

# Uist Grower's Almanac *the natural way to grow*

Laura Donkers, Local Food for Local People CCF-3812

Published by Elite Publishing Academy  
[www.elitepublishingacademy.com](http://www.elitepublishingacademy.com)

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by photocopying or any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage or retrieval systems, without permissions in writing from both the copyright owner and the publisher of the book.

First Edition published 2016  
© Laura Donkers 2016

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Elite Publishing Academy

A catalogue record for this book is available from The British Library  
ISBN 978-1-910090-50-3

All text, design & production (unless otherwise stated): © Laura Donkers

Photographs: © Laura Donkers and Sue MacDonald

Vegetable illustrations: © The '5-A-Day-Club' (After-School Gardening Club)











## Contents

		<i>Introduction</i>	6
1	<b>January</b>	<i>Ground Rules: What can my ground grow?</i>	11
2	<b>February</b>	<i>Getting Started: Planning layout + veg plot rotation</i>	15
3	<b>March</b>	<i>Preparing and Sowing: Seeds + equipment</i>	19
4	<b>April</b>	<i>Soil, Seaweed and Manure</i>	23
5	<b>May</b>	<i>Potting on, Planting out and Direct Sowing: Things to think about</i>	27
6	<b>June</b>	<i>Getting your crop to grow better: drainage, poly tunnels and plants for protection</i>	31
7	<b>July</b>	<i>Weeds and Compost</i>	35
8	<b>August</b>	<i>Soft Fruit and Jam</i>	39
9	<b>September</b>	<i>Harvesting, Storing, Preserving</i>	43
10	<b>October</b>	<i>Planting for Spring</i>	47
11	<b>November</b>	<i>Protecting your plot</i>	51
12	<b>December</b>	<i>Next year it'll be even better: Reviewing and planning</i>	55
		<i>Further Reading and Acknowledgements</i>	58

## Introduction

This is the year that you stop making excuses and decide to learn how to grow some food for yourself, and your family. It is possible, it is worthwhile, and it will help you to eat better. It will also allow you to take some action on climate change because of the impact that increased local food production can have to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions due to a reduction in food miles (the measure of the distance a food travels from the land to your plate<sup>1</sup>).

**Uist Growers Almanac: the natural way to grow** is a horticultural publication that seeks to share the rich resource of local knowledge and skills on growing fruit and vegetables successfully in the challenging and wild landscape of the islands of the Uists and Benbecula, Outer Hebrides. It has been commissioned, written and published as part of the outcomes of the Climate Challenge Fund project<sup>2</sup> Local Food for Local People

CCF-3812: a year-long project (2015-16) run in partnership by community organisations Tagsa Uibhist and Cothrom. Additional funding providing writing-up time, and covering printing and evaluation costs was received from The Pebble Trust<sup>3</sup>.

**Local Food for Local People CCF-3812** provided opportunities for local people to learn about healthy eating and wellbeing, and how to grow fruit and vegetables for themselves. It has provided growing facilities in the form of Keder Greenhouses, raised bed allotment plots, and delivered formal (SVQ Horticulture) and informal horticultural training to support the 'growing community' to work towards becoming more self-sufficient, as well as developing understanding of how to use 'seasonal vegetables' by working with Sgoil Lionacleit Home Economics teachers and pupils.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eta.co.uk/environmental-info/food-miles/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Environment/climatechange/howyoucan-help/communities/ClimateChallengeFund>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.thepebbletrust.org>

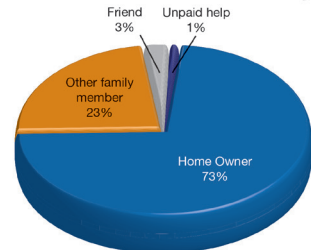




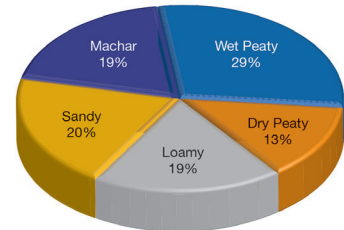
## Reclaiming the Knowledge Data Gathering Project

collected information about local growing knowledge through an island wide, inter-generational survey, involving all the schools of Uist. The survey was developed by Geography Higher pupils and their teacher as part of an assignment in understanding land-use. All the island's children were engaged in taking survey sheets home to their townships to gather information from their families and neighbours about the current area of land under fruit and vegetable production, as well as details about soil type, crops grown, and who does the growing. This gathered data now forms the body of this book and reveals island ways of **how**, **what** and **where** to grow vegetables and fruit in Uist, and also, **what to cook** with them

### Person Involved in Growing

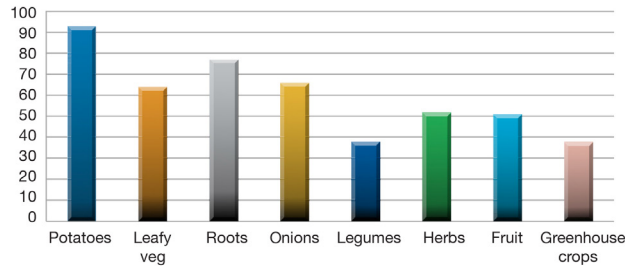


### Soil Type on Which Produce is Grown



Map highlights areas where surveys were completed. All visual data compiled and created by SAC Consulting

## Number of Respondents Growing Each Type of Produce



- *acknowledging island dwellers traditional competence in self-sufficiency*
- *revealing the current growing capacity, knowledge and skills that still exist throughout the islands*
- *informing and encouraging new growers, new crofters and new gardeners to begin growing and increasing the potential of their land*

## Produce Grown



This publication promotes the possibility of a return to more sustainable lifestyles and the development of a more self-sufficient community. Freshly picked, local produce can directly improve the island community's diet, afford a healthy and productive activity for its growers, and decrease reliance on supermarkets for fresh food.

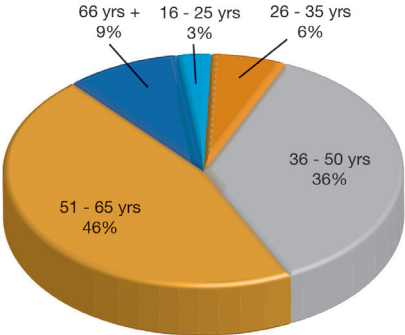
The Future of Farming, DEFRA 2009 stressed '...the importance to ensure that our children reconnect with where, and how the food they eat is produced'. In both farming and crofting, the average age of practitioners is



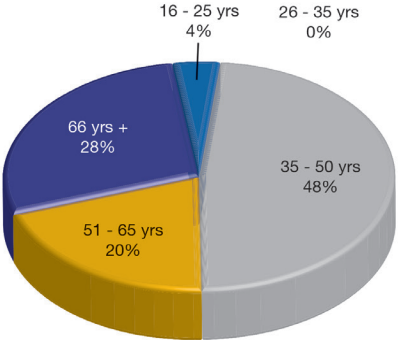
exceeding 55 and there is a real need to attract young people who are motivated to work in this area. The production of an accessible, relevant horticultural publication that is written for island inhabitants and speaks to a broad demographic is a vital aspect to supporting local community growing initiatives and championing more sustainable lifestyles.

Laura Donkers, Project Leader

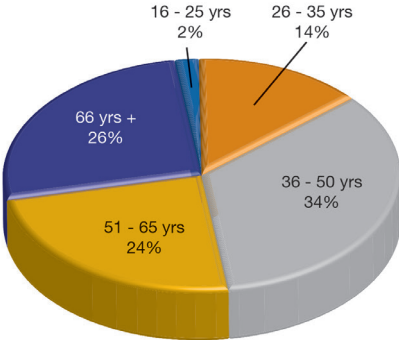
**Age Category of Growers in North Uist**



**Age Category of Growers in Benbecula**



**Age Category of Growers in South Uist**







# 1 January

*Ground Rules: What can my ground grow?*

## **Do you know what sort of soil you have?**

Generally the soils in Uist range from dry sand to water-logged peat and both of these extremes present a real challenge to the would-be grower of vegetables and fruit. However, most soils fall somewhere in between these extremes. In fact wherever the ground has been cultivated before it will have been improved to a degree.

