

SMALL FARM TRAINING GROUP

May 2022 Newsletter

This month's newsletter includes:

- 1000 Years of Traditional Farming, Part 6
- Elder, and why you should grow one
- Sow Grow and Cook (its bean time!)
- The Wonderful World of Willow



May 2022

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Letter from the Chair

By Zoe Chinman

Can anyone tell me where the last 8 weeks have gone? Wow, now restrictions have been lifted it seems like life is back to flying past me at 100 miles per hour, (as I am sure it is for many of you!) and I can't believe that it is now almost May....

April saw lots of us having a huge clean-up operation after the storm, and many of us are still clearing up a deluge of fallen trees (us included). I know some of you have had to temporarily pause the clean up and repairs to deal with lambing season too....whilst not the warmest of spring months, they were at least largely dry, so fingers crossed you all had relatively straightforward lambing and can now look forward to watching them grow and enjoy the meats of your labours in the autumn.

For the Small Farm Training Group - we are all looking forward to an exciting summer, our stand will be out for the return of the Heathfield Agricultural Show at the end of May, and then again for the South of England Show in June, do pop by and say hello if you are at either of these, and a huge thanks to Paul Lovatt-Smith and his team of volunteers for getting the show on the road as it were.

The end of June (26th) sees us all getting together at the SFTG Summer BBQ - kindly hosted by Pauline & Colin at Hartfield, along

What events are coming up..

MAY 2022

All Month - Bottle Feeding of Lambs

20th May - Free Talk: Deer Management & Control

21st May (date tbc) Sheep Shearing

28th May - Heathfield Show

JUNE 2022

1st June - Meet the Member: Denise Taylor

10th June - 12th June: South of England Show

17th June - Free Talk: Rural Crime

with their gorgeous Rheas from our recent talk. The tickets are available to book now on the website, and are largely subsidised by the SFTG, so do get this date in your diary, it promises to be a good one!

And finally – a little plea for help...We could really do with some extra help from our members to organise a workshop for us, whether this is you running one yourself as part of our enthusiastic amateurs' workshops, or you finding a tutor who you think we'd love. You can literally pick any topic that interests you, (so long as it vaguely fits our ethos of countryside) – and we will do the rest, the advertising, ticket sales, tutor payment etc. We are just struggling a bit with time to call round and get prices and date availability so could do with a hand. Please contact me, Zoe at chair@sftg.org.uk with your ideas, and options for some summer and autumn events if you think you could help.

Hope you had a great Easter and hope to see you at the Heathfield Show in May!

Zoe x



1. June's illustration from the Julius work calendar

1000 years of traditional farming

Part 6 - June

By Paul Lovatt-Smith

To the woods, to the woods!

"Clearing and collecting wood" is the British Library's description of June's picture and there is little room for controversy in this interpretation. Two woodsmen with axes are felling trees and trimming the branches from the trunks to make roundwood timber. A third is loading the timber onto a sturdy wood-cart with caged sides, spoked wheels and what looks like a brake to stop it rolling away. The pulling power for the cart, and probably haulage of the timber, is supplied by two yoked-together oxen who have been unhitched and are patiently browsing on woodland foliage nearby.

26th June – Midsummer Members BBQ

JULY 2022

9th July – Peg Loom Weaving

15th July – Free Talk: Wildlife and Farming, the next decade

16th July – Strawberry Tea

17th July – Raising Your Own Turkey for Christmas

30/31st July Hay making Festival

SEPTEMBER 2022

15th September – SFTG Social Cuppa at the Dolphin Sheep Fair

25th September – Dehydrating for Beginners, Morning Session

25th September – Dehydrating for Beginners, Afternoon Session

If there is a course you would like to do but haven't seen listed, please don't hesitate to let us know.

Get Social

Don't forget that we're also on Facebook and Instagram...why not follow us and see what we're up to!

