

CAMBRIDGE ORGANIC GAZETTE

# courgette



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**Local Food Ecosystems**  
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**Fine Prospects**  
The charity growing  
opportunities alongside their veg

**Re-use it or lose it**  
how to close the waste circle

**Soups On**  
Try our seasonal squash recipe

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## Comment from Duncan:

Founder and owner of Cambridge Organic



Quite often in my editorials I find myself praising the whole Cambridge Organic team for a particular achievement or for their hard work and terrific attitude (in fact, not often enough; those guys are amazing and I think the world of them). However, on this occasion my praise and appreciation is directed at a particular section of the Cambridge Organic staff, and that is the management team. Last month we completed the final part of a leviathan project which began with our re-brand and culminated with the implementation of a brand new website, a change to a new accounting system, and a change to a new direct debit provider. All in all this project has been going on for some eighteen months or so, and at times has involved extraordinary workloads, long hours and challenges to overcome. Getting this project past the post feels like a real achievement and I want to thank our management team of Rob, David and Alice enormously for all their work and effort, and a special mention needs to go to David, as he is largely responsible for the new website.

I'm sure that many of you, like me, were sobered (if not exactly surprised) by the recent IPCC report which categorically stated that climate change is happening and is a result of human activity. I often succumb to despair whenever I'm reminded of the catastrophic consequences of climate change, then look around me to see that even though we are being given this message loud and clear we are still not see the changes in behaviours or policies that are going to get us on the right track. The despair gets more acute the more time without action passes, and the more dire the warnings become, but then again so does my resolve to persevere both with the business and our attempts to create a more sustainable food system with the Food Hub. Your continued support and custom is so important to everything we are trying to achieve. Thank you.



**Free Audiobook.** There is now an audiobook version of Duncan's new book 'Local Food Ecosystems; How Food Hubs Can Help Create a More Sustainable Food System'. Download a copy for free at [www.localfoodecosystem.co.uk](http://www.localfoodecosystem.co.uk).

"The book explains the vision for a much more sustainable local food system, and how the Cambridge Food Hub will help achieve this in Cambridge. There is much more to your membership of our scheme than simply a supply of locally grown organic veggies, by belonging to our box scheme you are also actively contributing to our efforts to bring about positive change in the food system. The free audio version means the book should be accessible to all, so if you are at all intrigued to find out about the Food Hub and the Local Food Ecosystem please do visit the website and download a copy for yourself." Duncan Catchpole

**Direct Debit Update.** We have recently switched over our direct debit provider from GoCardless to London and Zurich. During switchover, there were 3 or 4 weeks where payments were not taken (weeks beginning 16, 23 and 30 of August and the week of 9 August for Thursday, Friday & Saturday customers)

This resulted in larger payments being taken on the week beginning 6th September because the system was taking payments for any boxes that hadn't been paid for in the previous weeks. Even if you were on holiday for some of those weeks it would still have taken any money owed.

Be reassured this does not mean you paid twice for boxes. The system will work as usual going forwards, where payment is taken weekly about a week after you receive your box.

**New Website.** The new website incorporates our new branding, as well as new shiny images! We hope you find it more visually appealing and simple to use. Having said that, we do appreciate that there will be teething problems with the launch of our new site, and not all aspects will be working as we intended. We are also planning on adding pages such as about our team, growers, veg identification, as well as a greater range of recipes and news articles (as the news happens!)

If you have feedback on any issues, are struggling to use the new website or have any ideas for things you would like to see, do let us know!







## THE PROSPECTS TRUST

One of the many benefits of locally grown is the opportunity to really know where your food comes from. In this edition of the Courgette, Kat Hiby visits The Prospects Trust at Snakehall Farm.

You're likely to have found tasty organic veg from The Prospects Trust in your veg boxes this summer, whether it's their impressive pumpkins or funky banana aubergines. The Prospects Trust, however, is much more than just an organic farm that believes in environmentally-friendly practices. They are a social enterprise charitable Care Farm supporting adults with learning disabilities and additional needs through supported placements in a real working environment.

