

Garden Organic – Digital Press Pack

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Organic gardening press/story ideas for 2026

1. Online Training Certificate

For the first time in its history, Garden Organic has launched its first-ever, formal 'Introduction to Organic Growing' online training certificate. The certificate has been carefully designed for amateur gardeners looking to upskill or move into a horticultural career or for early-career professional gardeners.

Led by expert horticulturist Chris Collins, participants will work through a series of six self-guided online modules and three seasonal webinars which will take around 12-15 hours of total learning time. This online training certificate will give participants a firm foundation in the key principles and practical approaches to organic growing.

Accredited media are invited to test drive one of the modules in this course, please email marketing@gardenorganic.org.uk. For further information about the course go to gardenorganic.org.uk/online-certificate.

2. Peat and pesticide-free campaigns

Garden Organic has been the leading voice in peat and pesticide free growing for the last 65 years. A petition to #EndPeatSales, created alongside the Peat Free Partnership – a coalition of horticultural businesses and environmental NGOs – has already received 13,000 signatures and will be taken to 10 Downing Street in March. In spring/summer 2026, the charity is also planning a campaign to end the sale and use of glyphosate for amateur gardeners.

3. Build a Better Veg Planner

New research from Garden Organic could potentially revolutionise how and when people grow veg across the UK. Seed packets are standardised to show growing info for the whole of the UK, however, the date you sow a bean in southern England is very different to when you sow one in the north. Add climate change to this and seed packet instructions are becoming increasingly inaccurate.

Growers are invited to sign up until 20 March and further information can be found at: <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/what-we-do/citizen-science-and-research/members-experiments/build-a-better-veg-planner-2>

4.Three landmark science papers highlight the threat to our food supply caused by biodiversity loss and potential ecosystem collapse

April 2024 – Garden Organic’s Dr Bruce Pearce, associate director of horticultural science, published a landmark paper ‘Every Garden Matters’.

He collated the latest data on biodiversity loss and reviewed the findings of extensive studies. He highlighted alarming figures that showed a 13% decline in overall wildlife numbers in the UK, and even more worrying discovered that within individual species 41% had shown a decline in number.

On a more positive note he showed how biodiversity could be boosted if everyone took some small steps in their gardens, backyards, balconies and allotments. With more than 520 thousand hectares of gardens in the UK, he suggested that if each were managed sustainably and organically it could change our landscape and benefit wildlife. ***The full report can be downloaded at: gardenorganic.org.uk/every-garden-matters.***

February 2025 –Tim Lang, president of Garden Organic and emeritus professor of Food Policy at City University London's Centre for Food Policy, published a joint paper for the National Preparedness Commission entitled ‘Just in Case: 7 steps to narrow the UK civil food resilience gap’. This paper found that Government is not identifying food security risks nor mitigating them. His report concluded that the UK is not prepared for world-wide ‘food shocks’ caused by a global conflict or changing weather patterns, which could cut us off from crops grown around the world. He stressed that we must do more to store and protect global food supply chains and our own supply of seeds. ***The report can be downloaded at: <https://nationalpreparednesscommission.uk/publications/just-in-case-7-steps-to-narrow-the-uk-civil-food-resilience-gap/>***

January 2026 - the Government has produced its own paper ‘Global biodiversity loss, ecosystems collapse and national security’. This paper concludes that there is a high risk of global ecosystem degradation and collapse which could threaten UK national security and prosperity. It recognises that the world is already experiencing impacts including crop failures, intensified natural disasters and infectious disease outbreaks. The paper also suggests there is a moderate risk that without significant increases in UK food and supply chain resilience, it is unlikely that the UK will be able to maintain food security if ecosystem collapse drives geopolitical competition for food.

- The UK relies on imports for fertiliser and for 40% of its food and cannot currently produce enough food to feed its population based on current diets.

- UK food production is vulnerable to ecosystem degradation and collapse
- Significant disruption to international markets as a result of ecosystem degradation or collapse will put UK food security at risk
- These threats are real and current. While many steps must and should be taken at national level Garden Organic also believes that individuals can contribute to reversing this trend by the steps they take in their own gardens and backyards. As well as choosing and conserving heritage seeds.

April 2026: Dr Pearce is also working on a new research paper, which will be out in spring 2026, looking at the importance of heritage seeds and seed conservation for food security.