Insta:

@small_farm_training_group

Facebook:

Small Farm Training Group



Why not let us follow you and your Facebook/Insta accounts and we can help

It's difficult for us to imagine how important wood would have been in Saxon times, particularly in the Canterbury area and the Weald where geology provides little in the way of building stone. Nearly every building would have been timber-framed and even some stone buildings (such as the Roman part of Pevensey Castle) had wooden foundations. Oak would have been the main species used for building as its structural and longevity qualities are unsurpassed. The oak would have been green, or freshly felled, which has flexibility as well as great strength. It's not possible to tell from the picture what species of tree is being depicted. One of the leaves on the middle tree looks like oak but another looks like holly.

June is an appropriate month to obtain green oak. Although Winter is the traditional season for felling, as moisture content is lower and there is no foliage to deal with, Summer is the ideal time for extracting timber from the woods because, especially on the clay-rich soils of the Weald, hauling timber on wet ground in the winter is nigh on impossible. Before mechanisation, large tree trunks took a huge amount of effort to move. Daniel Defoe records the problems of hauling trees, destined for the shipyards, in Sussex in 1742:

"I have seen a tree on a carriage, which they call there a tug, drawn by two and twenty oxen; and even then 'tis carry'd so little a way, and then thrown down, and left for another Tug to take up and carry on, that 'tis two or three years before it gets to Chatham; for once the rains come in it stirs no more that year."

Oxen, castrated male cattle, had two purposes: to provide pulling power in life and meat in death. In the Weald, they were the draft animal of choice over the heavy horse, even up until the advent of mechanisation because of their better traction in the heavy clay soils, as well as on the flinty chalk Downland. This continued, as Walter of Henley put it in the thirteenth century:

"If the ground be tough your oxen shall werke where your horse shall stande styll"

In 1534 Master Fitzherbert, also came out in favour of the ox, asserting that when the ox:

"..wax olde, broysed or blinde, for two shillings he may be fedde, and then he is mannes meat, and as good or better than ever he was, and the horse, when he dyethe, is but caryen."

One other issue with either an ox or a horse is that it requires land for its feed. The rule of thumb for a heavy horse is around 5 acres - a huge area compared with our holding's total of 7 acres. For an ox, probably, it was a little less. It's hardly surprising that when mechanised alternatives came along, which could be "fed" with fuel dug out of the ground, it was only a matter of time before draft animals were pushed out of farming. The draft-work on our smallholding is carried out by a machine whose power - 35 times that of a horse - is derived from imported fossil fuels rather than our

you with your smallholding dreams and promote your goods to SFTG followers?



Jobs for the month

By Caroline Upton

With the growing season starting to take off here are your handy jobs for the month..

Pinch out the tips of early sown broad beans... this helps stem the pesky issue of aphids which typically infest the top of the beans

Plant companion plants in the veg plot... marigolds and borage do really well at this

Keep earthing up potatoes... for the first earlies, if you're seeing the leaves appear, keep earthing them up to prevent light from getting to the tubers

Plant second early and maincrop potatoes...

Deadhead daffodils and other spring flowering bulbs... but leave the foliage and a final liquid feed is recommended as this helps the bulb for next year's display

Pot on seedlings that are outgrowing their pots/trays....

own living vegetation and whose make-up is inedible metal, plastic and rubber, rather than the basis for a delicious roast dinner.

I read somewhere that when an old farm labourer, who had seen the transition from draft animals to mechanisation, was asked what the main thing was he missed about the old days, he replied that the fields now seemed so empty and unfriendly. Does the luxury gained by the technology and mechanisation make up for the lack of companionship from working with and caring for a fellow living being? Attached as I am to our Italian alpine tractor, I really wonder sometimes.