Snakehall Farm is located out in Reach, Cambridgeshire. I'm warmly met on arrival by farm manager Mark Cornell. With lifelong experience as a grower and naturalist, he has a clear passion for the work of The Prospects Trust.

Mark explains to me how it all began: "This was set up thirty-two years ago by parents and forward-thinking people who needed somewhere for their children to go. It was quite unheard of, but they had a goal and went for it and now we have ended up with 18 acres." He talks proudly of the range of produce they grow but even more proudly explains that "the main thing we grow here is people."

The co-workers are adults who may have learning difficulties, physical disabilities and varying health needs. The Prospects Trust offers them supported day placements, training and work experience. Mark explains that "It's their farm. That's the joy. I know we are organic and we have to look at business ...but we are a pyramid and the top of our pyramid are the co-workers, then our volunteers and our staff."

Mark likes to call the farm a 'market garden'. It may not be large by industry standards but the range of produce is impressive. There are raised beds to allow wheelchair users access and a coop for rescue chickens whose main objective is to teach animal husbandry.

Another brilliant aspect of the farm is the water system, installed right at the start





by the founders of the Trust. Many of the polytunnels are rainwater harvesters that filter the precious water into a massive 75,000 litre underground storage tank.

When talking about growing challenges, Mark explains, "our soil is clay over chalk meaning we struggle to get any goodness out of the ground, so we make our own compost." Even the compost is a long-term project – the professional garden team collects grass cuttings, 'good weeds', and leaf mulch from gardens without sprays, plus growing their own green manure on the farm in the form of weeds such as clover.

Biodiversity is a priority on the farm. The trust has created its own woodland since starting in the '80s and they are planning to plant another 1,000 trees. The woodland is a lovely calming area boasting wild garlic, primrose, daffodils and bluebells.

They are sectioning the 18-acre farm with hedges to promote more wildlife habitat and there are wildflower patches dotted around. Plants such as clover are left to flower for the bees and the butterflies.

The next person I talk to is people manager Hannah Austin. She speaks passionately about the trust and how everything they do is based on a progression pathway "to ensure all co-workers have goals to work towards and are doing something meaningful when they are here". She explains that the selling of produce has an important financial place in the running of the farm but that "even if a crop fails one year, as long as our co-workers are good then we have succeeded."

Prospect Trust runs multiple campaigns and events to raise money. Look out for this year's Ghost Trail – a haunted Halloween walk around the farm with lots of surprises to thrill those who dare to visit!

They have a number of volunteers who work both on the farm and at the 'Prospect's Unwrapped' shop in Ely - a zero-waste, plastic-free shop with a café for light bites and coffee.

Find out more about their extensive range of produce, how to donate or to volunteer, at [www.prospectstrust.org.uk](http://www.prospectstrust.org.uk).



## THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

We talk a lot about the 'circular economy', but how does it relate to reducing our use of resources when it comes to packaging, in particular?

A key concept of the circular economy is the closing of 'material loops'. This means instead of extracting new resources in order to create new products for consumption, we reuse materials we already have. Packaging is the biggest user of primary materials (ones that haven't been used before). In Europe, 40% of virgin plastic and 50% of virgin paper is used for packaging. Reusing materials and products as many times as possible reduces the need for primary materials and as long as the loops are closed in a sustainable way, it also reduces the environmental footprint of materials use. However, there's a large gap to be bridged: currently less than 10% of our resources are recovered to be reused.

In the past, much of reducing the environmental impact of packaging has focused on making packaging more lightweight, and on recycling. The benefit of reusing, rather than recycling, is that the functionality of a material is retained: a bottle stays a bottle, rather than being melted down into its component plastic or glass to be remade. Recycling has its

own associated emissions costs, and then there's the increasingly prevalent concern that our recycling doesn't get recycled at all, but instead dumped on less well-off countries.

