



Above Autumn foliage and berries on viburnum opulus in the woodland coppice **Below** Jacqueline and Simon Sagers

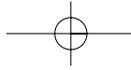
THE GOOD LIFE

Growing your own produce, keeping chickens and coppicing your own woodland are probably something we daydream about. Philippa Pearson meets a couple near Royston whose dream has become a reality and a way of life



SIMON Sagers's family have been farming at Bassingbourn for more than 400 years. Growing up on a farm, Simon always knew he wanted to stay in the family business, but along a far different route than previous generations. 'I wanted to create a smallholding that was self-sufficient and linked to the local community', says Simon. Guilden Gate Organic Smallholding began life as a ploughed field in October 1999: the field, known as Guilden Gate was bought in the 1880s by Edward Sagers and has been in the family ever since.

Intrinsic to Simon and his wife Jacqueline's approach to the new venture was to create a business and family home that were in harmony with nature, using sound eco principles and diverse conservation projects. 'We wanted to create something resilient and self-reliant that integrated the house with the land,' says Simon. The land is maintained organically to Soil Association standards and the eco-cottage, built on the site of concrete bases of the old chicken sheds where Simon's father kept battery hens, was built using sustainable materials. They have a wind turbine that generates ►



Rose hips



The greenhouse



Apples ready for harvesting



Plum tomatoes in the greenhouse



Borlotti climbing beans

their own electricity and water is recycled; household overheads are minimal, their carbon footprint zero.

In the two years preceding the launch of the project, Simon and Jacqueline

also looks after their two children, George, six, and Maddie, four. 'This is a family smallholding designed around the human scale so all work is meant to be done by humans, not by mechanical

on his bike but the popularity of the scheme has spread further afield and customers now collect their veg boxes direct from the smallholding. 'What is great about this,' Simon says as we walk

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around the burgeoning vegetable plot, 'is that our customers become more involved in what we

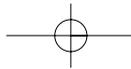
worked on organic farms in the UK and abroad, gathering information on an eco style of living and working. Simon didn't want to maintain the smallholding with a tractor because of its use of unsustainable fossil fuels and does most of the work himself, with help from Jacqueline who

machines like tractors,' Simon explains. An acre of the land is given over to growing organic produce, vegetables, herbs, nuts and fruit, which provide the local community with a wholesome veg box scheme throughout the year. Simon used to deliver these around the village

are doing here.' Families come to collect their boxes each Friday and take the opportunity to look around the site: children see how wholesome food is produced and where it comes from.

Elsewhere on the smallholding, a large woodland area is part coppiced to provide





Runner beans



Tomatoes in the greenhouse

fuel for the cottage in winter and another source of income from the split hazel hurdles that Simon makes. Honey and eggs are also offered in the veg box scheme and a wildflower meadow and orchard are a perfect home for the beehives whilst chickens enjoy foraging amongst the cob nut ride.

RHS Silver-Gilt medal winner Philippa Pearson is a garden designer and professional horticulturalist. Contact Philippa on 01767 651253 or email gardens@hertfordshirelife.co.uk

 Share your gardening tips on our forum at www.hertfordshirelife.co.uk



Simon Sagger's self-sufficiency TOP TIPS

GROW YOUR OWN

Challenge yourself to grow five of your favourite produce. Start with a 2ft² plot, you'll be amazed what you can grow in a small area, then progress onto larger and more beds. If space is limited, grow in containers: climbing beans can grow up a wall, herbs and veg grow happily in containers.

PLANT A TREE

Plant a fruit nut tree in the garden. Trained trees take up less space, look pretty and produce a high yield so are perfect for smaller gardens.

KEEP CHICKENS

You don't need a cockerel to have fresh eggs every day, just some hens. You will need an adequate hen house that is fox-proof, though.

KEEP BEES

You can keep a couple of beehives in a reasonably sized back garden. Do get expert advice beforehand.

VISIT THE SMALLHOLDING

Simon and Jacqueline Sagger's smallholding is open by appointment only. Guided tours are available, price on application, which give an interesting and entertaining insight into what makes a smallholding tick. Guilden Gate, 86 North End, Bassingbourn, Royston SG8 5PD 01763 243960
Email: simon.saggers@googlemail.com

Gardens

Cuttings gardening news

FASHION ANTICS for MEDAL WINNERS

Adam Woolcott and Jon Smith, the Bishop's Stortford-based triple Chelsea gold medal winners, are designing two courtyard gardens for fashion guru Lucille Lewin, founder of the Whistles clothes chain. Lucille has opened a fashion studio in London's West End, Chiltern Street Studios, which is housed in an old Victorian school building and Adam and Jon are designing the outside space at the company. One of the courtyards will be a recreation place for students working at the studio with reclaimed flagstones, wooden planters and climbers. The other courtyard will have a Gothic theme using reclaimed materials, Victorian artefacts and antiques and shade loving and unusual plants.

'We're delighted to be working with Lucille on this project; her passion is infectious and her creative vision is inspired,' said Adam and Jon. 'It's a real privilege to be associated with such an admired figure within the fashion industry and we're really looking forward to combining our own garden design ethos with Lucille's more 'fashion' approach. The result will be interesting!'

Contact Adam and Jon at:
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Adam Woolcott and Jon Smith