The Saxon's axes have been replaced by the chainsaw and I won't complain about the hard work that this spares us. None of the great quantity of wood we burn, around 3 tonnes per year, has been felled for timber, although we do have some magnificent, mature, curving oaks on the west side of our shaw (narrow strip of woodland), deliberately planted, I believe, for use as barn uprights. When I asked a woodsman about felling them, I had to admit to him that they had been used as living fence posts by previous owners and therefore contained metalwork which would mangle a chainsaw in seconds. He would not take the job and thus their past mutilation saved them from being felled.



Figure 2: Logging and carting firewood with chainsaw, tractor and trailer, February 2017 (neighboring houses in the background)

Although, like Saxon houses, ours is mainly timber-framed, its similarity with their buildings ends there. The timber is imported kiln-dried softwood, not local green oak. Bricks, tiles, plasterboard, hardboard, rock wool and cement, most of which were unheard of in Saxon times, form the rest of the building. Even more extraordinary, I suppose, to our thousand-year-old forebears, considering metal's enormous value in those days, our barn's frame is made of several tonnes of steel, imported from somewhere far away, possibly overseas.

Start applying a liquid feed to houseplants... and be mindful in the change in natural lighting to avoid leaf scorch.

Remove the dead foliage from ferns to make way for this year's growth

Remove any unwanted suckers from fruit trees



Royal Potato Salad

This is a recipe from Yotam Ottolenghi and raises the bar on the humble potato salad.

Total Time: 30mins
Serves: 6

Ingredients

15 quail eggs
800g Jersey royals, cleaned but not scrubbed
20g basil leaves
20g parsley leaves, plus extra for garnishing
60g Parmesan, grated
60g pine nuts
2 cloves garlic, crushed
200ml olive oil
150g petit pois (blanched for 30 seconds and refreshed)
½ tsp white-wine vinegar
1 bunch sorrel (or mint) leaves, finely shredded
Salt and pepper

Put the eggs in a saucepan, cover with cold water and bring to a boil: simmer for



Figure 3: Our 14x11m Steel-framed barn, put up in 2015

Unlike the locally-grown, sustainable, wooden frames of Saxon buildings, prodigious amounts of fossil fuel were burned and polluting gases were emitted in our buildings' manufacture, transportation and construction. I may add in our defence that we have installed solar panels on the barn roof and intend to try to put up a roof wind turbine soon but I doubt very much whether this compensates fully for all the "embodied" carbon emissions in the buildings.

Next month will be hay-making, so get your scythes ready.



30 seconds (semi-soft) to two minutes (hard-boiled), according to taste. Refresh in cold water and peel.

Cook the potatoes for 15-20 minutes until soft but not falling apart. Meanwhile, put the basil, parsley, Parmesan, pine nuts and garlic in a food processor and blitz to a paste. Add the oil and pulse until you have a runny pesto.

As soon as they are cool enough to handle, cut the potatoes in two (they will absorb more flavour when hot) and toss with the pesto, peas, vinegar and sorrel. Mix well, even crush the potatoes slightly, so all the flavours mix. Taste and adjust the seasoning, being generous with the pepper. Cut the eggs in half and fold into the salad. Garnish with parsley.



Letter from the Editor

By Caroline Upton

Hurray for May! By now the veg plots should be starting to take shape and the greenhouse/cold frame/polytunnels are probably filled to the brim with plants ready to be hardened off and planted out!



Elder – Why Everyone Should Grow One..

By Jenny Huggett

Elder is a common shrub/small tree of the Chalk, less common in the Weald. It's uses are many, from the flowers to the leaves to the berries. It has been described as a whole medicine chest in one plant. In late spring the strongly scented flowers can be gathered to make tea, sorbet, cordial or wine. The flowers should be picked when dry and shaken gently to remove insects. The flowers can be dried for tea (but should not be dried for other uses), and used for the treatment of colds and flu, it will break up catarrh, plus it will reduce congestion and inflammation of the upper respiratory tract. The list of ailments that this tea can treat is remarkable, but be warned, in quantity it induces sweating. Amongst the many other uses of elderflower, tea is supposed to inhibit hay fever symptoms, when used in conjunction with nettle leaves. I suspect the taste is as bad as the hay fever!