As a rule of thumb, sandy soils are too dry and peaty soils are too wet, but we add well-rotted manure and seaweed to them both in order to improve their ability to hold moisture, improve fertility, increase the micro-organisms that are present, and make it more 'workable', so that it can grow the large range of vegetables and some soft fruits that we have become accustomed to eating.

## **Get To Know What Your Soil Will Grow**

- Dig out a sample of soil from your vegetable plot, garden, or where you want to start growing.
- What does it feel like – sandy, peaty, dry, wet?
- Find out the pH (acidity or alkalinity) of your soil with a [Soil pH Testing Kit](#)
- Most vegetables grow well in enriched soils with a pH of 5.0 -7.0, but add LIME to soils below 5.5 pH if you want to grow a good crop!
- The active ingredient in lime is Calcium Carbonate and comes in the form of ground limestone - 'garden lime', or chalk, or Calcified seaweed
- When adding lime follow the instructions on the packet.

## When to test soil pH

It is always worth checking soil pH before starting a new garden, making vegetable plots, planting fruit, where growth has become disappointing, or where yellowing of foliage occurs. We do this primarily to find out whether the soil could do with a dressing of lime.

Home testing: You can test your soil pH yourself using a DIY kit widely available at garden centres and online. These kits are relatively cheap and easy to use and give a good indication of soil pH.

Always follow the sampling directions given by the test kit or laboratory to get a representative sample for the area in question. When adding lime follow the instructions on the packet. The active ingredient in lime is Calcium Carbonate and comes in the form of ground limestone - 'garden lime', or chalk, or calcified seaweed<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> CALCIFIED SEAWEED is a completely natural product harvested from the seabed. It rapidly absorbs minerals and nutrients from the seawater and eventually grows into a hard, brittle coral-like structure with a high mineral and trace element content.

Lime increases soil pH and make it less acidic, but it is important to know what your soil's pH is before going ahead and adding lime. Most soils in Uist are organic soils and naturally quite acidic compounded by the excessive rainfall which compacts the ground spoiling the structure and removing oxygen from it which reduces the activity of bacteria, and leaves it sour. Bacteria cannot grow in soils below 4.7 pH. Plant nutrients become more liquid in very acid soils and therefore are washed out more easily.

Cultivating the soil through digging, manuring/sea weeding, raking, and hoeing all help to reintroduce oxygen and sweeten the ground, bringing it back into good heart. For cultivated soil where the pH is too low (anything below 4.5) you will not be able to grow vegetables well as they won't be able to get the nutrients out of the soil, so you will need to start improving it!

A nutritious winter treat using beetroot and carrot from your garden 'Elderflower and Honey Ice-cream with Beetroot Smoothie' by Liana, Finlay and Calum.

#### **Elderflower and Honey Ice-Cream**

*100gm caster sugar  
3 tsp liquid glucose  
3 large egg yolks  
250 gm Crème Fraîche  
150ml whipping cream  
3 tspn Elderflower Cordial  
1 tbspn runny honey*

#### **Beetroot Smoothie**

*2 x Carrots  
1 x Beetroot  
1/2 Cucumber*

#### **Elderflower and Honey Ice-Cream**

Place sugar, milk, liquid glucose into large saucepan and stir well. Over gentle heat warm the milk until it gives off steam, but is not boiling. Meanwhile whisk egg yolks until light and fluffy. Slowly whisk in warmed milk, then put mixture back into the pan, whisk thoroughly. Add cream and return to gentle heat, gently stirring continuously until thickened. Remove from the heat. Strain through a fine sieve and leave to cool.

Once custard is cool, add the crème fraîche, whipping cream, cordial, honey and stir well. Either churn in an ice-cream machine, or pour into a shallow freezer container and freeze. During the freezing process beat the mixture 3 or 4 times to break up any ice crystals to create a smooth ice-cream. Swirl the smoothie into the final beating of the ice-cream.

#### **Beetroot Smoothie**

Scrub the carrots and top + tail them. Scrub the beetroot before chopping into chunks. Peel the cucumber. Juice the beetroot followed by carrot, and cucumber. Mix together in a glass.

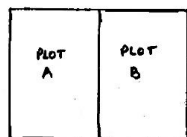




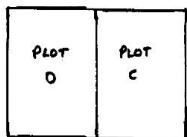


## 2 February

### Getting Started: Planning layout + veg plot rotation



Vegetables need a fertile soil if they are to grow well. In Uist, even in a poor growing year, you can expect to grow around 4 kilos of vegetables on one square meter provided you enrich your soil each year by digging in well-rotted manure and seaweed, and set up a crop rotation so that you are not growing the same vegetables on the same piece of ground year after year.



### Crop Rotation

The practice of rotating crops was developed thousands of years ago by the early farmers as a way to keep the soil fertile and free from pests, and it is still as relevant today even if you only have a small vegetable plot in your garden.

### Planning layout + veg plot rotation

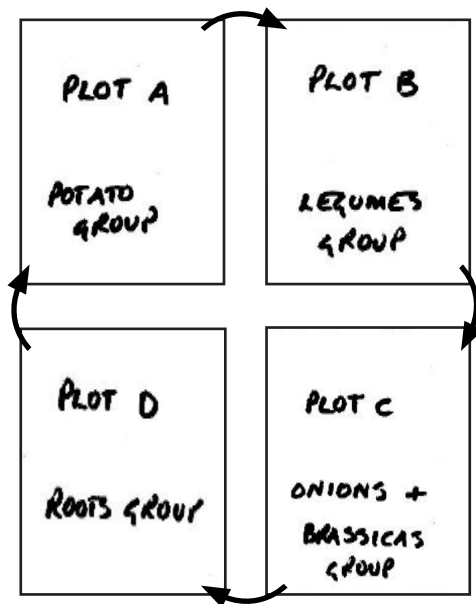
- Draw a simple plan of your vegetable plot
- Separate the area into four even plots
- Mark each one as follows:  
Plot A – Potatoes;  
Plot B – Legumes (Peas, beans);  
Plot C – Onions + Brassicas (Cabbages);  
Plot D – Roots (Carrots, Parsnips)
- Add manure + seaweed to Plots A, B, C
- Do not add any manure to Plot D as it will cause roots to 'fork' from too much Nitrogen. Carrots grow best in soil that was cultivated and manured the previous year.
- On new ground dig, manure + seaweed the whole plot and grow potatoes. Next year start the rotation growing potatoes for a 2nd year on Plot A.

### Potato Group

- Potatoes
- Courgettes and marrows
- Seakale or Swiss Chard
- Spinach

### Roots Group

- Beetroot
- Carrots
- Parsnips
- Radishes
- Spinach
- Swedes
- Turnips



### Legumes Group

- Broad beans
- Peas
- Runner beans
- Celeriac
- Celery
- Parsley

### Onions + Brassicas Group

- Garlic
- Leeks
- Onions + Shallots
- Spring onions
- Broccoli
- Sprouts
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower

The principle of crop rotation is to grow specific groups of vegetables on a different part of the vegetable plot each year. This helps to reduce a build-up of crop-specific pest and disease problems and it organises groups of crops according to their cultivation needs.