If you would like to discuss this further, interviews can be arranged with:

- Dr Bruce Pearce, associate director of horticultural science at Garden Organic.
- Tim Lang, president of Garden Organic and emeritus professor of Food Policy at City University.
- Fiona Taylor, chief executive of Garden Organic

Interviews can be arranged with Tim Lang. Contact awhitehead@gardenorganic.org.uk or pam@houghbellis.co.uk.

Stories about our Heritage Seed Library

1. Noteworthy growers of Heritage Seed Library seeds

His Majesty the King is a patron of Garden Organic and grows heritage vegetables at his gardens at Highgrove and Dumfries House. At Highgrove he currently grows the Afghan Purple carrot, New England Sugar Pie squash, Cantalun melon, Parfree Dragon Tongue dwarf French bean and the Mummy Pea. Melissa Simpson, head of Horticulture for the King's Foundation is responsible for looking after his Majesty's garden at Highgrove and cultivating these remarkable varieties.

Raymond Blanc OBE, top chef and vegetable grower, is the Vice President of Garden Organic's Heritage Seed Library. He says: "I have been a champion of the Heritage Seed Library for many years, and I'm delighted to be supporting its 50th anniversary celebrations.

"The Heritage Seed Library is a vital resource that saves heritage and heirloom seeds, which have been dropped from commercial catalogues or have been preserved in families over many generations. Many of these varieties have adapted to specific growing conditions, are tolerant of weather extremes and are disease resistant. We

must do all in our power to preserve these unique and often beautifully flavoursome varieties”

Sue Kent, BBC *Gardener’s World* gardener and broadcaster said: “I have been a member of the Heritage Seed Library for more than 30 years. I appreciate the history and diversity of heritage seed varieties. I like to grow heritage seeds to expand my knowledge and appreciation of vegetables and to make a practical contribution to the work of the Library and future food security”.

Note to journalists: More extensive detailed quotes are available from Raymond Blanc.

2. Heritage Seed Relay

The Heritage Seed library is marking its 50th anniversary with a mammoth seed relay across the UK to draw attention to the importance of community seed saving and sharing. It has travelled 180 miles across England - and on St David’s Day (1 March), it will start a journey around Wales.

At each stop-off point, supporting ‘seed champions’ will take a packet of seed from the golden anniversary parcel to grow (and eventually harvest and save), and pass the rest of the seeds onto the next destination.

After their journey through Wales the golden parcel of heritage seeds will travel to northeast England and into Scotland by early summer. A special celebration will also take place in Ireland.

Further information at: <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/hsl-50>

3. Seed Guardians

From the north coast of Scotland to the Kent countryside, 185 amateur gardeners – from all walks of life – act as Seed Guardians and grow varieties from the Heritage Seed Library to help protect biodiversity and the food of the future. An ‘Orphans List’ is produced each year, which Guardians can pick seeds from to grow. The Seed Guardians save the new seed and return it to the library.

Marie duQuesnay has been a Seed Guardian for nine years. She lives on an exposed hill 850ft above sea level in Pembrokeshire, but this hasn’t dampened her passion for seed saving.

She says: “It’s been fantastic to have the opportunity to play a tiny part in such an important project as the Heritage Seed Library. It is so sad to see that the intensification of farming is narrowing the range of what’s grown and coupled with regulations around what seeds are certified for sale, we’re losing very local varieties. And once they’re gone, that’s it.”

Note to journalists: Interviews can be arranged with Seed Guardians and more quotes are available.

4. Seeds with climate resistance

Alterations in global temperatures and disruption of regional weather patterns pose a major threat to food security – with growers and gardeners increasingly looking for food crops that can withstand the unpredictable climate.

Heritage varieties, such as those preserved by the Heritage Seed Library – and offered up each year in its Seed List - provide a diverse range of heirloom vegetable plants, many of which are better suited to the UK’s warmer and wetter climate. Examples include:

Lettuce ‘Black Seeded Samara’ – a light green loose-leafed, summer butterhead lettuce that stands up well to drought. The soft leaves have a mild flavour and fine texture. So named because it produces black seeds.

Lettuce ‘Bronze Arrow’ - a beautiful, productive California heirloom, popular in the USA but was almost unknown here. A large, non-hearting lettuce; the attractive, arrowhead-shaped leaves have a distinctive bronze tinge and mild flavour. Drought and cold hardy, so ideal for autumn sowing and overwintering; it's also less popular with slugs.

Climbing French bean ‘Lazy Housewife’ – a German heritage variety which copes well with hot, dry conditions, popular there since the early 1800s. Thought to have earned its name as at the end of the season the leaves wither and expose the pods making them easy to pick. Growing to around 2.5m in height this white-flowered variety is hardy and resilient, and very productive.