The leaves should not be eaten, but come late summer, early autumn, the berries can be gathered to make a winter cordial. These berries are antioxidant-rich, and both help ward off colds, and when made into a cordial help to soothe a sore throat. The berries are also an essential ingredient of my hedgerow jelly (you also need crab apples, blackberries and sloes, which come later, so I freeze the berries).

I have a black elder in my garden, which has pink flowers that make a very pretty sorbet. If you want one of these one of our members known for his horticultural skills took a lot of cuttings from my plant

The tomatoes I sowed about 2 months ago are doing very nicely even if I am a little overrun with them. I have friends and family who will be only too happy to take them off my hands and hopefully this year we'll manage to avoid the blight that took some of last year's crop.

For the first time, I'm planting potatoes in the beds (advice from Monty Don and I also saw how our very own Jenny Huggett grows hers and that woman is never wrong about crops). I also nicked another of her ideas and a very fine one it is. Between the veg beds we've installed some metal supports and a frame that goes over the walkway so that we can grow beans up them. It makes fab use of the space because you don't need to dedicate a whole bed to climbing beans – just a side section of a bed is needed. This year I'm going to try and create an arch of sweetpeas.

That's enough ramblings from me for the moment, I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter and if you have any ideas for articles or would like to share some of your knowledge with our members, please contact me.

editor@sftg.org.uk

in the winter, and just might have a few to spare when he knows which have rooted.....

Recipes for all the above can be found on the internet, or in the SFTG library book "Hedgerow Medicine" (available for borrowing at Friday night meetings).



Sow Grow Cook – its bean time...

April to May is the best time to sow beans, but ideally you started thinking about them last November. To get a really good crop of climbing beans, they need to be grown in soil that has either been mulched with manure compost and leaf mould or has had a trench filled with those goodies. I left heaps of manure, leaf mould and compost at the foot of the arches I grow beans over, and when the blackbirds finally tired of kicking it around, the worms started to take it down into the soil, so that now much of it is down below where it is needed. But fear not, you can still give your beans a good start in life by improving the soil now.

Seeds sown now are best started off in pots or trays, I find seeds sown direct into the soil don't succeed until well into May, when the soil has warmed up. By doing a mixture of sowing now and later you will get a succession, rather than all your beans at once. French beans can be started in March if you have a polytunnel to plant them out in once they have 3 sets of leaves, this should give you a crop by June, though they will sulk in cold springs such as we had last year, and not crop until as late as if you had started them off in May.



Willow making course

By Caroline Upton

What an amazing course! And run by our very own Richard who is clearly a willow-fan. And with good cause because it's such a versatile material and you can make some amazing things (as evidenced by the vast array of delightful things that Richard has made).

He's built an 80m willow fence at his home to keep the deer out and makes all sorts of things from living structures in community gardens to baskets, bowls, hurdles, willow stars and balls.

Our course started with the all-important safety brief which included a 'no stabbing anyone in the eye with a waving bit of willow' and 'mind out for sharp secateurs'. But with that under our belts, off we went....

We started by collecting some fresh willow although you can use willow that is already harvested but it needs soaking in a trench for a while to soften it up.

However you grow your beans young plants need protection from slugs (older plants need protection from black fly). I protect my beans by using Grazers repellent for slugs for young plants, and Grazers repellent for insects for mature plants.

Which varieties to grow? I would certainly recommend growing more than one because different types of beans do well in different weather conditions. I grow a mixture of red flowered "runners", a flat bean, climbing French beans and climbing borlotti beans. They all have different coloured flowers so look rather pretty grown together. I also grow Ferrari dwarf beans for an early crop in the polytunnel (I think the name is supposed to describe their rate of growth) and the delightfully named Jacobs Golden Cattle bean for drying, which is the tastiest drying bean I have tried. Perfect in a casserole with mushrooms, tomatoes, onions and paprika, that can be a side dish for meat and at the same meal, a main dish for a vegetarian.



