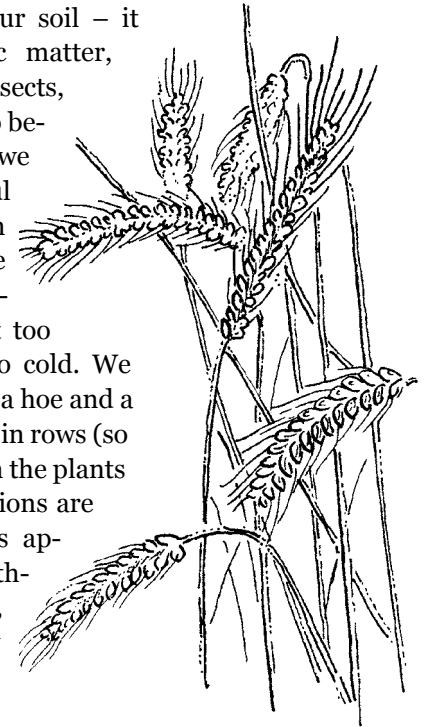


The
**Subsistence
 Gardener**
 Subsistence gardening in the 21st century



Over the years, there has been a definite improvement in our soil – it contains more organic matter, more worms, more insects, and has less tendency to become waterlogged, but we still have to pay careful attention to preparation and planting times. The soil needs to be reasonably free of weeds, not too compacted, and not too cold. We work over the area with a hoe and a rake, and plant the seed in rows (so that we can hoe between the plants in the spring). If conditions are right, the rye seedlings appear above ground within a week or ten days, and will grow quickly enough to avoid being attacked by slugs and birds. Once the rows of plants become clearly visible, the initial danger is over: the plants will grow slowly over the winter months, and you can expect to get a crop next year.

OCTOBER Fruits and Nuts

Rye.

Cereals are a key part of the subsistence garden, and October is a key month in cereal production. After many years of trial and error, we have settled on growing rye as our main cereal crop. We have found that it consistently gives a much higher yield than we have so far managed with wheat, and the grain is easy to process and mill into flour. We have developed a taste for rye bread (in common with people across northern and eastern Europe over the centuries), and now consider it to be the staple food product from our garden.

In the early years, we had problems with germination and/or the young plants being eaten by slugs or birds. This may have been partly due to sowing too late, in cold, heavy waterlogged soil, but the seed that we started with also seemed to be lacking in vitality and perhaps unused to the conditions in our garden.

We now grow rye in rotation with potatoes, spring wheat, winter wheat, buckwheat, beans, and maybe oats. This can be quite complicated as we grow more rye than any of the other crops, but we try to sow rye directly after potatoes, buckwheat or beans: the potatoes break up the soil, which seems to be particularly good for the rye, and the buckwheat and beans both suffocate out the weeds, making it easy to prepare the ground for a winter crop.

It has been noticeable this year that our harvest season did not finish with the cereals and the beans. We had quite a good crop of hazelnuts, and the apples are starting to fall: we have been collecting these up, and have already had one pressing of cider. The walnuts are just starting to fall, and there looks to be a good crop of chestnuts on the trees. Trees that we planted fifteen years ago are now starting to yield a reasonable crop on a fairly regular basis. We have continued planting a few fruit trees, and nut trees, here and there, every year since then, so the annual harvest should only get better.

Not surprisingly, some of the trees that we planted when we first arrived here (which is now almost thirty years ago) proved to be the wrong varieties, or planted in the wrong place. It seems fairly normal for it to take a few years in a new garden before you get a feeling as to how it should be laid out, what trees will do well, where they should be planted, and what your needs are going to be. This is one of the biggest challenges facing the subsistence gardener. In normal circumstances, the fruit trees, and the nut trees, would supply a significant part of one's needs from the start; there would be a system for passing the garden on from one generation to the next, and the gardener would always be thinking how to improve the stock of trees – planning decades ahead, not just weeks, months or years.

Gareth Lewis

October With Tim the Gardener

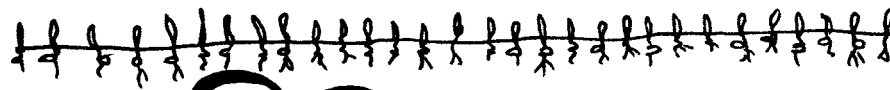
Last month I only got a small crop of buckwheat, but I must have fed a few dozen little birds!



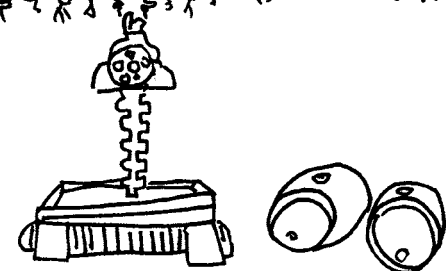
After a crop of buckwheat, beans or potatoes, I like to plant RYE.



When RYE first comes up, it is PINK.



It will be time to pick and store my eating apples



And also make a little CIDER.



Web: subsistencegardener.com hoe-farming.com youtube: Hoe Farming

Hoe Farm OPEN DAY Sunday 8th October, 10am-4pm, Nezert 22160 Duault France

Training Days <SUBSISTENCE GARDENING> see website for details

FEEDBACK WELCOME! send letters to: info@hoe-farming.com