

viable approach is known as the cut-and-freeze technique. Berry laden branches are pruned from the tree, frozen overnight and then the seaberries are parted from the branches and leaves using a vibratory/airflow separation machine.

This necessitates capital expenditure on freezers, buildings and machinery. Not only this, but as seaberries only grow on two-year old branches or older, it means that in order to maintain a continuous harvest you have to grow twice the number of trees. An orchard under the cut-and-freeze harvest system is divided into two halves, one in fruit production and the other in regenerative growth, post berry-harvest in the previous season. It is important to note that not all varieties are particularly adapted to this aggressive harvest approach. .

Prospects

Seaberries are a tart berry and the western society has grown up with a sweet tooth. Therefore it is imperative that efforts are made during product development to ensure public acceptance. A significant hurdle to overcome is low public recognition of the fruit and taste and health benefits are of paramount importance to this acceptance.

Whilst the UK sea buckthorn market is in its infancy, it is big business in Russia, China and Eastern Europe, where the fruit is a part of the culture. People are familiar with the fruit and aware of its healthy attributes. Commercial businesses were developed behind closed borders during the Cold War. Consequently, investment was made inwardly and opportunistic in nature and this restricted progress within traditional western world markets.

Thus the UK and USA are some of the last countries to become familiar with this amazing fruit. With an increasingly health-conscious public and the rise of the convenient-health category, sea buckthorn is well placed to provide people with a unique healthy product offering. In the recent 2016 Food and Drink Report by Waitrose, 70% of those surveyed listed healthy eating as an important part of their identity. Combining a healthy product with organic certification is an additional marketing tool – the two go hand in hand. Furthermore, it adds reassurance the buying public that the product is of utmost quality.

Whilst flies and harvesting pose real challenges to commercial uptake, one is inclined to question the viability of sea buckthorn as an enterprise. However, you could also argue that any other fruit crop would have its own set of specific challenges of no lesser significance.

To summarise, sea buckthorn represents a significant opportunity and is well suited for organic production. For growers who aren't too averse to risk, a seaberry enterprise could offer an exciting new challenge and could be easily established or complement an existing enterprise on an organic farm.

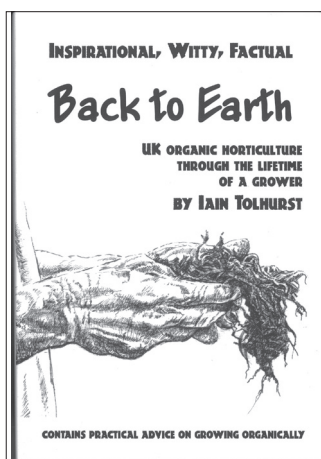
Seth Pascoe



Photo: Seth Pascoe

Book review

**Back to Earth.
UK Organic
Horticulture
through the
Lifetime of a
Grower by Iain
Tolhurst.**
HB 278pp. From www.tolhurstorganic.co.uk



Our hands come to tell the stories of our lives. There was a good story locally of a rep (it may have been) who after shaking hands with two growers, a partnership, couldn't resist saying 'it's easy to tell who does the work around here'. Another concerns my wife Jan (in those days herself a working grower), on the old OGA stand at BGLA (British Growers Look Ahead – the onetime premier annual show for commercial horticulture) in conversation with a couple of sceptical conventional growers – one of whom took her hand,

and then admitted that maybe she had some idea of what she was talking about after all. And then there are the hands on the cover of Tolly's book – Tolly's hands. It's a striking image. Looking at it first it seemed to me that these were the hands of someone twenty years older, but then I gave my own a proper look. That's what earth does, etching and ingraining; and the only way into the earth, to have any hope of coming to some knowledge of it, is surely through the hands. It moulds them as they mould it.

The book's title is *Back to Earth*. As I don't think he's ever left it this surely is Tolly's statement of where we need to be. The subtitle is *UK organic horticulture through the lifetime of a grower*, but it's not a work of remembrance. Rather it is a collection of the man's output of articles and short pieces from 1981 until the present. These show that it's not just his hands – Tolly's brain has always been fully engaged. Here we get the benefit of the symbiotic relationship between the two, of a keen intelligence combined with a determined practicality, and a book containing, as it says on the cover, 'practical advice on organic growing'.