My bean arches in July. They were made to order by Cranbrook Iron works.

Runner Bean and Shallot Curry

Ingredients:

vegetable oil
2tsp mustard seeds
10 curry leaves (dried will do)
5 finely chopped shallots
1 green chilli sliced
4 garlic cloves crushed
500g runner beans chopped into 3cm lengths, or better sliced first with a bean slicer,



Soaking times vary on the type of willow that is used.

Once we'd put the larger pieces into the template base, we used the smaller whippy bits to tie up the top which gave us our garden obelisk structure. Then it was a case of twisting willow round and round the structure to firm it up and create some lovely bands which is typical of a garden obelisk.

Template:

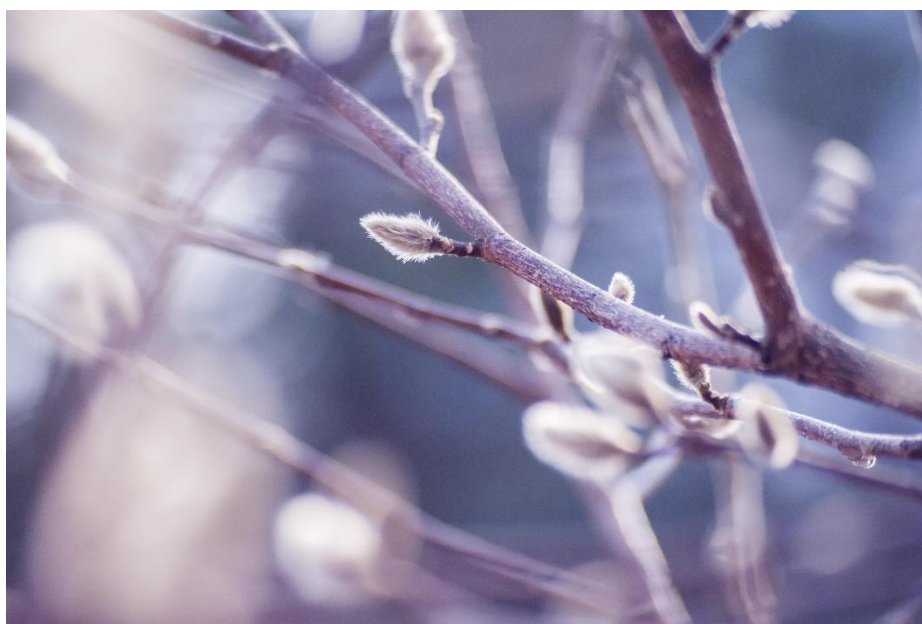


The finished product (and yes, I know it has a distinct rocket shape to it but I love it nonetheless and it will have a home in the garden for as long as it wants 😊)



1 tsp turmeric
4 tbsp coconut milk

Method: Fry shallots in the oil until soft, add the chilli plus spices and when the seeds start to pop, add the beans. Stir the beans about and cook for a few minutes, then cover and cook in the coconut milk until done. Serve as part of a meal with rice, other vegetable or meat dishes.



The Wonderful World of Willow

By Richard Vidal

Why did I choose to grow over 800 willow stools and pollards with 10 different coloured varieties since 2003? I had read an article in Farmers' Weekly (essential read every week in my job at the NFU and later at MAFF/DEFRA) all about the versatility of willow and there was an advert for a weekend introductory course on a permaculture Ragmans farm in Glos.

I eagerly travelled by train to attend the two day course with six other attendees where we learned all about growing, cutting and working with willow (often known by their genus *Salix*). We made several garden screens where we were encouraged to be as artistic and creative as possible. We learnt about the different qualities of numerous different varieties of *Salix*; ranging from very thin flexible rods for use on baskets, whilst thicker colourful bark (yellow, maroon, green and black) can be used for living structures, hurdles, garden arches, screens and plant supports.