*'In the spring (on wet, peaty ground) dig in plenty of leafy tangle, cow muck, compost, before planting. Do this for all beds except the carrot and parsnip bed. Plant carrots and parsnips in last year's peas and beans bed. Don't enrich the carrot and parsnip bed as this encourages roots to fork.'*

Uist Growers advice for a 3 plot rotation leaving out the Potato Group)



Instead of frozen pizza and oven chips why not try Eilidh, Catherine, Laura and Kirsten's healthy homemade version 'using leeks, onions and potatoes from your garden?

### **Veggie Pizza**

*DOUGH: 300g Bread Flour,  
1tsp Yeast, 1tsp salt, 1tsp  
pepper, 1tsp olive oil, 200ml  
warm water*

*SAUCE: 1 tube of tomato  
puree, 150g*

*TOPPING Mozzarella cheese,  
1 onion, 1 leek, 3 cherry  
tomatoes*

### **Cheeky Chips**

*5 x potatoes  
1 tbsp. olive oil*

### **Veggie Pizza**

Turn on the oven at 220°C

Sieve the flour into a large bowl, then stir in yeast and salt and pepper. Make a well – pour 200ml warm water and olive oil and stir with a wooden spoon, until a soft fairly wet dough is formed.

Then onto a floured surface and knead until smooth. Roll dough out and cut into the shape you have chosen, i.e. star shape. Spread tomato puree onto the base. Chop onion, leek and cherry tomatoes. Put the mozzarella onto the pizza base, and add all of your toppings

Put the pizzas onto a baking tray and bake in the oven at Fan for 10 mins approx.

### **Cheeky Chips**

Peel and cut the potatoes into thin chips. Coat with oil. Bake at 200°C for 20 minutes until golden and crisp.





## 3 March

### *Preparing and Sowing: Seeds + equipment*

*"...you knew there would always be the spring, as you knew the river would flow again after it was frozen....and when spring came there were no problems except where to be happiest." Hemingway, E. 'A Moveable Feast'*

In Uist, we long for spring just the same as anywhere else. It can seem that it's slow to come some years, but when it does come it's not yet the time to start planting! The islands have a maritime climate, which means that the temperature of the land depends on the temperature of sea. This means that it will be May before the land is warm enough to plant into. To some extent you can overcome this by using cloches<sup>5</sup>, building raised beds, erecting a poly tunnel, or building a greenhouse, but generally sowing seeds directly into open land before May will result in poor germination.

---

<sup>5</sup> a small translucent cover for protecting or forcing outdoor plants

### What will you sow?

- Don't start planting too early
- The islands have a 'maritime climate' meaning that the temperature of the land depends on the temperature of the sea
- This means that it will be May before the land is warm enough to plant into
- Sow seeds inside so that you have plants ready to plant out in May
- Sow summer cabbages and cauliflowers: Broccoli; leeks and onions; herbs; spinach; salad
- Wait until April to sow the later crops like winter cabbages, sprouts, Kale, and purple sprouting broccoli
- Follow the sowing instruction on the seed packet, but sow indoors rather than outside!

Of course it is always feels worth a try if we do get some great spring days, because you have the time and you feel like being outside doing something positive. I would never say DON'T, but I would say that it's always surprising how much more successful seeds seems to germinate when you sow them after mid-May, and that is because the soil has finally warmed up. What is also surprising is just how quickly things seem to grow and even if you have had some success with early sowings the later ones will grow so fast that you will not notice a difference by the time you come to harvest. So follow the wisdom of islanders and plant when the soil is warm.

This timing means that all outdoor sowings would have to wait, but the secret is to start some plants off inside such as peas, onions, leeks, cabbage, broccoli, kale, cauliflower, celery, spinach and lettuce, so that they are ready to go out in May along with direct sowings of carrots and parsnips, radishes, lettuce, and beetroot. You need to start these

---

<sup>6</sup> Hardening off plants is the process, of preparing plants started indoors for the change in environmental conditions they will encounter when permanently moved outdoors. Without allowing plants to harden off, they will be negatively impacted by the sudden shock of exposure to daytime's sunrays and night time's coolness.

plants off from seed in about March and you will need to propagate them in the correct conditions i.e. the right temperature, moisture, and light, and have somewhere to grow them on and harden-off<sup>6</sup> before you eventually plant them out in May.

### **Seeds and Equipment 'Grow what you like to eat'**

All you need is a window-sill Propagator, which is a seed tray with a clear plastic cover and may also have a thermostatically-controlled heater so that you can set the temperature precisely. Generally most vegetables including brassica plants<sup>7</sup>, onions and leeks need around 13-15°C but more tropical species, like tomatoes and peppers, need 20-21°C in order to germinate. If it doesn't have a thermostat just sow your seeds according to the instructions on the packet, and observe them every day. You are bringing new life into the world and they need your regular attention.

<sup>7</sup> Brassicas are another name for the Cabbage family including Sprouts, Broccoli, Sprouting Broccoli, Kale and Cauliflower



If you grew kale last year you will still have some in your garden which will be particularly tender following frost. So why not make a simple, nutritious addition to mashed potato by adding freshly picked kale from your garden? Theo says 'it goes very well with vegetarian bacon'

### **Theo's Potatoes With Kale**

*Home grown potatoes*

*Freshly picked young curly*

*kale leaves*

*Milk + Butter*

*Peel potatoes*

Remove central ribs from kale and finely chop leaves

Boil potatoes in lightly salted water until cooked through. Drain and mash adding milk and butter.

Add chopped kale to potatoes and let soften in the hot mash before stirring in and serve.







## 4 April

### *Soil, Seaweed and Manure*

**Soil:** Once you have decided where your planting plots are going to be, mark them out into even-sized plots and start digging. **Digging** involves starting at one end of the plot and taking out a trench one spade deep across the width of the plot. Take this soil to the other end of the plot and make a heap. Now go back to the trench and half-fill with manure and seaweed<sup>8</sup>. Start the next trench, tipping the soil into the first trench, covering the manure up as you go. Work your way down the plot one trench at a time until you reach the end. Fill in the final trench with the soil from the heap. N.B. Remember to keep your back straight and take time for regular stretches to avoid back strain.

**Seaweed and Manure:** fantastic, organic fertilisers that are freely available to all growers and gardeners in the islands.

---

<sup>8</sup> Make sure that any manure and seaweed has been well-rotted for 3 months before you dig it into the soil

### Digging, Manuring and Sea weeding!

- *Before starting to dig mark your ground into even-sized plots*
- *Take out a trench at one end of the plot and move this soil to the other end*
- *Fork some well-rotted manure and seaweed into the trench*
- *Start the next trench tipping this soil into the first trench covering the manure up as you go*
- *Do not add any manure where you plan to grow root vegetables such as carrots, parsnips, beetroot, as they don't need so much Nitrogen. Carrots grow best in soil that was cultivated and manured the previous year.*
- *On new ground dig, manure + seaweed the whole plot and grow potatoes for the first year.*

All you need is a garden fork and an old coal, compost or animal feed bag to collect seaweed from the beach or get manure from someone who keeps cattle or horses. It is best to let them rot/compost for 3 months before digging it into your soil.