Inside you'll find over 120 separate chapters - articles and short pieces reprinted in the order in which they were written. The longer ones (though few take up more than three pages of text) were almost all published in the practical organic publications of the day and for the most part are focused on the methods and

techniques of producing vegetables organically, though often, and increasingly as the years go on, with a view to the wider implications of how we do what we do. But there are some too which can be read with interest while looking beyond our own workaday labours, for instance a fascinating account from 1994 of the potential for vegetable production in Iceland (I wonder how they are doing now?) and another in similar vein on Moldova written in 2008.



Tolly with Lin, at the book launch

The chapters could have been organised in a general way by topic, but as well as being the simplest scheme the chronological arrangement means that it acts as a kind of autobiography, so that we follow the development of Tolly's thoughts and horticultural activities from youthful enthusiasm to sage, but still enthusiastic, elder statesman. It also has the benefit that you never know what is going to be around the next corner so that reading the book becomes a pleasant ramble through varied territory. Actually the first six pieces concern the growing of strawberries. Fair enough, this was the crop that made his name, and leaving aside the comments on varieties which are now of historic interest the information provided is as sound as ever. I particularly enjoyed the very first which describes his and Lin's early struggles on their unlikely horticultural holding in the Cornish Alps and their attainment of ministry-certified status for the strawberry plants, a first for Cornwall. The article ends with the offer of an open door to those seeking advice or a look-round, an offer Jan and I took him up on when we were in pursuit of our own horticultural holding a couple of years later. Tolly has always been generous with advice and the fruits of his experience and this book is testament to his willingness to share his knowledge unconditionally with the widest possible audience.

From strawberries we go to a well-researched article on providing shelter on the farm, a short account of a Potato Marketing Board meeting at Liskeard and Tolly's presentation of the case for organic growers to be granted more quota (he's never been shy in the public arena), and then a fully-costed explanation of how to grow peas on a field scale without sticks. This is one whose scheme we followed at the time with success, except that the wholesaler went bust before we got paid for the largest part of the resulting crop. The 1980s finish with advice on bare-root plant-raising - a production technique which is revisited in 1994 with a plea for soil-grown transplants over plastic modules and which remains dear to his heart. The prevalence and high cost of hybrid seeds has rather forced the issue since, but the truth of his final assertion - that no amount of research will produce a decent organic plant from a flawed system - still stands.

Much of the 1990s thereafter is accounted for with short pieces reprinted from the Tolhurst Organic newsletter, which after brief spells as the Broccoli Bugle and then the Parsnip Post became what it remains - The Onion Oracle. By their nature these will tell growers less than the practical articles and though they are

generally forthright (GMOs, pesticide residues, food miles) and entertaining in their own right the preponderance of weather reports - for instance 'Notes on drought', 'A good moan' and simply 'The weather' (times five!) - becomes somewhat relentless, there being few things more dead than last year's weather (other than an obsessive on the subject) save for the most extreme of extremes, such as the drought of 1976 and the great storm of 1987 - both of which get a mention.

The bulk of the contents - 200 out of 280 pages - date from the last fifteen years and here you will all those elements which together constitute Tolly's 'systems approach' to vegetable growing and which makes a visit to Hardwick so impressive - self-sufficient stock-free fertility through rotation design and green manures, composting, energy-accounting and active biodiversity. As well as these the succession of articles on different individual aspects of growing continues - so if you want to know about storing squash, beating the Hungry Gap, growing broad beans or how to beat docks (to take a few at random) you'll find them covered here.

The book ends with a reflective afterword which brings the succession of years together, looking backward and forward, acknowledging the support he's had along the way and restating his commitment to

"the goal of sustainable food production, a system that feeds people and planet equally."

His aspiration for the future remains what it has always been

"Not to farm as an island in isolation, but to involve and share the experience for those who also wish to follow the craft of proper food production - the feeding of people".

It's right that he uses the word 'craft' rather than 'industry'. Organic vegetable growing has none of the parameters that confine a true industrial activity. We work with materials - earth and seeds - which are seemingly infinitely variable, and under a sky which will bring we know not what. Constants are seldom to be found. As well as application and hard work, growing requires the sensitivity for and understanding of materials and tools that is the mark of a craftsman. That Tolly is a supreme craftsman is evident from this book. The knowledge and understanding that he passes on is direct and straight to the point. It tends towards helpful simplicity rather than over-intellectualised complexity and springs from clarity of vision and from a common sense that is not so common at all. All of this book is entertaining and most of it provides information that is readily applicable on any grower's holding. It is also the record - so far - of the career of an inspired and inspirational grower, one that fully deserves a prominent place on your bookshelf.

Tim Deane