5. Heritage seeds with the oldest origins (16th century)

Cabbage 'Shetland' - our donor acquired this variety from organic crofters in Burland, near Scalloway, Shetland. Reputedly grown on Shetland since the 16th century, it was a crucial source of winter food for livestock and spring greens for the crofters. It is a very hardy, wind resistant brassica, forming loose heads and developing some purple colouration as the temperatures fall.

Carlin Pea - grown by our donor's family since the 1890s and originally given to his great-grandfather as a wedding present, this ancient variety dates back to the latter half of the 16th century. Protein rich, (about 25%) this classic drying pea is still traditionally eaten in northern England on Carlin Sunday (the Sunday before Palm Sunday). The peas are soaked in brine overnight, boiled and eaten with salt and vinegar or doused in beer or mint sauce. Some say that the day commemorates the arrival of a shipload of peas in besieged Newcastle in 1644, saving many from starvation. Attractive pink and lilac flowers are followed by pods of small, brown mottled peas.

Pea 'Holland Capucijners' - traditional pea unique to the farm communities of the northern Netherlands. The name is derived from the Capuchin monks, who are said to have developed this type of pea in the 1500s. This compact variety (approximately 1m) has pretty, fragrant bicour pink and violet flowers and large, starchy peas, perfect for drying and using as mushy peas.

6. Seeds with interesting historical back stories (many more stories available)

Climbing French bean 'Angel' - our donor was given seeds of this variety as a gift from a friend in Germany. It's so named as the pattern around the hilum of the seeds resembles an angel. In Germany it is also known as the Monstrance Bean, as these markings also bear some similarity to the shape of the sacred vessels used by the Roman Catholic church. The legend suggests that, during WW1, a French pastor planted beans above his buried artefacts to prevent their discovery. The beans produced by these plants bore the marks we now see. They produce beautiful orange-red flowers followed by flat, green pods packed with the pretty beans, which are perfect for use dried.

Tomato 'Marianna's Peace' - Indeterminate. Cordon. This variety dates back to the turn of the century. Marianna was a Czechoslovakian farmer's daughter who managed

to escape from Russian captivity during WWII by jumping from the truck that was transporting her and some school friends to Siberia. Despite being shot in the leg she reached the safety of Bavaria. These seeds were a gift from her father before he died. Produces very vigorous vines and very large, pinkish-red, weakly ribbed fruits weighing around 500g each. Their balanced sweet-acid flavour makes them good for eating both fresh and cooked.

6. **Weird and wonderful heritage vegetables to grow** (a small sample below)

Squash 'Lady Godiva' - named for its 'naked', hullless seed, rather than any connections with Coventry. This variety had been available commercially for many years but failed to make it onto the UK National List when Britain left the EU. An attractive and vigorous plant with large leaves and long trailing vines which yield large pumpkins with striped skins and flavoursome orange flesh. However, primarily grown for the tasty, shiny, dark green seeds.

Melon 'Hongs Shark Fin' - widely used in southern Central America and Asia, this vegetable is so named because it is traditionally made into a broth that resembles shark fin soup. This variety spreads vigorously, particularly in nitrogen-rich soils, so it will need plenty of space to scramble. Each plant will produce 4-5 pale green fruits which have mild-flavoured, cucumber-like flesh.

Lablab 'Vasu's 30-Day Dwarf Papri' - acquired via our 'Sowing New Seeds' project, this lablab is named after its donor and is said to take 30 days from seed to flower. Grown and saved on the Redhill Allotments, Leicester, but originally commercial seed from India. This variety performs best in fertile soils and a temperate climate.

7. **Heritage vegetables good for small gardens and balcony growing**

Many of our heritage varieties are brilliant grown in pots or in small spaces. Here's a selection:

Dwarf French bean 'Navy Bean Edmund'

Navy beans were first cultivated to sustain Australian forces during WWII and are the type used as baked beans. This variety came to us from RHS Harlow Carr and produces compact (around 20cm), branching plants that work well in containers. White flowers are followed by short green pods filled with small round beans. The pods are also held

off the soil, reducing slug and rotting problems. Principally a drying bean but can be eaten as a green bean too.

Chilli 'Trifetti'

Produces pretty plants, that look lovely in planters, with variegated cream and green leaves, purple flowers and dark purple/black, bullet-shaped fruits that turn red when ripe. The peppers are extremely hot, and care should be taken when handling, preparing and eating!