During the day long course which was interspersed with a delicious homemade lentil soup (it was so tasty that everyone asked for recipe!), we made a few items including stars, balls, obelisks and peony supports. It was a really great day and some useful skills were learnt so Richard, I thank you 😊 For the rest of you that fancy getting a little creative but want to make something useful, keep your eye out for Richard's courses and get yourselves booked on them. You won't be disappointed.



SFTG Haymaking weekend

By Marie-Angel Chevrier

The SFTG is planning to organise a hay making weekend using traditional techniques. A scything workshop for beginners will be taught on the Saturday and then on the Sunday beginners and anyone else who would like to come and make hay will start scything (the more the merrier!). Austrian scythes are great for cutting grass but they are also incredibly good for tidying up areas of nettles, thistles, docks etc so even if

I returned from that weekend determined to grow my own willow on a corner of a paddock of our small family farm at Ticehurst that was no longer used for grazing heifers once we had given up dairy cows. I discovered that the purchased 3 feet long planting rods could simply be rooted by pushing down at least 10 inches into our moist soft Winter/Spring clay field (or first making a narrow deep hole with a metal bar or long screwdriver). The heavier the soil the better the plants will throw down quick long roots. Some people put down mesh or plastic to suppress the grass. I have not found that to be essential and nettles tend to creep insidiously under any sheeting.

Avoid planting between late April and November and resist the temptation to grow it in a small garden or near the boundary or over drains or near buildings as their roots spread a long way. Similar to deep rooted bamboo, willow can however be grown in very large pots so long as the soil is mostly moist (with an element of clay and no compost). Pots will require frequent watering until the leaves drop in December, and then again after April.

My first five varieties of Salix were: Daphnoides (maroon with beautiful pussy willow catkins in an and Feb), Purpurea known as 'Dark Dicks' which produce slender and very thin rods which are ideal for intricate work and basket making), Viminalis/Triandra (good catkins in March and vigorous for living structures), Alba Vitellina 'Britzensis' (a lovely bright yellow with scarlet tips that look great when working with fresh willow and esp, in garden structures), and Eugenii (green with nice March catkins and useful for tree spheres and hurdles), and Chinese Willow .

In later years I planted a few more experimental varieties such as Golden Yellow (many offshoots but great winter colour) and 'Black Maul' (a variation of purpurea that is excellent for basket weaving) and a Chinese vigorous willow that I used for large living structures. Until my retirement in late 2020 my hobby was a great distraction from the stresses of office life as a government legal adviser within DEFRA . I had conducted a few willow working days in previous years but found it hard to keep up with winter harvesting of over 800 plants (some producing over 150 rods per plant after around year five). Now in retirement I have time to hone my willow making skills and to find time to enjoy more leisurely harvesting, sorting and storing of bundles in a barn if not used fresh.

Once the bundles are dry the rods can be kept for several years and when needed to be used the bundles are laid down into a water trough for between 4 and 7 days, dependent on thickness and whether the bark has been stripped to create buff/white willow that reabsorbs water more quickly to regain its former flexible qualities.

Over the years I have donated my willow to several London schools and community garden projects where I have volunteered in making garden structures, arches, tunnels, igloos and hurdles. During Covid lockdown I decided to create a Community Garden from a large patch of invasive brambles owned by Lewisham Council. I used that

you don't have a hay meadow it's a great technique for all smallholders to learn. There has also recently been a resurgence in the use of the English scythe. Marie-Ange Chevrier has kindly offered to host the event on her farm at Horsham. We would like to make this quite a large event - we plan to invite Frank Wright to teach how to scythe and you will be able to purchase a scythe on the day if you do not already own one, but if there is enough demand, we could also ask more teachers to come and assist. On the Sunday Marie-Ange will talk about sustainability and diversity, and we will learn how to use a small hand baler and how to build a hay rick. The date is **30/31 July** and the course will be held at TERRA FIRMA, Woldingfold Estate, Cowfold.

