

episode 28 show notes and advice

Organic lifestyles have become increasingly popular in the last few years, but the shrewd gardeners at Yeo Valley Organic Garden in the depths of Somerset, have been at it for over 25 years. What's even more exciting is their debut appearance at this year's Chelsea Flower Show (now in September), - a 'dream come true' for Yeo Valley's Head Gardener Sarah Mead.

From dealing with pests to picking out vibrant native flowers for their Chelsea display, Sarah has a host of fantastic tips for those of us wanting to use fewer chemicals in our gardens in this episode of "Grow, cook, eat, arrange".

In this episode, discover:

- How Yeo Valley Organic Garden is encouraging, but not pressurising, people to live more organically
- Various ways to entice wildlife into your garden to help keep slugs and snails at bay
- A selection of Sarah Mead's favourite ornamental & native, organic flowers
- Yeo Valley Organic's exciting maiden outing at Chelsea Flower Show this year
- Sarah's keen interest in a revolution for organic food

Links & references:

Shop on the Sarah Raven website: <http://bit.ly/3jvbaeu>

Get in touch: info@sarahraven.com

Yeo Valley Website: <https://www.yeovalley.co.uk/>

Yeo Valley Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/yeovalley/?hl=en>

Follow Sarah: <https://bit.ly/3iDTvBp>

Follow Arthur: <https://bit.ly/3jxSKK5>

Episode 28 advice sheet | Organic gardening with Sarah Mead

Our guest this week is Sarah Mead from Yeo Valley Organic Garden, in Somerset.

Sarah and her husband Tim were very early in the whole organic story — 26 years ago. It made sense to them on two main counts — sustainable both for the planet and for the business. The garden followed.

Managing the 6½-acre garden around their house, within a 400-acre organic farm, Sarah fell into the organic way of doing things and then realised what good sense it made. She became fully invested when she began to see the results.

Sarah says it's good to realise it's not an all-or-nothing-club. There's plenty of grey between the black and white so you don't have to be virtuous in every way. You can do some things more organically and gradually go further and be stricter. Sarah describes organic gardening as hands off gardening. Don't be too speedy to reach for the strimmer, the slug pellets etc.

What you can't have

You can't have a Wimbledon-style lawn, it's more carpets of clover than sward of grass, and roses can be tricky, apart from ramblers. At Yeo they also grow 'Buff Beauty', as it seems to be disease resistant. They prune the bushes hard so there's lots of air flow and give them plenty of seaweed feed.

Sarah's style for the garden

The garden near the house (where they sit) is more gardened. As it goes further out, it gets more natural and relaxed and so merges into the landscape and the farm.

They only mow grass paths so they are the only areas of lawn. This saves times and is better for biodiversity.

For slugs

- Veg are put out as teenagers rather than baby seedlings, by which point they are less attractive to slugs.
- Try barrier methods including gravel and coffee grounds in an unbroken ring.
- Use nematodes watered into the soil to attack the slugs.
- Arthur recommends flocks of Runner ducks – better than hens, which are snooty about what they eat.
- Garden birds are encouraged. Bird feeders are taken away in April so the garden birds feast on the aphids rather than bird feed.
- Yeo are famous for their incredible compost system, and since Sarah Raven last visited Yeo Valley in 2012, they've changed to producing it a little slower. The inspiration for this came recently from a visit to the Weleda Garden. This taught Sarah Mead that quick turnaround compost may not have as many nutrients as if you leave it to rot more slowly.

With an inaugural showing at this year's Chelsea Flower Show, the Yeo Valley Organic Garden will not only be bringing a slice of the Yeo Valley to this year's show, but they're also hoping that it will encourage show visitors to dig into organic gardening and to put nature first. Award-winning garden designer, Tom Massey, has designed the show garden, supported by Sarah Mead. The garden features a steam bent oak 'egg' hide designed and handcrafted in Cornwall by

Tom Raffield. The shape represents the very thing that has inspired the garden – nature and the cyclical systems we see within it.

Recommended plants for pollinators/biodiversity.

- Any alliums – even good old chives
- Clover
- Native poppies
- Cephalaria
- Eremurus (almost like echiums for bees)
- Single dahlias e.g. D. merckii, Bishop Series

FIND OUT MORE

- Food labelling – and grading as to how processed foods are – is what Sarah feels is the next big important thing.
 - Regenerative Farming methods (see Episode 13 with The Land Gardeners for more information on this).
 - Yeo Valley Garden is open 2 times week, Wednesdays, Fridays and also Saturdays in October. Link here. Pre-book slots. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/yeo-organic-garden-general-open-days-2021-tickets-148580481219>

Strawberry Pavlova

This is our Perch Hill version of Sarah Mead's favourite summer pudding. She uses strawberries from the Cheddar Gorge.

For 8:

For the meringue:

110g granulated sugar

110g caster sugar

4 egg whites

½ teaspoon cream of tartar

1 teaspoon white wine vinegar

For the filling and topping:

2 -3 punnets of Strawberries, hulled and halved (I think the more the merrier)

275ml Yeo Valley organic double cream

Splash of brandy/sherry/sweet wine (optional)

Caster sugar, to taste (optional)

A couple of tablespoons of strawberry (or blackcurrant/raspberry) coulis, to serve

Edible flowers

Preheat oven to 160°C/gas mark 3.

To make the meringue, mix the two sugars together. Whisk the egg whites until they are really stiff and continue whisking while you add 3/4 of the sugar, one tablespoon at a time. Make sure that the mixture regains its former stiffness and finally, carefully fold in the remaining sugar with a metal spoon. Add the cream of tartar and vinegar. Sparsely oil 2 circles of greaseproof paper (or use silicon mats) and divide the mixture between the two, spreading it out as lightly as possible.

Cook in the preheated oven for about 45 minutes until the meringue is crisp and has turned coffee-coloured. Turn off the heat and allow the meringue to cool completely in the oven before removing from the baking sheet.

To make the filling, prepare the strawberries. Then whip the cream (with a tot of brandy, sherry or sweet wine if you fancy), and possibly sugar to taste.

Sandwich the 2 meringue layers together with the cream and a layer of strawberries between. Add some cream to the top and more strawberries, and drizzle strawberry coulis (or blackcurrant or raspberry, to make it less sweet) over the top of the lot.

Serve with some edible flowers – some rose petals or English garden pinks to jazz it up even more.