Gupta's Indian Mustard

Although originally from India, this salad green has been grown for many years by our donor on the St Mary's Allotments in Leamington Spa. It's the most productive of the Indian mustards trialled in our 2013 Sowing New Seeds project, producing attractive mild-flavoured leaves.

Radish 'Tientsin Green'

Our donor originally obtained seeds of this variety from a collection in China. It produces white roots with a green collar and a really 'radishy' bite! Could be tried as a winter radish.

8. New exciting acquisitions found for the Heritage Seed Library

Thanks to its #SeedSearch project, funded by a grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the HSL is discovering new intriguing heritage seeds that you can't buy in the shops and many that have been passed down through the generations.

11 new seeds have been added to the collection this year including:

- **Broad bean – Grandfather Beans**
Grown by the Burge Family in Somerset for around 150 years, this is a true family heirloom. Named 'Grandfather Bean' by our donor's father, referring to his own great-grandfather, who was born in the 1830s.
- **Broad bean – Uncle Maurice's**
This heritage broad bean has a history that spans 100 years, two continents, three cities and three gardens!

- **Dwarf French bean – Weller’s Blue [pictured]**
Named after our donor’s father who was given this variety in 1946 by a soldier who had served in France during WWII. It has been grown and saved by our donor since 1970.
- **Purslane - Golden Purslane**
A very unusual salad plant. Mentioned by Gerard in *Generall Historie of Plantes of 1597* who states: “raw purslane is much used in salads, with oil, salt and vinegar. It cools the blood and causes appetite”. It’s very versatile; suitable for stir fries, casseroles and stews.
- **Red orach.** This variety gets the prize for the most interesting plant. Donated by the UK Warwick Vegetable Genebank, this unusual member of the amaranth family has been cultivated for centuries and makes a great alternative to spinach. And it’s the first variety in the HSL collection to produce ‘dimorphic’ seeds – this means two distinct types of seed produced on the same plant. Producing both larger, brown seeds with thinner coats and smaller, black seeds with thicker coats, this is an incredible survival tactic. The seeds have different dormancy levels, staggering their germination and allowing them to survive in difference conditions. This may mean the brown seeds sprout in autumn and the black seeds wait until spring, meaning more chance of survival for the species as well as an extended harvest for the grower.

10. Interviews, photos and behind the scenes opportunities

This year the HSL is growing up to 30 varieties of tomatoes, 20 varieties of beans, and four varieties of carrots - and we would love to show you behind the scenes at the Library, showing you our grow-out polytunnels and glasshouse, indoor harvests, and cleaning and storage areas.

Depending on when you visit, you could see:

- Second year biennials e.g. beetroot, onion, leek, brassicas.
- Hand pollinating and fly pollination from June/July onwards.
- The big seed harvest in July/August.
- Lots of interesting trial varieties from our National Heritage Lottery Project.
- You may also be able to taste some of these varieties and compare and contrast them to shop-bought ones.

To arrange an interview or obtain further information please contact: Alice Whitehead awhitehead@gardenorganic.org.uk, 02476 217 702 or 01604 700 652, or Pam McCann at pam@houghbellis.co.uk, 07870 508 257.

Calling all influencers and social media stars!

Thank you for visiting us at the Garden Press Event. We're excited to connect with garden and horticulture creators who care deeply about the positive environmental benefits of organic growing.

We're inviting a small group of creators to work with Garden Organic and the Heritage Seed Library. Our aim is to build meaningful, long-term relationships with people who genuinely connect with our mission.

Why Garden Organic?

Garden Organic exists to promote organic growing and composting, citizen science and research, and seed conservation through our Heritage Seed Library. We want to help people garden 'the organic way', using natural methods to promote healthy, productive, sustainable gardens.

Influencers and content creators play a crucial role in helping us reach new audiences and communicate the importance of organic growing in a relatable way.

What we can offer you

- The chance to collaborate with a respected charity making real, positive environmental impact.
- Opportunities to create content around Garden Organic and The Heritage Seed Library, giving your followers access to unique perspectives around sustainable gardening and seed conservation.
- Be the first to know about Garden Organic campaigns and research.
- Opportunity to be a guest on the Organic Gardening Podcast, sharing your expertise with our listeners - 10,000+ monthly.
- Opportunities to write or be featured in articles for *The Organic Way* members' magazine.
- Collaborations across Garden Organic's social media platforms - combined audience 130,000+.