If you are interested please check out the SFTG for full course details. We can pre order your scything kit:

at a reduced price if you would like us to do so, we will be getting it from this website

<http://www.thescytheshop.co.uk/price%20list.html>

Do ask for advice on what your choice of equipment should be by calling Marie-Angel on 07875628554. And read Simon Fairlie's site on:

<http://www.thescytheshop.co.uk/index.html>

opportunity to display my whackier willow and bamboo structures that doubled as plant climbers. The vegetables and flowers produced in the garden are distributed by me around the local Council Housing Estate.

I joined SFTG last year and I am now enthusiastic to pass on basic weaving techniques to our members and hopefully enthuse others about the wonderful world of willow!

I hope to provide around four different willow workshop days so that members can choose the ones that are best suited to their interests. So the proposed four courses that will be advertised over the course of the next 12 months will be:

1. An introductory willow workshop where I will explain the growing and harvesting process and then you have a chance to make a garden obelisk or peony frame, together with demonstrations of other useful weaving techniques.
2. A course on making willow spheres (balls of willow for hanging from trees) and/or artistic garden arches and screens. Basics of creating living willow structures will be taught.
3. A course to make willow table platters, hearts and willow dragon flies.
4. Christmas decorations involving making willow wreaths and a variety of stars that can be decorated with natural hedgerow material collected from our woods.

I hope to be sufficiently practised in making willow baskets to be able to offer a basket weaving course in 2023. Here are a few tips for working with willow:

- a) Buy a decent pair of sharp secateurs, and keep them sharpened regularly. Be extremely careful not to cut fingers of your other hand as it is easy to get distracted when working against the clock.
- b) You can use the very thin wispy willow to tie knots (to hold rods or structures together) so that you do not have to use any string ties. With living structures you can generally make all the required ties with the thinnest flexible willow. However if you do purchase ties then get the elastic flexible rubber ties (with hole through the middle) available from only a few large garden centres...otherwise on line.
- c) To avoid kinks in the rods you should note the natural curve of the rod and then holding one end in **each** outstretched hand curve the rod firmly around your knee. This is known as "taking the spite out of the rod". You can do this with between 3 and 5 rods at one time. With small thin weavers you can just pull it through your hand braced against your thumb that will help to create a natural curve to avoid kinks.



Your committee members

By Caroline Upton

We'd love to hear from you! For anyone wanting to reach out the SFTG committee members then please find our contact details below as well as who does what...

Chairperson

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d) Willow frames and hurdles will last longer outside if sprayed or painted with linseed oil, or a combination of linseed and white spirit or tung oil.

e) Always consider the best variety to use for different creations. Thinnest with no offshoots is the ideal for fine work. Offshoots from the larger rods are not such an issue for making hurdles, tree balls, living willow fencing and garden screens.

I look forward to welcoming you to one or more of the willow courses that will shortly be on offer to SFTG members. You will be working in a lovely rural location at Gibbs Reed Farm/Swallows Oast beside the willow plantation and hornbeam/beech woods but within easy reach of kettle, tables and toilet facilities. Indoors or pavilion/gazebo cover is available if inclement weather.

Instagram: Ticehurst willow



Welcome....

We'd like to give a warm and hearty welcome to the following people who have joined the SFTG in the last few months.

Our new members are:

Dan & Rachel Topping and Family, Sophie Tod, Antonella and Joseph O'Hara, Lizzie Hall, Emily and James Bradshaw, Attwell Associates, Suzi Masterson, Sarah Spencer and Anton Gayton, Katie and Mike Donovan, Wendy & Michael van der Westhuizen and Family, Lauren and Jack Foster, Laura and Gareth Scrivens, Helen and Joe Cowen, Heather Waughman and Steve Hills