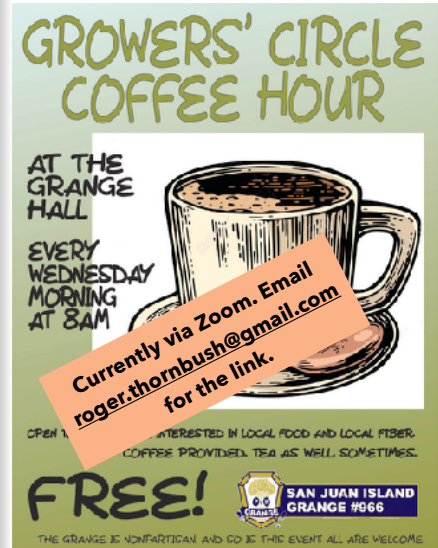
On the Third Thursday of May, Boyd Pratt showed how islanders have responded to changes in the regional economy in their fishing, farming, and food processing activities. Industries such as dairying and growing fruit for export have been all but eliminated in the islands, not because resources were depleted but because the outside economy changed. I believe this to be a good lesson for us. Learning to steward and use the resources we have will make us more resilient.

For June's Third Thursday on the 19th, Keith Keyser will teach us how to grow food throughout the year, made possible by our mild climate. This will be very important as we build up our local food system.

Overmarsh Farm Commons is growing! Seeds are in the ground and little plants are emerging. The irrigation system is delivering water. The greenhouse and toolshed are under construction. Plans are afoot for a community orchard with a strong heritage tree component.

While many of our activities improve our economic conditions, they also teach us manual, environmental, and social skills and build the community we will need to withstand shocks, whether natural or human made.

Roger Ellison, 2025 President



Notices

INSURANCE FOR GRANGE MEMBERS

To obtain your AD&D insurance benefit as a Grange member and learn about additional free benefits, as well as customized benefits you may qualify for, please reach out to either of the San Juan Island representatives for a presentation. It doesn't take long but might be beneficial for you and your family. Grange member Isobel Davis and AO Globe partner Jennifer Rice are available by phone, text or email at (206) 310 7271, davisisobel.ao@gmail.com

Grower's Circle Digest

Reported by Roger Ellison

On April 30 we talked about a recent online meeting with Linda Gilkeson, who shared valuable insights on gardening and sustainability. The team also discussed the importance of learning and sharing knowledge, with Elliot suggesting that sometimes the best learning comes from personal experience.

Nancy shared her successful methods for growing carrots, including starting them in milk jugs and planting them out with a bit of sand or potting soil. She also discussed her experience with the carrot rust fly and how she uses burlap to cover the carrots, which helps maintain moisture and prevent the flies from eating them.

Nancy emphasized the importance of rotating the carrots to avoid pest issues. Suki shared her experience with growing carrots in milk jugs and using radishes to mark the location of carrots since they emerge sooner.

Elliot asked about the effectiveness of drip irrigation, to which Alice confirmed that it works well. Elliot also shared his idea of using burlap sacks as grow bags for plants like tomatoes.

Sarah shared her experience of growing horse chestnuts from seed and offered to give some away. The attendees discussed the beauty and

unique features of horse chestnuts. The team discussed various plant species, including the California Buckeye and the Horse Chestnut. They explored the native range of these

plants, their characteristics, and potential uses. The conversation also touched upon the naming conventions of these plants and their cultural significance. Roger discussed the horse chestnut as an industrial starch crop, suitable for processes like textiles or paper making.



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Grower's Digest continued

On May 5 we talked about our forests and the need to manage them better to produce firewood, biomass for our gardens, logs for mills and habitat for wildlife. Elliot said that the current rapid regrowth of Douglas fir is part of a third wave, the first being in the wake of the decline of Indian populations and the second after harvesting for the lime kilns. We talked about the value of chainsaw classes. Here is a link to a class recently offered on our island: [Chainsaw Course | San Juan Islands Con](#)

One alternative to the Douglas fir forest is the oak savanna.

[Restoring the noble oak | The Journal of the San Juan Islands](#) Or maybe a savanna can

be created with chestnuts in place of oaks for a quicker, more palatable crop. [Chestnut - Savanna Institute](#)

Kat discussed her experience with hydrophobic soil in her greenhouse, where the soil had become so dry that it repelled water. She learned that adding a wetting agent, such as dish soap or agar gum, could help the soil absorb water again. [8 Organic Ways To Fix Hydrophobic Soil \(Proven\) | AskGardening](#)

A grower recommended woven nylon netting from Orchard Valley Supplies to protect cherries from birds: [Bird Netting – OrchardValleySupply.com](https://www.orchardvalleysupplies.com/bird-netting)

On May 14 we started by talking about dry beans. They ought to be planted in the garden in mid May or started earlier in the greenhouse. [Growing Dry Beans and Grains - Grow Northwest](#)



And then we moved on to growing corn and making tortillas, including soaking and grinding the corn. [How to Make Homemade Tortillas from Whole Corn - Azure Standard](#) Elliot made his tortillas using bloody butcher corn. [All About 'Bloody Butcher' Corn, Part 1: Planting and Pest Control - Mother Earth News](#)

What can we store food in if we are avoiding plastics? Glass

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Grower's Digest continued

storage containers, mason jars and silicone bags were mentioned. [12 Best Non-Plastic, Non-Toxic Food Storage Containers You Need - Green With Less](#)

The group advised a grower to use a mixture of compost and garden soil when planting squash, rather than compost alone. The traditional method of planting in hills is still a



good one. [Why Plant Squash In Hills? The Secret To Bigger, Healthier Harvests - SipsScene](#)

A grower is having trouble with arugula bolting early. [Arugula Bolting: What Can You Do About It?](#)

On May 21 we talked about dry beans, soil temperatures, whether to direct sow or transplant. Many growers prefer to start under protection and then transplant into the garden.

[FS135E-Growing-dry-bean-in-home-garden-publication.pdf](#)

How do we protect seedlings from slugs? Elliot shared his experience using collars made of hardware cloth and greenhouse plastic, while Kat suggested using copper tape. Many growers use Sluggo: [How Does Sluggo Work to Kill Slugs in Your Garden? - Gardenia Organic](#)

How about protecting strawberries from birds? Several growers use bird netting, not too fine because pollinators need to get through, but not so coarse that birds can get through.

The group discussed fig tree care and pruning techniques, with Kat sharing her successful method of transforming a tree into a multi-stemmed bush by cutting it back and encouraging new growth. Teddy sought advice about his 20-year-old unproductive fig tree, and Roger suggested cutting it back to the ground in late winter or early spring to promote new shoots. [How to revitalize an old fig tree by pruning: a complete guide to restoring its vigor!](#)



Next in the Resilience Series

Join us every Third Thursday for our San Juan Island Grange monthly lecture series on "Island Resilience"!

In May our lecture was delivered by local historian and author Boyd Pratt, who reviewed the history of resilience on our island over the last few centuries.

In June, we will be joined by local gardener Keith Keyser who will deliver a



Historic view of San Juan Valley from Bailer Hill, when the valley was generating food that fed folks as far as Seattle.

Photo: San Juan Island Historical Museum

**lecture on
"Four Season
Gardening:
Readying Your
Garden Now to
Provide for
Your Winter
Table."**

**Keith's lecture
will take place
Thursday,
June 19th at
5:30 at Grange
Hall.**

Light refreshments provided!



Building island resilience in modern times at Overmarsh Farm Commons

Left to right, Court Bell, Amanda Zee, Loren Soland, and Bill Seversen construct a greenhouse donated to the Overmarsh project by Zach Chan, New Hannah Farm.