Our ask

We'd love to work with you to:

- Engage with Garden Organic's work and values.
- Collaborate with us on social media content.
- Share and amplify Garden Organic and Heritage Seed Library campaigns across your platforms.
- Promote organic growing and sustainable living through content creation.

If this sounds like a good fit, we'd love to explore how we can work together. Contact marketing@gardenorganic.org.uk for more information on how you can help us promote organic growing.

GROW YOUR ORGANIC GARDENING SKILLS WITH GARDEN ORGANIC'S GOLD-STANDARD CERTIFICATE

For the first time in its 65-year history, Garden Organic will be sharing its organic growing skills via a brand-new formal learning certificate.

Sustainable gardening charity Garden Organic, renowned for its research and knowledge about growing organically, has launched its first-ever 'Introduction to Organic Growing' online training course.

The course has been carefully designed for amateur gardeners looking to upskill or move into a horticultural career. It will also be suitable for early-career professional gardeners.

Led by expert horticulturist Chris Collins, participants will work through a series of six self-guided online modules and three seasonal webinars that give a firm foundation in the key principles and practical approaches to organic growing.

Chris Collins said: "You never stop learning when it comes to gardening – so I'm really proud to be working with Garden Organic to offer this new certificate. With climatic fluctuations and changing the way we approach things, many people are now looking to enhance their horticultural knowledge when it comes to things like soil health, composting and biodiversity.

"As the UK's leading experts in organic growing and seed conservation, Garden Organic are bringing decades of in-depth knowledge in a flexible online format. You can complete the course online in your own time, from the comfort of your own home – or even your garden! It's a fantastic way to expand your knowledge and career opportunities."

Key course skills include:

- *Understanding the principles and benefits of organic growing.*

- *Developing a best practice, sustainable approach to improving soil health and learning how to apply effective composting techniques.*
- *Learning how to manage and plan a productive organic growing space, including assessing the space, plant choice, key planning skills and propagation techniques.*
- *Understanding the benefits and best approach to building a healthy biodiverse space including what to grow, creating habitats, recognising pests & diseases and how to manage them organically.*
- *Learning propagation skills from our Heritage Seed Library team to confidently grow, harvest, save and sow seed.*
- *Learning how to maximise the health and productivity of a growing space all year round.*

To arrange interviews or obtain further information please contact: Alice Whitehead awhitehead@gardenorganic.org.uk on 02476 217 702 or 01604 700 652, or Pam McCann at pam@houghbellis.co.uk, 07870 508 257.

Editor's Notes

About Garden Organic

[Garden Organic](https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk) promotes organic growing and composting, citizen science and research, and seed conservation through its Heritage Seed Library. Its aim is to help people grow 'the organic way', using natural methods to promote healthy, biodiverse, sustainable gardens.

Founded in the 1950s as the Henry Doubleday Research Association, it has been leading the way in researching and demonstrating best practice organic growing for more than 65 years and brings together a movement of thousands of growers keen to have a positive impact on the green space they nurture.

For more information visit [gardenorganic.org.uk](https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk), or follow [@gardenorganicuk](https://twitter.com/gardenorganicuk).

NEW ORGANIC GARDENING NETWORK FOR UK GARDENERS

Garden Organic is calling on professional and community gardeners across the UK to join a unique network of organic 'Growing Partners' – to share skills and find peer support for organic growing.

The Growing Partners network will connect new organic growers, those working towards organic principles, and established gardeners. In the future, it's hoped there will be regular in-person meet ups to share sustainable gardening experiences, successes and resources.

Partners will have access to factsheets, discounts on Garden Organic's Online Organic Growing Certificate, events and webinars, and the ability to advertise their gardens and events on the gardenorganic.org.uk website – which has 30K monthly visitors. They can also participate in citizen science projects.

"This is the first networking group of its kind aimed specifically at organic gardeners, and growing spaces that embrace the principle of organic growing – or are working towards it," says Garden Organic's head gardener Emma O'Neill.

"Gardening can be a lonely business – particularly when you're pioneering organic and sustainable skills – and our network is a chance to build relationships with likeminded people, and learn from peers, as we all strive to grow the organic way."

If you know a public garden or community growing space that would like to become part of the Growing Partners network, please email growingpartners@gardenorganic.org.uk

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GARDEN ORGANIC TEAMS UP WITH GROW-YOUR-OWN APP FRYD TO REVOLUTIONISE HORTI' CITIZEN SCIENCE

Sustainable gardening charity Garden Organic is linking with popular veg growing app Fryd to revolutionise how and when people grow veg across the UK.