**Advice, hints and tips to share with other growers:**

*'get best crops when using seaweed'*

*'Plenty of seaweed – leave it to rot'*

*'Seaweed on the ground make a difference and to do it early as it is easier to plough'*

*'My growing ground is very wet so I put seaweed down in autumn and cover with heavy duty polythene'*

*'Dig a trench to put seaweed 4 inches deep and then cover over. Make a dent to plant carrot seeds but remember to thin them out!'*

*'I'm a new grower-this is the first time that I have grown any vegetables. My biggest success this year was the kale that just grew and grew. I grew it in peaty soil with seaweed mixed in which seemed to work really well'*

*'Use seaweed and horse manure'*

*'Make and get as much organic material as possible. Have crops growing 12 months of the year.'*

*'Use seaweed as fertilizer'*

*'Use seaweed every 3 years'*

*'Top up soil on potatoes when needed – manure better fertilizer than seaweed'*

*'Always use seaweed off the short instead of artificial fertiliser'*

*'Uplift seaweed after mid-November and before March before spreading on ground in March/April'*

*'Dig in plenty of dung'*

*'Mulch with plenty of seaweed'*

*'Put a new spread of seaweed on soil annually'*

*'Use horse manure and seaweed as fertilizer'*

*'Leave seaweed to rot for 2 weeks'*



Using up the last of the season's staple vegetables from your store you could make this nutritious and tasty dish: Andrew, Emma, and Hope's 'Leek, Potato and Carrot Soup'

### **Leek, Potato and Carrot Soup**

*2 pieces of bacon*

*2 carrots*

*4 medium-sized leeks*

*1 tbsp vegetable oil*

*225g/8oz potatoes, peeled and cubed*

*1.25ml/2 pints vegetables stock*

*150ml/5 fl oz double cream or crème fraîche*

Heat the oil in a large pan and add the sliced onions, potatoes, carrots and leeks. Cook for 3-4 mins until starting to soften.

Add the vegetable stock and bring to the boil. Simmer until the vegetables are tender.

Whizz with a hand blender or in a blender until smooth. Reheat in a clean pan, stir in the crème fraîche or cream through, and serve.





## 5 May

### *Potting on, Planting out and 'Direct Sowing': Things to think about*

Hopefully you will have had some good germination from your sowings in March and you will now be ready to pot on your seedlings. If you have sown the seeds nice and thinly they will be quite strong little plantlets by now, but if you were a bit too generous and sowed too many seeds at once they might look a bit cramped in the seed tray so just pot on the strongest looking ones as the weak ones are best discarded.

Transplant them into their own little pots or individual cells by filling the container first with some multi-purpose compost, and lightly tapping to remove air pockets. Ideally only hold the seedling by its leaves rather than stem or roots as these are very vulnerable to damage. Once transplanted water in gently and place in a well-lit space on a base that can be watered such as a tray, or bench. It is best to stand the pots on 'capillary matting' or paper towel and keep that watered rather than watering from above as this avoids the nutrients getting washed out of the compost and also reduces the build-up of algae, but mainly encourages a better root system to develop.

### Potting on and Planting out

- Once your seedlings start to emerge don't be in too much of a hurry to move them out of the seed tray
- The first leaves that appear are only 'seed leaves' you need to wait for the first couple of true leaves to appear before starting to 'pot' them on
- Prick out seedling into a small pot or cell-tray (as in photo)
- Let them grow on for 2-3 weeks
- 'Harden-off' plants gently by taking them outside in the day and bringing them back in at night, acclimatising them to the cooler, breezier conditions
- Plant out in final positions from mid-May onwards
- Directly sow carrots, parsnips, radishes, spinach, beetroot into final positions



**What to Grow?** ‘Grow what you like to eat’ In Uist, if you have created a sheltered spot you can grow almost anything outside apart from produce such as tomatoes, peppers, chillies, aubergines, and cucumbers, which need to be grown inside a greenhouse, conservatory, porch or windowsill. You can start off the plants from seed sown inside or sow directly into the open ground from mid-May onwards. If you have space give the following a try:

**Sugar Snap Peas, and peas:** In my opinion the best reason to have a veg garden is so that you can grow peas! They are delicious, prolific, and easy to grow. You can get an earlier crop by starting off some plants inside in cell trays, putting one or two dried pea seeds per cell, but you can also sow them directly into the ground from mid-May where they will grow quite happily in a sheltered position. It is hard to imagine that their delicate looking tendrils could survive the Uist climate, but instead peas prefer our cool, damp summers. The whole Sugar Snap pod is edible, which means that no shelling is required.

**Sweet Fennel:** Is just as easy to grow as celery, but provides a sweeter addition to soups, casseroles and sauces. It is high in vitamin C, and is a good source of

dietary fibre, potassium, folate, and flavonoids. Its feathery fronds are similar to those on a dill plant. Its crunchy green root resembles celery stalks. Its thick white bulb can be thinly sliced, and eaten fresh in fruit and green salads, or steamed, sautéed, or boiled.

**Shallots:** Particularly the torpedo-shaped ‘Banana Shallots’ grow well and provide a delicious alternative to standard onions. They grow very easily from seed, as long as you have started them off quite early in the season (Jan-Feb) , but if not you should be able to buy as ‘sets’ ready for planting out in May

**Leeks:** Nothing surpasses the rich taste of a freshly picked leek. They are so easily grown as long as you follow the wise advice given to me by Hugh Matheson to plant into a trench filled with manure and lightly covered with soil. They will be the biggest, sweetest leeks you’ll ever have the pleasure of eating.

*‘Everything this year was sown or planted out late into still very wet and cold soil. Brassicas in particular flourished, but lettuce not so good. So – it varies from year to year. Almost every year something doesn’t grow well.’*



## Sue's Rhubarb and Chocolate Mint Muffins

*300g freshly picked rhubarb,  
chopped*

*3 tbsp caster sugar*

*Juice and zest of 1 orange*

*300g plain flour*

*1 tsp cinnamon*

*2tsp baking powder*

*120g caster sugar*

*2 eggs, beaten*

*200ml milk*

*100g melted butter*

*4 heaped tbsp. of fresh  
chopped chocolate mint*

*Demerara sugar*

Preheat oven 180

Line a 12-hole muffin tin with paper cases

Mix rhubarb and sugar together on a baking tray, sprinkle with orange juice and zest, and bake in the oven for 10mins or until tender. Remove from the oven and drain well, reserving the juice.

Mix flour, cinnamon and baking powder. Add caster sugar, eggs, milk and melted butter and chopped mint. Mix all of the ingredients together with the rhubarb, do not overmix.

Divide mixture between cases and bake in oven for 20 mins or until risen and golden.

Mix the demerara sugar with the reserved rhubarb juice and spoon a little over the hot muffins.

Enjoy with a dollop of clotted cream!





## 6 June

*Getting your crop to grow better: drainage, poly tunnels and plants for protection*

### **Drainage**

*'We have found that raised beds work well for us'*

*'Lots of drainage for peaty soils'*

*'Add sand to soil'*

*'If you have very wet peaty soil adding sand can help it drain better. Doing this turned a boggy piece of land into a useful plot for growing potatoes. Duke of York potatoes so better than most in wet areas but like most potatoes they fail in hard peaty soils. Adding sand makes the soil lighter which is great for potatoes.'*

*'Improve peaty wet soil with drainage and mixing in sand or sandy soil'*

### **How to improve your crops**

- *If possible use a poly tunnel or greenhouse to start off vegetables from seed, and grow them on to be strong plants before planting out in your plots*
- *Improve the drainage on your site – particularly in peaty soils*
- *Plant less and look after it better*
- *Use horticultural fabrics like fleece and environ-mesh to provide protection from pests*
- *Use seaweed and manure every year to keep up the fertility of your soil*
- *'Don't tamper too much with the rhubarb, they grow better when just left'*



## **Crop Protection**

*'Fence out ducks, chickens and other livestock'*

*'Get as much shelter as possible'*

*'Shelter is vital to protect crops from harsh winds. Even a fishing net along the sides of the beds provide shelter.'*

*'Grow cabbages and other brassicas under netting to keep butterflies off and protect from caterpillars'*

*'The use of a greenhouse or poly tunnel is very handy for growing seedlings so that you can plant out big and healthy plants whenever possible.'*

*'Start off as much in the greenhouse as possible'*

*'Cover carrots with fleece to stop root fly – and then them out.'*

*To combat root fly we grow cabbages, sprouts, kale, broccoli, swedes and also carrots under fine environment-mesh.'*

*'Good shelter and drainage is a must'*

*'Poly tunnel has been a revelation and the polythene has survived at least 5 years. A home-made tunnel. Amazing*

*what will grow – a good crop of aubergines, cucumbers, tomatoes, French beans, peppers, chillies and cape gooseberries.'*

*'Preferably use a poly tunnel if not able to grow in unprotected area'*

## **Plants for protection**

*'Use fast growing perennials such as lovage, bronze fennel, Jerusalem artichokes, comfrey, or lupins around the edge of large vegetable beds as wind protection. Remember that their roots extend into the beds so don't plant seeds too close to them. Divide the roots every year or two so that they don't get too big.'*



Kate's 'Broad beans with Chard in Butter'  
reprinted with permission from Uist  
Wholefoods website  
<http://www.uistwholefoods.com/>

10oz broad beans, shelled"  
10oz chard, sliced"  
5tbsp butter ^  
1 onion, diced "^  
8 tbsp chopped fresh dill" or  
1 1/2 tpsps dried dill leaf \*  
1/2 tsp salt

Ingredients marked \* are available organically  
from the Wholefoods Co-op," can be grown  
locally, and items marked ^ are available as  
organic, fairly traded, or locally produced from  
local shops and food producers.

Kate says: *'This dish is unreasonably good.  
It is pretty simple to make, and so delicious I  
was eating it out of the pan with a spoon. The  
broad beans and chard were home grown,  
but frozen beans will do, and fresh spinach.'*

Prepare all the vegetables, then heat the  
butter in a heavy wide casserole. I used my 'le  
creuset' pan. When the butter has melted and  
is beginning to foam, add the onion, and stir  
for a minute.

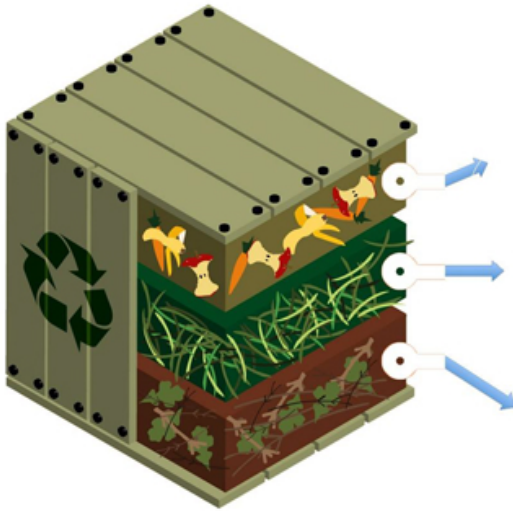
Add the beans, stir and sauté for another  
minute.

Add the chard and dill, and stir for another  
couple of minutes

Add the salt and 2 floz water, cover tightly and  
simmer for about 15 minutes. This is delicious  
served hot or warm, with rice or with pitta  
bread.



## How Can I Make Good Compost?



**Greens** Quick to rot and provide important nitrogen and moisture.

- Animal Manure with straw
- Annual Weeds
- Bindweed
- Bracken
- Brussel Sprout Stalk
- Carrot Tops
- Citrus Peel
- Coffee Grounds
- Comfrey Leaves
- Cut Flowers
- Fruit Peelings and Pulp
- Fruit Seeds
- Grass Mowings
- Hay
- Hedge Clippings
- House Plants
- Nettles
- Old Bedding Plants
- Perennial Weeds
- Poisonous Plants
- Rhubarb Leaves
- Seaweed
- Soft Prunings
- and Plant Debris
- Tea Leaves and Bags
- Urine
- Vegetable Peelings



**Browns** Slower to rot, provide carbon and fibre and allow air pockets to form.

- Autumn Leaves
- Cardboard
- Christmas Tree
- Corn Starch Liners
- Cotton Towels
- Egg Boxes
- Egg Shells
- Evergreen Prunings
- Hair
- Natural Corks
- Nuts
- Paper Bags
- Privet
- Straw
- Sweetcorn Cobs
- Thorny Prunings
- Tomato Plants
- Used Kitchen Paper
- Vacuum Cleaner Contents
- Wood Ash
- Wool



**Keep This Out** Certain things should never be placed in this bin.

- Bones
- Bread
- Cans
- Cat Litter
- Cigarette Ends
- Cling Film
- Coal Ash
- Crisp Packets
- Dairy Products
- Disposable Nappies
- Dog Faeces
- Dog Food
- Drink Cartons
- Meat and Fish Scraps
- Olive Oil
- Plastic Bags
- Plastic Bottles
- Soiled Tissues

*'Why do I need to compost if my waste will break down in landfill anyway?'*

- Waste sent to landfill creates methane - harmful greenhouse gas which harms the Earth's atmosphere!

- When this same waste is composted above ground, oxygen helps the waste to decompose aerobically, and hardly any methane is produced - good news for the planet!

*'Why should I make compost?'*

- Reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill

- Composting at home for just one year can save global warming gases equivalent to all the CO<sub>2</sub> your kettle produces annually, or your washing machine produces in three months.

- After 9 - 12 months, you get free fertilizer for your garden.

## 7 July

### *Weeds and Compost*

#### **Weeds**

You will never be able to completely stop weeds growing within your plot as the weed seeds sit within the soil and will germinate along with your carrots or spring onions. It is possible, however to ensure that they have less places to grow.

By the middle of summer you will either have managed to control them reasonably well so that your vegetables are bigger and dominate the space, and in the process limit the growth of weeds. Or you will be wondering what happened to your carrots and onions! Even if this is the case it is never too late to get your plot back under control. You might need to re sow if you have ended up pulling up the seedlings with the weeds, but you have to do something after all the work you have put in to improving your ground.

It is a mistake to think that you can have a rich fruitful garden without any weeds. They are hungry just like cabbages are. You just need to get into the habit of weeding, and hoeing much earlier and more regularly than

### **Weeding and composting time!**

- *Keep on top of the weeds when they are small. That way your soil will feed your produce not the weeds*
- *You can compost all the new young weeds but if they have strong roots on them better put them in the bin*
- *Never compost perennial weeds if they have seed heads on them, especially nettles or docs*
- *<http://www.askorganic.co.uk/composting>*
- *When composting privet and evergreen trimmings they need to be chopped small and might take 3 years to rot down, unless well mixed with 'green' ingredients that heat up quickly and speed up composting*
- *Cover the soil around base of perennial plants such as strawberries with ground cover matting, seaweed, cardboard, newspapers, straw to act as a mulch and keep light away from the soil so that weed seeds don't germinate*

you have been. Take the advice of some Uist growers who have learned how to deal with their weeds!

## Weeds

*'Keep on top of weeding. Half an hour a day makes a big difference'*

*'to stop weed growth cover dug-over veg patch with 'Asco' (dried seaweed) for the winter, except for next year's carrot and parsnip patch. Cover this patch with black plastic. The Asco will mostly melt into the soil over the winter. Throughout the year put Asco around brassicas, fruit bushes and over all bare ground to keep weeds at bay.'*

*'Dock roots just don't want to die! They keep growing through, even from the bottom of a black bin with a black lid after a year. I now put them in double black plastic bags tied up so they rot before I add them to the compost bin. Same with nettles!'*

**Composting** is an inexpensive, natural process that transforms your kitchen and garden waste into a valuable and nutrient rich food for your garden. It's easy to make and use.

Find the right site: Site your compost bin in a reasonably sunny position on bare soil. If you have to put your

compost bin on concrete, tarmac or patio slabs ensure there's a layer of paper and twigs or existing compost on the bottom. Choose a place where you can easily add ingredients to the bin and get the compost out.

Add the right ingredients: Have a container available such as a kitchen caddy or old ice cream tub. Fill your kitchen caddy or container with everything from vegetable and fruit peelings to teabags, toilet roll tubes, cereal boxes and eggshells.

## **Take care not to compost cooked food, meat or fish!**

Fill it up: Empty your kitchen caddy along with your garden waste into your compost bin. A 50/50 mix of greens and browns is the perfect recipe for good compost.

Wait a while: It takes between nine and twelve months for your compost to become ready for use, so now all you need to do is wait and let nature do the work. Keep on adding greens and browns to top up your compost.

Ready for use: Once your compost has turned into a crumbly, dark material, resembling thick, moist soil and gives off an earthy, fresh aroma, then it's ready to use.

Use it: Don't worry if your compost looks a little lumpy with twigs and bits of eggshell – this is perfectly normal. Use it to enrich borders and vegetable plots.



## George + Rosemary's 'Cucumber Soup'

*Cucumber*

*Onion, one for each cucumber*

*Potato*

*Stock*

*Fresh Herbs*

Peel off about half the skin lengthwise.  
If very full of seed scrape out some of it.  
Chop coarsely.

Chop the potatoes small and sweat them (in butter is good, but fine in olive or other oil), onions and potatoes first till onions are soft, then add cucumbers.

Add stock to cover. Simmer till just cooked  
Add seasoning to taste, and fresh herbs (e.g. parsley, tarragon, dill) before blending.

Nice with a swirl of double cream or olive oil, and a sprinkling of parmesan, but fine without.





## 8 August

### *Soft Fruit and Jam*

With so much fruit available in the supermarket at any time of the year you might wonder if it is really worth trying to grow some for yourself. And certainly in comparison with growing vegetables the relatively small crops that you can produce might persuade you to leave fruits out of your garden cropping plans. However, if you ever get the chance to taste some freshly picked strawberries, or eat homemade jam made from ripe, freshly picked blackcurrants or raspberries you will be in no doubt that it is worthwhile.

Soft fruits grow on perennial plants (strawberries), shrubs (currants, gooseberries), or canes (raspberries)

**Currants:** are cool-climate plants and fruit well in northern areas. Blackcurrants are most commonly grown in Uist producing bunches of dark purple to black fruits in mid-summer. Redcurrants are particularly tart producing a lovely burgundy-red jelly traditionally used with game but very

### Soft Summer Fruits

- *Best fruits to grow in Uist are:*
- *Blackcurrants, redcurrants and white currants*
- *Raspberries*
- *Gooseberries*
- *Strawberries*
- *It's always worth experimenting with others such as Blueberries, cranberries, blackberries etc. but even though they should like our acidic soil they do not seem to cope well with the salty conditions and the constant winter wet.*

good with local mutton. White currants are hardly ever offered for sale in shops, so growing them for yourself is the only way to experience these berries that are pure white to cream in colour, with some ripening to almost yellow. They are best turned into a jelly to keep the unusual colour and citrus flavour.

- *Water blackcurrants during dry periods in the growing season. In late winter mulch around base of plants with well-rotted seaweed and manure to suppress weeds and feed.*
- *Prune blackcurrants when dormant. Fruit forms on young wood, so when pruning aim to remove older wood, leaving the young shoots. Give a hard prune every three years cutting plant back by one third to encourage and make room for younger, healthy wood.*

**Raspberries:** will grow almost anywhere provided they are planted on well-drained soil. They like a more alkaline soil of around 6.5 so a sandy loam rather than a more peaty soil, although you could improve the latter with the addition of sand, and plenty of seaweed, manure and compost. The main thing is to improve soil drainage, and plant new canes correctly.

- *Uppermost roots should be no more than 2in below soil level*
- *Cut canes back to 6-9 in prior to planting to encourage new growth from beneath the soil level*  
*When new growth appears the existing cane should be cut down to ground level to ensure the production of strong new canes*

**Strawberries:** can be grown almost anywhere – in borders, containers or hanging baskets. Home-grown strawberries taste delicious and are great value too!

- *Plant into well prepared ground*
- *Water frequently during dry periods*
- *Feed with tomato food*
- *As fruits start to develop tuck straw around them to prevent strawberries touching the soil and potentially rotting*
- *After cropping has finished, remove the old leaves from summer-fruiting strawberries with secateurs or hand shears. Also remove the straw mulch to prevent a build-up of pests and diseases. Replace plants every 3 years rotating the crop to minimise*



## Laura's Blackcurrant Jam

*1.8kg (4lb) freshly picked blackcurrants*

*1.7 litres (3pt) water*

*2.7kg (6lb) granulated sugar*

*small knob butter*

Pick the blackcurrants into a bowl or bucket. Add cold water and let it run. Swirl the blackcurrants in the water and scoop out a handful at a time and pick out leaves and stalks. Place clean fruit in a colander. Weigh fruit and place in preserving pan with the water. Bring to the boil and simmer, uncovered, for about 40 minutes, or until the fruit is softened and the water reduced. Add the sugar, stirring frequently until the sugar has dissolved, bringing it up to a gentle boil. Let it bubble for 10 minutes then test for a set - put a spoonful on to a chilled saucer then place it in the fridge for 5 minutes. Turn the jam right down in the meantime. The test should have set to a jam-like consistency if you push it with your finger. If not, return to the heat, re-boil then test again. Add the butter, stir well. Cool the jam for 10 minutes to prevent the fruit sinking in the jar; ladle into sterilised jars - don't fill to the top. Let the jam cool before covering.







## 9 September

### *Harvesting, Storing, Preserving*

Lift and store or leave in the ground? If you have planted a good variety of different produce such as potatoes, carrots, beetroots, parsnips, cabbages, sprouts, onions, leeks etc. you will hopefully still have some left and might be thinking about whether you need to lift them out of the ground for storing or whether you can just carry on taking just what you need each day.

**Onions:** Will benefit greatly from lifting out of the ground. You should ideally have lifted them in August and left them to dry off before tying up or storing on shelves in a cool airy place.

**Leeks:** on the other hand are best either kept in the ground and harvested as necessary or picked, cleaned and prepared as if for cooking, and then put into freezer bags and frozen. But use up within 3 months to be sure of keeping a good flavour. Winter leeks keep well in the ground until there

### Harvesting and storing your produce

- *It is largely a matter of choice whether you lift and store your veg or leave in the ground, except for the following:*
- *Onions must be harvested, and dried well if they are to keep – do this in August*
- *Leeks can stay in the ground, as can winter brassicas*
- *Roots and potatoes only need to be lifted if vermin are a problem, but if you lift them you need to clean them and store in sand or clean bags and boxes. Always check them periodically to make sure none are rotting*

is a nasty gale and then they can start to 'melt' from the excessive wind and rain. So if there is a bad forecast and you still have some lovely leeks in your plot then harvest them all and prepare for the freezer.

**Brassicas:** You never need to lift cabbages, kale or broccoli as they will be able to withstand the winter weather and it can actually improve the taste because frosts break down some of the starch into sugars. Cauliflowers, unless of the Winter variety, are best lifted, prepared as though for cooking and then packed into freezer bags and used as necessary. As with other frozen veg use these up within 3 months

**Roots and Potatoes:** if you want to lift all your root and potato crops it will entail a lot of work to lift, clean and pack into sand or keep in bags or boxes for use throughout the winter. It is worth doing if you have a problem with vermin eating the crops in situ, or you know that your particular garden suffers from frost pockets that might lead to spoiled vegetables. However generally it is not necessary, but a question of choice

### **Here's some advice from Uist growers:**

*'Don't let the rabbits get in'*

*'Bend onions' stalks June/July to get bigger bulbs'*

*'Top up soil on potatoes when needed'*

*'We swap a lot of stuff with my father whose land is very dry machair and totally different from ours.'*

*'Different parts of Uist have different growing requirements whether its machair land or peaty soil on the east side of South Uist. The islands are generally a month to 6 weeks behind the South of England/Central Belt in terms of growing season. Society has changed also so less cultivation for personal use is done as people work full-time so have little time for gardening. We were self-sufficient to a degree because we had to be or we would have starved. Climate change with wetter summers and a shorter growing season means horticulture or any idea of self-sufficiency are no longer valid. We also don't have the capital to buy greenhouses'*



## Norma's 'Borscht' (Beetroot Soup)

*Make as your favourite mixed veg soup,  
but use a good quantity of beetroot.  
Liquidise after cooking and serve with  
plain yoghurt or cream!*

Beetroot has high nutritional value; especially the greens, which are rich in calcium, iron and vitamin A and C. They're an excellent source of folic acid and a very good source of fibre, manganese and potassium. The greens should not be overlooked; they can be cooked up and enjoyed in the same way as spinach.







## 10 October

### *Planting for Spring*

Even if you have been able to give yourself a good supply of winter greens in the form of cabbage, kale, sprouts and early sprouting broccoli you will still be looking forward to a fresh supply of spring greens by the time March and April arrive. If you have a poly tunnel, cloches, or a very sheltered spot then now is the time to start planning and sowing for the spring.

The following is a list of plants that grow quickly and are able to withstand the short day length until February when they will start to perk up and provide some fresh greens for the table by March.

**Mustard Greens, Mizuna, and Pak Choi:** These greens grow quickly and easily in Uist, are full of flavour, and loaded with nutrients and health benefits. Mustard greens are an excellent source of vitamins K, A, and C. it is also a good source of folate, manganese, calcium, potassium, and

### Start to think about next year

- *Think about sowing some fresh greens for the spring choose varieties that are suitable for Winter Cropping.*
- *Order your garlic bulbs and plant out before 21st Dec*
- *Rejuvenate your old rhubarb crowns by digging down deeply around the base of the plant*
- *Cut off sections between two growing points and slice down into the hard woody root.*
- *Lift out the piece and leave it upside down for a few weeks so that the air and cold get into it.*
- *Replant into a new growing site which has been well dug and fertilised, and*
- *Share with neighbours and friends so that they can enjoy fresh rhubarb too!*

vitamins E, and B6, phosphorus, copper, and dietary fibre. Not only do these greens have antioxidant and inflammation fighting properties, but they also support healthy vision, neurological function, and cleanse and detoxifies the blood and liver.

**Spinach:** Spinach can be grown to produce a crop all year round, making it a useful vegetable to grow when other greens might be in short supply. Prepared and cooked properly, it is a tasty, versatile crop that can also be used in salads. Some cultivars can be overwintered for an early spring harvest. Winter cultivars need a sunny position, but summer types benefit from a little shade. Thin seedlings to 7.5cm (3in) apart when large enough to handle. A few weeks later harvest every alternative plant for use in the kitchen. Winter cultivars will need protection from October onwards. Cover with cloches or protect the crown with straw or similar material and cover with fleece.

**Garlic:** Don't forget to get your Garlic ordered and planted up before the winter sets in. It needs a long season in order to grow to maturity, as well as a long spell of cold to enable the bulbs to split into cloves. As a rule of thumb - get it planted before the shortest day (21st December) and you'll

be able to harvest it by the time the longest day comes around (21st June). There are lots of different varieties available, but most of them are bred for growing in much warmer climates than ours.

- *The Really Garlicky Company in Nairn grows over 30 acres of the variety 'Porcelain Hardneck' and supplies bulbs for autumn planting.  
<http://www.reallygarlicky.co.uk/contactus.php>*

**Rhubarb:** If you don't have any rhubarb in your garden then now is the time to get some, perhaps from your neighbours or friends, because it is a good time for them to be digging up some old crowns to rejuvenate them.

How to get your rhubarb to grow bigger and better: With a sharp spade dig down deeply around the base of the plant. If it is particularly big cut off sections of the plant between two growing points and slice down into the hard woody root. Lift out the piece and leave it upside down for a few weeks so that the air and cold get into it. Then replant into a new growing site which has been well dug and fertilised with manure, or give away to neighbours and friends so that they can enjoy fresh rhubarb too!



## Hanna's Kale Pesto

*'My favourite recipe at the moment is probably 'Kale Pesto' which I make by steaming or boiling kale to make it soft. After that I put it in a food processor together with olive oil, garlic, parmesan cheese, pine nuts (or almond flakes). Fresh basil and then blitz. Basically it's pesto with the addition of kale.'*

This gets mixed with whatever pasta you want to use. Comfort food.







## 11 November

### *Protecting Your Plot*

Your plot needs to be stock, deer and rabbit proof if you want to make sure that you get to eat what you have grown. It will also benefit greatly from some wind protection.

You can do this most effectively by erecting a fence made by attaching recycled fish farm nets to fence posts that have been firmly concreted into the ground.

There are other windbreak materials available in the form of green shade netting, but these rarely survive one or two seasons in Uist before they are shattered or torn by the harsh weather. They are not designed for the extreme conditions prevalent in the islands and therefore are a waste of money.

An alternative to a fence is a net covered tunnel erected over your plot. This will afford the necessary protection from stock and wind as well as remaining open to the elements and therefore reducing the need for regular watering as with a polythene covered tunnel, and might provide a solution for a more isolated site away from amenities.

### Ways To Protect Your Plot

- *Fish Farm nets are a waste product from fish farms. Contact your nearest fish farm to find out when they will have some available*
- *Don't add windbreak material to an ordinary stock proof fence as the force of the wind might bring the fence down*
- *'Living windbreaks' can be made using robust, quick growing shrubs such as *Olearia traversii* or *Escallonia macrantha*, but avoid using Willow varieties such as *Salix viminalis* (Osier Willow) as this can be very invasive unless cut back hard each year*
- *Plants as windbreaks take nutrients from your veg plot. So don't forget to give them a dressing of seaweed too!*

Erecting solid walls is not usually considered to be the best protection against the wind unless they are of sufficient height. This is because a solid barrier like a wall has the effect of lifting the wind over it which can add to its force when it goes over the wall and into your garden. Old walled gardens such as at St Peters, Daliburgh has a wall in excess of 8 feet high and this helps to lift the wind right over and away from the plots. Its better then to consider using some sort of fence that will filter the wind rather than attempting to stop it completely.

**Some Uist growers have the following advice on finding ways to live with the windy conditions:**

*'Get to know your own ground and have fun experimenting! Be prepared for some things not to work and just keep going regardless of the number of setbacks and obstacles. Things that don't work for a neighbour might work for you and don't follow advice from others too slavishly!'*

*'Once brassica plants have grown quite large don't stake them but let them lie at an angle. They will still support themselves with lower leaves, but not be battered by the wind so much.'*

*'Gardening in the Western Isles is easy. The only thing you really need to do is break the force of the wind. Pallet-fences, walls, hedges can all help.'*

*'Still learning!'*

*'If you don't plant it, it won't grow. Any thing's worth a try!'*





### Angus John Laing's 'Favourite Machair Potatoes'

Favourite way of serving potatoes grown on the machair, boiled, with a nob of butter, and served with a glass of ice cold milk

Tiny Machair potatoes thinned out, cleaned and boiled – great for a potato salad.

The highly prized 'machair potato' is grown using the traditional system of planting on the sandy machair (arable ground just up from the shore) using seaweed as fertiliser. This practice gives the potatoes their rich flavour and leaves them with a drier texture.



*'I always grow potatoes in machair ground that has not been turned for at least 20 years. I like to experiment with different varieties, e.g. 12 varieties this year. Bonnie, British Queen, Catriona, Cara, Duke of York (White), Golden Wonder, Keers Pink, Markies, Pink Fir Apple, Picasso, record, Shetland Black. All grew well apart from Bonnie!'*

*North Uist crofter*

LEGUMES  
GROUP

**ut  
aste!**  
Plants & Fruit  
2015

PLOT  
A

PLOT  
D

PLOT  
C

PLOT A

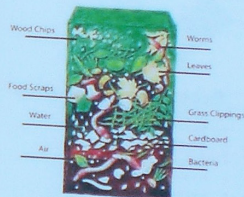
POTATO  
GROUP

### Plot D

## Roots group

PLOT C

ONIONS +  
BRASSICAS  
GROUP



## Making compost

Composting is an inexpensive, natural process that transforms your kitchen and garden waste into a valuable and nutrient rich food for your garden. It's easy to make and use.



**NEW Heritage S**  
Heritage Strawberry Collection includes  
These are some of the most  
and good all round crop  
ants. It's a reliable  
14

- 'Cambridge Favourite' is a very old and 100 yearbearer plant
- 'Royal Sovereign' is a very old and 100 yearbearer plant
- 'Red Gauntlet' is a good

1060-5546

Greenhouse in Unm...

To increase the  
the great big, ston  
in the special sle  
loamy soil or co  
Grow a wide r  
rows. Each p  
and out of  
1090-5

1090-5



2 0606

for just £9.95  
raspberry

eds.co.uk

## 12 December

### *Next year it'll be even better: Reviewing and Planning*

This is a good time for thinking about what to grow next season. If this was your first year of growing you will have had some successes and some failures, but don't be downhearted when something hasn't gone very well.

It's good to know that new ground takes a number of years to come into proper productivity. So if you only just started to cultivate your plot for the first time this year then you will have done well to have grown anything to harvest. And don't underestimate how much you have learned simply by doing. Every stage of planning, cultivating, sowing, planting, tending, feeding, harvesting, preparing, cooking and eating will have increased your knowledge, ability and awareness of the process of growing to feed yourself and your family.

Think about what did grow well and whether it was something you liked to eat. You might have started with some of the staples crops like potatoes, carrots, onions,

### Ways To Protect Your Plot

- Review the plan you made of your vegetable plot
- If you didn't make one then consider making one for next year
- Use a rotation and move the beds clockwise (See January's notes)
- Have a look at your old seed packets – check if you have any seed left before buying replacements
- Seed will keep quite well from year to year provided that you store it somewhere cool and dry and never keep it in a greenhouse or poly tunnel
- What grew well for you? Did you like eating it?
- Grow more of what you like to eat, but do try something new as well

leeks, cabbage, kale, cauliflower, sprouts. These are easy to grow, are always useful to have in your plot, and will have an improved taste and texture simply because you have grown them naturally, and can pick and cook them fresh from the garden. You might also have found some seed varieties that have a better taste, grow more easily in your soil, or are unusual e.g. different coloured tomatoes or carrots, and you will have started to discover the pleasure and freedom that comes with being able to produce food that you like and are enthused about.

There are lots of other interesting vegetables and fruit that grow very well here in Uist provided you have followed the previous guidance on cultivation, management and wind and pest protection. Why not try a couple of new things alongside your main crop varieties, as well as discovering the added health benefits of eating more vegetables and fruit?

**Globe Artichoke:** This is an edible thistle, which is rich in potassium, magnesium, dietary fibre, and vitamin C. Artichokes also provide iron, calcium, phosphorous, protein and vitamin B-6. They are a perennial vegetable and grow easily on a sandy machair soil, but don't like the winter wet

so may not last long if the season is poor. Grow them from seed and you'll get a small crop the following year, and if they like your conditions they'll keep producing for a couple of more years.

**Asparagus:** This is a little tricky to grow if you don't have a protected plot e.g. cool greenhouse or poly tunnel. It needs damp free-draining soil to do well but can't deal with our wet winters so the plants eventually rot. I grow it on the shaded side of our poly tunnel where it thrives. Asparagus is rich in folic acid, and is a good source of dietary fibre, potassium, vitamins A, B1, B3, B6, and C. It also contains protein, niacin, magnesium, copper, and calcium.

#### **Here are some final wise words from Uist growers:**

*'Perseverance'. 'Experiment!'*

*'Be patient. You learn by your mistakes'*

*'Very much trial and error, and totally weather dependent'*



Georgia, Innes, Hamish, and Katie's 'Fajita, Chips + Salsa' is a spicy, warming winter meal that all the family will enjoy and can help to make.

1 red pepper  
2 onions  
2 chicken fillets  
30g fajita seasoning  
4 wraps  
8 potatoes  
Oil for deep frying  
Fresh parsley/coriander  
3 tomatoes  
3 spring onions  
2 green chillies  
1 large garlic clove  
1 lime  
Sea salt  
Freshly ground pepper  
2 tsp extra virgin olive oil

**Fajitas:** Prepare veg: chop peppers and spring onions.

Slice chicken into strips and cover with the flavouring and cook until the chicken is cooked. Add the onions, peppers and spring onions. Cook for 5 mins. Keep warm.

**Chips:** Peel potatoes and slice into chips. Dry in a tea towel. Fry until golden and crispy. Drain well so the chips are not oily and put in a dish with paper towels, then serve.

**Salsa:** Wash all of the veg. Finely chop parsley or coriander (stalks and all) and place into a large bowl. Peel and finely chop the onions. De-seed and finely chop the chillies and tomatoes, and add to the bowl. Peel and finely grate the garlic. Add the juice of 1 lime and 1 tsp of extra virgin oil. Mix well then season to taste.



## Further Reading

Darling, F. F. (1955) *West Highland Survey: an essay in human ecology*. Oxford University Press

Sudell, R. (1956) *Practical Gardening and Food Production in Pictures*. Odhams Press Ltd, London

Pears, P. (1992) *Beds: Labour-saving, space-saving, more productive gardening*. Henry Doubleday Research Association, Search Press

Cox, K. (2009) *Scotland for Gardeners*. Birlinn, Edinburgh

Cox, K. and Beaton, C. (2014) *Fruit and Vegetables for Scotland: A Practical Guide and History*. Birlinn, Edinburgh

Rushbrooke, B. *Approaches to Coastal Gardening on the West Coast of the British Isles* <http://www.gcurnsery.co.uk/coastal.htm>

## Thanks and Acknowledgements

This book could not have been written without the help, enthusiasm, guidance and contributions of the following, to whom we offer heartfelt thanks:

Our outstanding and dedicated horticultural team: Horticultural Staff and Volunteers whose work is featured through the publication.

Our Partnership: Taga Uibhist, Cothrom, Grimsay Community Association, Hebridean Living, Lews Castle College UHI, SAC Consulting; CnES Skills and Enterprise, Storax Uibhist.

Our Supporters: Uist based growers and gardeners who responded to the survey and shared their gardening data; Angus Ferguson, SAC, for support in processing data into visual information; the support of all the islands Primary schools Daliburgh, Lochdar, Balivanich, Carinish, Paible, Lochmaddy; Secondary School Sgoil Lionacleit, especially Eliz Anne Boyle, Geography, for her advice, encouragement and contribution towards ensuring that so much data was gathered through the 'Reclaiming the Knowledge' Survey, as well as Veronica Beaton and Katherine Watt, Home Economics, who developed a valuable and rewarding element of the project to engage S3 pupils in understanding how to cook with seasonal produce; and finally, the '5-A-Day-Club' (Balivanich School P5-7) who brought their enthusiasm and energy to the project, not to mention their great illustrations!

Our funders: The Pebble Trust; Climate Challenge Fund