Reusable packaging is not new. Particularly in 'business to business' trade reusable packaging is frequently used. We have a stack of crates that produce from local farms, such as Wild Country Organics or James Foskett Farms, arrives in, and these are returned to the farms each week to be filled with more produce for future deliveries. Similarly, our pallets are either collected by one of our local farms or by a company that redistributes the pallets for reuse. It is 'business to customer' trade that lags behind in the reuse of packaging, although the growth in refill shops is part of the drive to reduce our overall packaging consumption through the reuse (and reduction) of materials.

Switching to reusable packaging is not without problems. Within the food industry we have to consider aspects such as: the cleaning of packaging; food safety concerns regarding reused packaging; potential increased transport movements; and complex 'reverse' logistics associated with returning packaging for reuse. Storage is also an issue, as packaging is likely to be waiting in warehouses at least some of the time before it is returned for reuse. A lot of these issues depend on the material being returned and the supply chain it is part of: short supply chains and transport distances are key.

At Cambridge Organic, we have direct trading relationships with a number of our producers, including Fen End, Totally Cultured, and our local honey producers. As this includes us collecting or having deliveries directly from them, it is easy for us to return packaging from customers for reuse. Heather of Fen End is in fact one of our veg-box customers, making the process even more simple! We reuse the produce boxes we get in as our boxes for packing, and ask customers to return these until they can't be reused any longer. In contrast, packaging that has a longer supply chain, such as coming through a wholesaler, is much more difficult to reuse.

Ultimately, of course, reducing our consumption of resources is the best way to limit our impact on the environment. However, if we accept that certain items are needed, such as containers for food, then the next best thing we can do is ensure we reuse the ones we have as many times as we can. As part of the food industry, we should also try to promote systems that make these kind of processes as easy as possible.

**This is a guide to what packaging can, and can't, be returned:**

## YES PLEASE

We'd appreciate return of any of the following. Please make sure any jars are clean for reuse:

- **Your boxes! We reuse these for future deliveries, until they get a bit too worn to be useful**
- **Fen End jam and chutney jars**
- **Totally Cultured jars**
- **Local honey jars**

## NO THANK YOU

Please don't return any other packaging to us, as there's unfortunately not much we can do with it besides recycle it ourselves. Check out the 'Greener Packaging' page on our website for more info on recycling packaging.

Plastic bags that contain leafy veg – these plastic bags are used to reduce food waste of vulnerable greens such as salad leaves, spinach and kale, that would otherwise wilt rapidly. The bags can be reused in the home for example as freezer bags or sandwich wraps. You can also use them to store other veg for longer, for example wrap your root vegetables such as carrots and parsnips in them and you'll see they last a lot longer.







## SQUASH, GINGER AND CHILLI SOUP



CAMBRIDGE  
organic

Squash season is one of our favourite times of year. We get a variety of squash from almost all of our local farms, from spaghetti squash to delicata. Squash are incredibly versatile, but roasting is one of our favourite methods of preparation as it really brings out their flavour. In this recipe, we combine roasted squash with chillis and ginger for a warming autumnal soup. If you like your soup creamy, you could add a dash of coconut milk.

The squash we've used here is the brightly-coloured onion squash from James Foskett Farms, named for their shape rather than their flavour. However, their nutty flavour does give them their French name, 'potimarron', which is a blend of the words 'potiron' ('winter squash') and 'marron' ('chestnut').

### Ingredients:

- 1 Squash
- 1 Onion
- 4cm Ginger grated
- 4 Garlic cloves chopped
- 150g Red Lentils rinsed
- Chilli - to taste
- Stock 1-2 litres
- Veg oil of your choice
- Salt and pepper



### Method:

- Slice and de-seed squash, drizzle with veg oil and season with salt & pepper
- Roast in oven 200°C for about 30 mins
- Meanwhile, chop onion and fry gently in a large pan for 10-15 mins. Add grated ginger, chilli and garlic for 2 mins
- Add red lentils and 1l of stock
- When lentils and squash cooked, add squash to pan and blend with hand blender
- Season to taste and add more stock as necessary