The sustainable gardening charity is asking for the public's help to make growing advice better apply to locations and regions. Currently, sowing advice is very broad-brush taking in the whole of the UK - despite sowing times for beans, for example, being dramatically different for the southwest compared with the north.

The Build a Better Veg Planner project aims to make it easier for gardeners to plant veg in their regions. It will get a better understanding of the timescales for growing vegetables in different regions of the country and to observe any changes or trends.

The project is asking people to sign up by **20 March**, via the Fryd app or online, to keep a record of key stages in a standardised climbing French bean crop over a number of growing seasons.

Citizen science goes digital

For 65 years Garden Organic has been running citizen science projects to help gardeners embrace organic techniques or grow better. In 2025, it teamed up with the Fryd app, the digital garden companion, so people can log data via their mobile phone as they garden. The aim is to make it easier than ever for gardeners to take part in Garden Organic's citizen science, reach new growers and scale up participation.

The partnership forms the first of many citizen science experiments hosted in Fryd Lab, a new feature within the Fryd app designed to make local, at-scale data collection simple and engaging.

“Gardeners are on the front line of climate change, they see and feel the seasons shift, but advice hasn’t kept pace,” said Florian Hassler, co-founder at Fryd. “With Fryd Lab, one five-minute contribution could help your whole area get better local sowing and planting guidance next season. You can even do it on your phone while you garden!”

“I look forward to this collaboration taking organic gardening citizen science to a whole new audience using Fryd’s modern accessible platform to reach thousands more growers across the UK,” said Dr Anton Rosenfeld, who heads up Garden Organic’s citizen science work.

Find out more about the Build a Better Veg Planner at gardenorganic.org.uk/build-a-better-veg-planner-2. Closing date for sign ups to this project is 20 March, 2026.

Editor’s Notes

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For more information visit gardenorganic.org.uk, or follow @gardenorganicuk or follow the charity on @gardenorganicuk.

About Fryd

Fryd (pronounced Froot) is one of Europe's most popular garden planning apps, helping over 300,000 gardeners plan, grow and share their veg patches. The digital garden companion allows users to create bespoke planting plans for their gardens or allotments, discover companion planting combinations, and get personalised sowing advice based on local climate and frost dates.

Fryd is steward-owned, purpose-driven and promotes eco-friendly, sustainable gardening.

Fryd Lab, available in the free version of the app, offers access to community-led citizen science experiments. Fryd is available to download in the UK on both iOS and Android platforms. Joining the Fryd community is free or subscribe to Super Fryd (£9.99 p/month, £44.99 p/year or £179.99 lifetime subscription) which boasts lots of enhanced features.

Heritage Seed Library and Garden Organic open days

We're delighted to be opening our organic demonstration garden and Heritage Seed Library to the public in spring/summer 2026. Open days run on selected Saturdays from 1pm-5pm.

Organic demonstration garden open days

- 28 March
- 25 April
- 16 May
- 20 June
- 11 July/12 September – opening for the National Garden Scheme
- 15 August
- 3 October

Heritage Seed Library open days

- 13 June
- 27 June
- 19 September

All open days and tours are available for the public to book at gardenorganic.org.uk/events. They are free to Garden Organic members.

Organic demonstration garden

Visitors can explore the garden at their own pace, and enjoy light refreshments as they wander around our no-dig trial area, large vegetable patch featuring unique Heritage Seed Library vegetables, National Comfrey Collection, and several wildlife ponds. This working organic garden also features dedicated areas for growing food in small spaces, and gardening for climate change. Guided tours can be signed up for on the day, where visitors can ask questions and get inspiration from the team.

Heritage Seed Library (HSL) tours

Visitors can get exclusive behind-the-scenes access at a series of open events, which offer the rare opportunity to view the HSL working spaces. During the visit they can explore our polytunnels and outdoor beds to see the methods we use to isolate and pollinate crops to ensure varieties are conserved 'true-to-type' for future generations. They'll be introduced to some unique and unusual varieties in the collection, as well as provide a sneak preview of our growing trials of recently rediscovered heritage varieties. We'll also share some easy - and more tricky - seed-saving techniques.

HERITAGE SEEDS WITH A ROYAL SEAL OF APPROVAL

We're honoured that our Heritage Seed Library has had long association with His Majesty King Charles III - with a parcel of seeds from our National Collection of Heritage Vegetables being grown at Highgrove.

His Majesty the King became a valued patron of Garden Organic 45-years-ago - and as a keen organic gardener and well-known environmentalist, he has always championed practices closely aligned with those of the charity.

Each year, we're delighted that we're able to send parcels of our Heritage Seed Library seeds to His Majesty's private residence at Highgrove, where they are grown in the organically managed gardens on the estate.

In a recent Unearthed Podcast for the Millennium Seed Bank at Kew, the King expressed how important the work of the Heritage Seed Library is.

"Forty-five years ago I became patron of the Henry Doubleday Research Association, which became Garden Organic...it was rescuing heritage vegetables...because at the time all the old varieties were being thrown away and weren't considered worthwhile," the King said during the interview. "I've always felt it was critical to keep the balance - because you may need them at a later stage. Don't throw them away!"

Heritage at Highgrove

Over the past 40 years, a series of interlinked gardens have blossomed at Highgrove. Managed organically and with sustainability in mind, these havens have become vital habitats for diverse wildlife - and home to Heritage Seed Library vegetables. We're feel privileged that seeds from our Heritage Seed Library are planted and nurtured here each year.

A horticultural legacy

Our precious heirloom vegetable seeds and their stories are also set to be preserved for 100 years as part of The King's Foundation's 35th anniversary time capsule.

Heritage beans, peas and tomato seeds will be buried in a special oak capsule – and not opened until 2125 – as part of the anniversary celebrations of The King’s Foundation. It couldn’t have come at a better time as our living library celebrates its 50th birthday between October 2025 and 2026.

The five heritage vegetables seeds have been specially selected to be part of the time capsule project. They have previously been grown in the gardens at Dumfries House in Ayrshire, the headquarters of The King’s Foundation - founded by His Majesty King Charles in 1990.

His Majesty launched the time capsule project earlier this year by placing the first items - his secateurs and a personal letter.

Heritage Seed Library seeds grown at Highgrove

- **‘Afghan Purple’ carrot**

Egyptian cave paintings dating back to around 2000BC show what are thought to be purple carrots; the orange varieties we are familiar with today were not developed until the 16th century. Donated by the Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, Virginia, USA, this purple carrot produces 20-25cm roots that, when sliced, reveal a bright yellow/orange core. They have a more pronounced 'carroty' flavour than orange varieties, and also show some resistance to carrot fly.

- **‘New England Sugar Pie’ squash**

The original small sugar pumpkin of New England, USA, first described by Fearing Burr in *The Field and Garden Vegetables of America* (1863). He described the squash as the smallest of the field varieties but an "abundant bearer" that rarely failed to mature its crops, making it "of first-rate quality". Its trailing plants produce orange, almost oval, lightly ribbed fruits weighing in at around 2kg with smooth skin and orange, creamy, sweet flavoured flesh.

- **Cantalun melon**

Originally from the Vilmorin Seed House near the Loire river in France, this Charentais-type melon produces round fruits, approximately 12-15cm in diameter and just under 1kg in weight. The orange flesh is sweet and juicy. We can grow melons in Britain!

- **'Parfree's Dragon Tongue' dwarf French bean**

Mr Parfree from St Albans in Hertfordshire obtained this variety from his neighbour, who had in turn been given them by a friend who travelled extensively in China, where they are thought to have originated. Compact, sturdy plants produce green pods with thin, deep violet stripes. An easy care, easy grow bean that would look pretty and decorative grown in pots.

- **Mummy's Pea**

This variety has been grown in Durweston, Dorset, for as long as local memory goes. They are known there as 'Mummy's' and local folklore suggested the seeds were originally found in a tomb. To add to the story, there is thought to be a link between a local landowning family (the Portmans) and the 1922 expedition that unveiled Tutankhamun's tomb.

If you'd like to find out more about the Heritage Seed Library and its work or become a member visit gardenorganic.org.uk/hsl.

About Garden Organic

[Garden Organic](http://GardenOrganic) promotes organic growing and composting, citizen science and research, and seed conservation through its Heritage Seed Library. Its aim is to help people grow 'the organic way', using natural methods to promote healthy, biodiverse, sustainable gardens.

Founded in the 1950s as the Henry Doubleday Research Association, it has been leading the way in researching and demonstrating best practice organic growing for

more than 65 years and brings together a movement of thousands of growers keen to have a positive impact on the green space they nurture.

For more information visit gardenorganic.org.uk/hsl, or follow @heritageseedlibrary. To arrange an interview or obtain further information please contact: Alice Whitehead awhitehead@gardenorganic.org.uk on 02476 217 702 or 01604 700 652, or Pam McCann at pam@houghbellis.co.uk, 07870 508 257.

Garden Organic – an overview

Garden Organic is the UK's leading organic growing charity and has been at the forefront of the organic horticulture movement for more than 65 years.

Its aim is to engage and equip people with organic food growing, seed saving and composting skills.

It's pioneered research into organic growing methods with a wide programme of citizen science experiments studying everything from gardening techniques and growing novel crops to wildlife surveys and pest control.

Garden Organic believes organic growing is crucial for a healthy sustainable world so along with a range of partners it campaigns to get harmful chemicals like neonicotinoids and glyphosates banned. And it fights for peat-free growing to safeguard this vital natural resource – the largest and most efficient land-based store of carbon.

The charity has developed a wealth of advice, resources and training materials to assist gardeners. It delivers community engagement programmes, including at its compost demonstration sites around the country, and online and in-person workshops and tours of its demonstration garden at Ryton near Coventry.

Garden Organic also looks after three crucially important National Plant Collections including the National Collection of Heritage Seeds, the National Collection of Comfrey and the National Collection of Calendula.

50 years of the Heritage Seed Library – a resource of national scientific importance

The Heritage Seed Library (HSL) holds the UK's National Collection of Heritage Vegetables and is looked after by Garden Organic. It is the Europe's oldest community seed bank.

It was established five decades ago in 1975 in Bocking, Essex, by organic gardening pioneer and Garden Organic founder Lawrence D. Hills - who had the foresight to realise that changes in seed legislation would mean hundreds, if not thousands, of vegetable varieties could be lost.

This living library, now housed at Ryton Organic Gardens, near Coventry holds more than 800 seed varieties. This living library holds more than 800 heritage seed varieties, conserving them but uniquely sharing its collection with gardeners through a membership scheme - and also Seed Guardians, who grow the seed and return their saved seeds to the library each year.

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation also estimates that globally 75% of crop diversity was lost between 1900 and 2002, a huge and significant figure.

These losses, coupled with alterations in global temperatures and disruption of regional weather patterns pose a major threat to food security – with growers and gardeners increasingly looking for food crops that can withstand the unpredictable climate.

“The Heritage Seed Library is therefore a resource of national scientific importance”, says Catrina Fenton, Head of the Library. “It currently houses over 800 seed varieties which have been collected over decades, sometimes many generations, by individuals

and communities. They have carefully selected and bred vegetable plants locally for their special characteristics, saving the seed from plants that grow well where they live.

“Plants have a simple way of adapting to different challenges, called genetic diversity. And the more diversity we can find and reintroduce into our food systems - through growing and eating old varieties of vegetables at home - the greater our resilience to future pressures in a changing environment.”

Story ideas associated with the Heritage Seed Library

Below are a wide range of hooks on which to craft a story about the HSL (more details in this press pack).

- The importance of heritage seeds in boosting food security and buffering climate change
- Noteworthy growers of Heritage Seed Library seeds – including His Majesty the King, Raymond Blanc, Sue Kent.
- Heritage Seed Relay.
- Seed Guardians.
- Heritage seeds with the oldest origins (16th century).
- Seeds with interesting historical back stories.
- Weird and wonderful heritage vegetables to grow.
- Seeds with climate resistance.
- Heritage veg good for small gardens and balcony growing.
- New exciting seed acquisitions.
- Tasting/photo opportunities.

Interviews with Heritage Seed Library staff can be arranged during the Garden Press Event by visiting stand H13 8A. Alternatively, interviews can be arranged after the event by contacting Alice Whitehead at awhitehead@gardenorganic.org.uk, 01604 700 652 or 02476 217 702, or Pamela McGann at pam@houghbellis.co.uk, 07870 508 257.

Interviews

Fiona Taylor, chief executive of Garden Organic, will be available on 17 February, 10am-4pm, for interviews. Please contact Fiona direct on 07711 855785, or contact Alice or Hannah at stand **H13 8A** to arrange.

We can also arrange interviews with any Garden Organic staff at a later date. Please contact alice@gardenorganic.org.uk, 01604 700 652 or 02476 217 702 to arrange.

Press images

Garden Organic has a huge library of images available for accredited journalists to use. These include organic gardening topics such as soil health, biodiversity and food growing. We also have many photos of our Heritage Seed Library's heritage seeds, and behind the scenes at the Library.

Scan the QR code below to access a small selection of images via our Dropbox:

