

VEGAN SELF-SUFFICIENCY NETWORK

SUMMER

NEWSLETTER



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Welcome to all!

We have been much encouraged lately, meeting and hearing from so many people who are dedicated and determined to fulfil their various plans for simple, vegan self-reliance. We feel sure that many successes will be enjoyed in the years to come, and we hope that VSSN members will be united, not only in wishing those concerned in such ventures all the strength and energy they will need, but in giving real practical support where possible too.

Enjoy the summer, look after yourselves and each other.

Love from

Alan + Elaine

ORGANIC, VEGANIC, OR VEGAN-ORGANIC?

There is often some confusion in the use of the above expressions. Perhaps the following will help to clarify:

Organic - in horticulture, the word 'organic' means that various products of animal or vegetable origin are used to fertilise the soil. As well as compost and green manures, any of the following are likely to be used: animal manure; hoof-and-horn; dried blood; bonemeal; fishmeal; sewage. No artificial chemical fertilisers or sprays are used.

Veganic describes a specific method of cultivation developed by the O'Brien family. The name is not derived from the word 'vegan' but from vegetable organic. No animal by-products or manures are used, fertility being maintained by the use of vegetable compost and, sometimes, naturally occurring minerals. Compost ingredients are clearly defined and certain materials are not acceptable, such as vegan-human excreta, vacuum cleaner dust, hair and nail clippings, etc.

Vegan-organic is the term generally used by the compilers of this Newsletter. It may be taken to mean any system of cultivation that avoids artificial chemicals and sprays, livestock manures and slaughterhouse wastes. Fertility is usually maintained by vegetable compost, green manures and/or mulches, and any other available method that is ecologically viable and is not dependent on animal exploitation. Excrement (efficiently composted) and urine from vegan humans, and other detritus from the vegan household, may or may not be used, depending on the individual. Naturally occurring minerals, and materials such as wood ash, soot and lime, are generally considered acceptable.

PLEASE NOTE THAT IDEAS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED BY VSSN MEMBERS AND CONTAINED IN THE NEWSLETTERS ARE PRESENTED AS INDIVIDUAL VIEWPOINTS ONLY AND MAY NOT NECESSARILY BE SHARED BY OTHER VSSN MEMBERS OR BY THE NEWSLETTER COMPILERS... THANKS!

THE MOVEMENT FOR COMPASSIONATE LIVING'S SPRING GATHERING, CORNWALL.

A small group of MCL members, most of us also VSSNers, met at the Well Being Centre, near Redruth, for a two day gathering over the weekend of 19th-20th April.

Our time was positively spent discussing a wide range of topics, including non-violence, simple living, the role of and way forward for MCL, individuals' plans, food growing, pest control, local groups, communities, the problem of getting land, and so on. These amicable discussions were punctuated by simple and delicious vegan meals and pleasant walks through nearby woods to the sea.

On the Saturday evening we were joined by a number of local people for Kathleen Jannaway's interesting and comprehensive account (illustrated with slides) of her and Jack's 16 years' experience of food growing by vegan methods.

Thankyou to Kathleen and Jack and everyone else involved for making the weekend enjoyable and successful.

(Alan & Elaine)

LOCAL GROUPS

Some of the ideas discussed at the MCL Gathering (reported above) concerning possible local activity by it's members - especially by working in groups - seemed to us to also be relevant to VSSNers.

Since VSSN's inception we have endeavoured to encourage co-operation and interaction within the membership - hence the production and regular updating of the Contact List and the opportunities provided by the 'Vegan Volunteers' scheme (although the latter is still very small and apparent activity within it is less than we had hoped to see). The founding of active local groups would be the next step, provided there is sufficient practical interest in such a development.

In order for a local group to be formed, someone needs to take the initiative by volunteering to be co-ordinator, at least for the founding stages. The co-ordinator would have several options, perhaps the most suitable being to get in touch with local VSSNers, either through known contacts or by advertising in the next VSSN Newsletter, and to arrange a get-together for those interested. (Please note that we feel obliged not to pass members' addresses on without their permission, unless of course they already appear on the 'Vegan Volunteers' or Contact Lists.)

There is currently potential for the establishment, in some form, of active local groups in many areas of England and Wales. Most of our Scottish members are perhaps rather too spread out for regular meetings to be viable, whilst overseas we have three membership addresses in Eire and one in each of several other countries (as of May 1986). Those members who are, for the moment, more isolated may be pleased to have the support of the rest of us through correspondence at least, by making use of the Contact List and the pages of the Newsletter.

For anyone asking what would be the purpose or function of a local VSSN group (or VSSN + MCL? Co-operation between the two must be inevitable anyway, at most levels, given the overlap of interests and of the actual memberships), we would like to offer a few suggestions of our own here - by no means comprehensive. Further ideas are more than welcome for sharing, especially from those volunteering to initiate groups in their areas. Though we have no intention whatsoever to attempt to dictate any single structure or direction for a group to follow, we would be happy to make suggestions or advise, if required - for example, on the adoption of such worthy principles as decision making by consensus rather than by divisive and inadequate democratic methods.

A local group could develop any of these ideas and others:

A SKILLS AND LEARNING EXCHANGE where, for example, a member who is skilled at a useful trade or craft can offer that service, or instruction in it, to other members, who may reciprocate with their own skills.

GARDEN AND WORK SHARING - one example of this would be where a member, unable to cope with a large garden, shares the work of clearing it and planting and tending a vegetable plot (then also divides the produce) with another member who perhaps

has no garden. Other possibilities include all or part of the group getting together to work up the gardens of local residents - particularly those who are elderly, infirm or disabled - thereby establishing a vegan food gardening scheme in the neighbourhood for the benefit of all involved. Or the group could get together to help when heavy or laborious work is needed on a member's plot, or to co-operate with food growing and tree planting, either official or 'clandestine', using common land, derelict sites, neglected fields, etc. Working in groups can be rewarding, good moral support, and fun!

ALLOTMENTS - a local group could campaign in their own area for the provision of allotments if enough are not already available. Several VSSNers could try to acquire adjoining allotments, creating opportunities for work sharing, communal compost crops and heaps, watering rotas, allotment-minding when one member is away, etc. See also 'Long Term Projects' below.

SHARING AND BARTERING - a local group of VSSNers could help each other to save not only time and labour by some of the methods already mentioned, but also money by sharing and exchanging such items as seeds (both bought and home-saved), plants and cuttings, produce, tools, books, material resources, transport, and so on.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES - some groups might like to promote vegan self-sufficiency ideas in their area by arranging meetings, displays and stalls at events, holding garden open days, and making contact with local horticultural societies and 'alternative lifestylers', etc.

SOCIAL OCCASIONS - some VSSN folks might like to be involved with others in their area purely for the pleasure of their company! 'Get-togethers' for sharing meals, discussions, music, rambles, games, hobbies, etc., are also important for communication between members and to strengthen the group as a whole. Evolving interpersonal relationships can also become the foundations for future communities, and there are many positive ways to enhance such bonds.

LONG TERM PROJECTS - hopefully a strong enough affinity would develop between some or all of those in a group for them to contemplate some kind of long term project. Some of the following may be worth considering:

- *The purchase of a plot of land for either joint cultivation or division into 'allotments'.
 - *The purchase of woodland to coppice for fuel.
 - *The development of a desirable, self-supporting enterprise, such as a recycling centre, craft workshop, market garden, herbary, or such, or a market stall or shop to sell produce, craftwork, recycled/secondhand goods, etc.
 - *The purchase of land and accommodation for the establishment of a community.
- FUND-RAISING - the advantages of being involved in a group can be realised when projects requiring capital are considered. A group of people can often raise funds more quickly and effectively than an individual or couple can. Fund-raising projects such as jumble sales, car boot sales, vegan catering, totting, recycling enterprises, growing plants for sale, and similar ventures are all viable means of acquiring the money needed to finance the purchase of land or property for the group - hopefully these methods can be acceptable and desirable as they can fit in with simple, ecological and compassionate living and do not necessitate over-capitalisation or ripping people off. It may take several years of hard effort, but this ought to be a worthwhile option - especially for those who are unable to raise capital by themselves.

This item is only intended to skim the surface and hopefully motivate some of you. There must be many more ideas for group formation, activities, projects, fund-raising, etc., that we have not even mentioned. Should anyone be interested in getting a group started in their locality, even if only three or four people are to be involved, we will be happy to be of service in support by helping in any way that we are able. Get in touch!

(Alan & Elaine)

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"THE REAL GARDENING ADVISORY BUREAU"

Would members who have purchased a copy of the HDRA booklet "Raised Bed Gardening" from us please note that the Real Gardening Advisory Bureau, whose address appears on the back cover of the booklet, is now defunct. Thanks!

Highwood Agroforestry Research Project

The project is a result of more than 30 years' study of world problems of food and energy production as well as human health and nutrition. Some of the results of that study were incorporated in two books, "THE INVIOABLE HILLS" (Stuart & Watkins, London, 1968) and "ECOSOCIETY" (Natraj, Dehra Dun, India, 1984), as well as numerous articles, papers and lectures, two of which were included in a symposium "HOW TO SAVE THE WORLD" (Turnstone, Northampton, 1984). I was also co-author with James Sholto Douglas of "FOREST FARMING" (first published London, 1976, 2nd English edition Intermediate Technology, London, 1984), a book that has circulated in many countries.

Agroforestry is a system for supplying all basic human needs, including food, fuel, fibres, building materials and energy, from trees and other plants, mainly perennial, grown in symbiotic association with each other. Among its many advantages are a higher degree of productivity per acre than under any other system of agriculture, horticulture or forestry and the fact that all materials are renewable and do not pollute, but rather conserve the environment. It therefore provides a root-solution to world problems of hunger, poverty, unemployment and environmental contamination, and could contribute to an immense improvement in health standards in every country.

The system owes its ultimate origin to the book "TREE CROPS - A PERMANENT AGRICULTURE" by Professor J. Russel Smith of Columbia University, first published about 1930. Smith's ideas were developed as Three-Dimensional Forestry by Kagawa in Japan in the 1930's and by James Sholto Douglas in Southern Africa in the 1950's and 1960's. Agroforestry as such was developed simultaneously but independently in the 1970's by myself in England, by a research institute in South China, by Bill Mollison in Australia, as 'Permaculture', and by a number of foresters in India, as 'Social Forestry'.

The aim of the project at Highwood Hill is to demonstrate that, by very intensive methods of cultivation, it is possible to apply Agroforestry principles to small temperate areas and thus enable families and small groups and communities to supply most of their food needs throughout the year, in accordance with the most advanced views of nutrition.

The project is divided into three sections: a Forest Garden, a Winter Garden, and a Plastic Tunnel and small Greenhouse.

The Forest Garden is designed ultimately to achieve a degree of productivity comparable to that of the natural forest, employing solely trees and other perennial plants of food and/or medicinal value. Like the natural forest, the system comprises a number of distinct 'planes': the canopy of high trees, such as walnut and honey locust; low, fruit-bearing trees; fruit bushes, such as currants; herbaceous plants, such as the taller herbs; ground-cover plants, such as creeping thyme and chamomile, as well as the 'vertical plane' occupied by climbers, such as various berries, runner beans and nasturtiums.



Advantage is also taken of fences and a wall as supports for fan-trained plums and a Canadian Brant vine.

This system is in direct contradiction to the conventional horticultural view that food-plants - as opposed to herbaceous borders of flowers - should be grown in isolation from each other, so as not to 'trespass' on each others' sources of sunlight, air and soil-nutrients. But, as the natural forest demonstrates, many plants tend to thrive best when growing in close proximity to each other. The reasons for this are contained in the science of Plant Symbiosis, a study that has so far been very little developed. One of the main aims of the Highwood project is to accumulate evidence for the laws of Plant Symbiosis.

The Winter Garden is a more conventional vegetable and fruit garden, largely laid out in accordance with the principles of Mischkultur - 'Ecological Cultivation' - enunciated by Gertrud Franck in her "COMPANION PLANTING - Successful Gardening the Organic Way" (Thorsons, Wellingborough, 1983). The primary aim is to grow very hardy vegetables, available during the winter months, as most perennial vegetables and herbs die down in the winter. We are experimenting with uncommon Italian, French, Chinese and Japanese vegetables 'discovered' by Joy Larkcom and described in her book "THE SALAD GARDEN" (Windward, London, 1984). Of particular interest are a number of chicories, emanating mostly from mountainous and hilly areas in Italy, some of which change colour, from green to crimson and other shades, and even change shape in the winter.

Space-saving devices suitable for very small gardens are also being demonstrated. These include:

a German system of mound-cultivation;

an apple-hedge, according to the French Bouche-Thomas system;

a 'family-tree': three varieties of English eating apples grafted onto a common rootstock;

a strawberry barrel.

The Plastic Tunnel is for growing vegetables in the coldest weather, when few of even the hardiest outdoor vegetables, except leeks and certain roots such as the giant French and Spanish radishes, manage to survive. Together with the greenhouse it is also being used for growing some uncommon fruit, including a strawberry vine and Chinese gooseberries.

The dietary component of the project is derived basically from the pioneer researches of the great Swiss nutritionist, Bircher-Benner, at the beginning of the century. These researches, together with more recent work, including the much-acclaimed "RAW ENERGY" by Leslie and Susannah Kenton (Century, London, 1984) and a lecture of my own entitled "Scientific Body Building", demonstrate conclusively that the ideal diet for positive, all-round health is one comprising mainly raw fruit, vegetables, nuts and herbs. As far as possible, these should be picked fresh from one's own garden.

ROBERT A. de J. HART,
Rushbury, Shropshire.

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'UNICORN'

Unicorn is a group of six people - three couples - who came together as a result of several years of working at the sharp end of Animal Rights campaigning.

The idea of living and sharing a different lifestyle together came about 2 years ago. Once the idea was out in the open we were surprised to find that we had been thinking along similar lines. We wanted to break completely with our current lifestyles. We were all vegan of course, but apart from that we led fairly 'straight' lives - work, mortgages, etc. But an increasing sense of dissatisfaction was creeping in. Being vegan had opened other doors, raised other concerns. We were opposed to nuclear weapons and had taken part in peace campaigning, opposed to nuclear power and increasingly aware of the interaction between our lifestyles and the poverty of the Third World. But we had to face the fact that we were part of the things we despised. Our taxes financed it; our work supported it; our votes gave it legitimacy.

Some of us had been reading 'subversive' literature written by those who had already successfully broken out. We were inspired by their example and began (5)

to try out our ideas. Now, two years later, we are only months away from completing our plans.

By the end of the year our houses will (hopefully) have been sold and our savings pooled. This will give us the necessary resources to buy outright a small farm in Wales (Pembrokeshire/Carmarthenshire is our target area). We will be setting up an income-sharing, house-sharing commune. We aim to eventually be largely self-sufficient, although we recognise that complete self-sufficiency is neither practical or desirable. Our savings will get us over the first couple of years and provide the capital for improvement of house and land. We have a whole pile of ideas for ensuring some eventual cash income, and in some cases already developed skills to put them into practice.

We have avidly followed the debate in VSSN about the necessity for properly conducted long term trials of veganic horticulture/agriculture. We will have the land and resources to make a start on some of this very necessary work. It seems that others are thinking along the same lines - we noted with great interest the suggestion that support should be sought from the Vegan Society for such ventures, and the success in gaining a commitment for support at the last Vegan Society AGM. Perhaps we will see a rebirth of the Vegan Communities Movement of the 1960's, which was responsible for launching the Communes Movement in Britain. (Incidentally, we would be very interested in hearing from anyone involved at that time. What happened to Selene? Are there any survivors from that Movement out there? Has anyone got any books, magazines, articles, etc. that they would be willing to lend us, giving a fuller picture of those events - what went wrong/right, etc.)

We intend to start looking for a suitable farm in September. As we all live in Essex it would be very useful to us if we had some sort of base in West Wales - no matter how basic the facilities. Somewhere to put down sleeping bags, access to water, etc. If anyone can help, please let us know. We also need someone in the area to supply us with local newspapers, etc. that have good farm property columns. On a more practical note we would be pleased to hear from anyone who has any experience of growing flax, especially in Wales, as this is something we are very interested in pursuing.

Once we are established we should be able to provide legions of VSSNers with all the opportunities they want for work on a veganic farm! If anyone else is planning along similar lines we would be interested to compare notes - perhaps we can arrange mutually beneficial co-operation later.

We look forward to discussing these ideas with some of you.

ALBERT & CHRIS MOTT, BOB & JEAN ALLEN, DAVE & HANNE WILKINSON: 'UNICORN'.

Please reply to: UNICORN, c/o 59 Guildford Road, Southend-on-Sea, Essex.

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STONE DUST FOR FERTILITY

A world grass-roots movement for remineralising impoverished, mineral-depleted soils has been inspired by the book "THE SURVIVAL OF CIVILISATION" by John D. Hamaker and Donald A. Weaver (Hamaker-Weaver Publishers, P.O. Box 1961, Burlingame, CA 94010, USA). Everyone working in the movement does so on a voluntary basis. There is no commercial objective involved. The aim is to re-establish balance in nature.

Worldwide, forests are dying. One of the main causes is the depletion of minerals in the soil leading to malnutrition of the trees, evidenced by the narrowing growth rings observed in many areas.

Robert Schindeler of Austria has had direct experience of what can be achieved by soil remineralisation - the following report is extracted from a January 1986 letter of his that has been circulated (via such ecology action groups as Green Deserts and the Hamaker Co-ordination) for further publicity:

"I discovered the phenomenon of ground stone dust fertility in July '81 whilst building a 3 kilometre road through my woods. A lot of dust developed everywhere during construction, and it settled on the forest whilst we were transporting rubble. Dying fir trees became healthy again in a few months, and ever since then the growing has remained steady. In the meantime we had the stone dust examined, and found that it had originated with a high mineral content from organic debris from a previous lake (Migmatitamphibolit). We have ground the rock to powder to

remineralise the ground and revitalise both humans and animals, and it has been sold for this purpose. I myself eat two teaspoons of my stone flour every day. My hair, which has been snow white for years, has returned almost completely to its original black colour. Chronic illnesses I had, such as gout, have disappeared. I believe that my discovery will be the biggest sensation of this century.

The forest lies 300 metres above sea level and the fir trees, pine trees and beech were badly damaged by acid rain. Now the area covered by the dust has completely recovered and the trees are growing 50% better than they had done before. The beeches lose their leaves 4 weeks later than they would normally do in autumn. Also the grass, herbs and raspberries and brambles grow to an extent that has never been known before. The fruits of the raspberries and brambles taste better than in the areas not affected by the dust. The red deer numbers have increased and they prefer the lavishly growing grass.

The Austrian government plans a scientific project centred around the stone flour."

(Extracted from Hamaker Co-ordination and Green Deserts papers sent in by Shirley-Anne Hardy, who can be contacted for further information at The Rocks, Pitlochry, Perthshire, PH16 5QZ.)

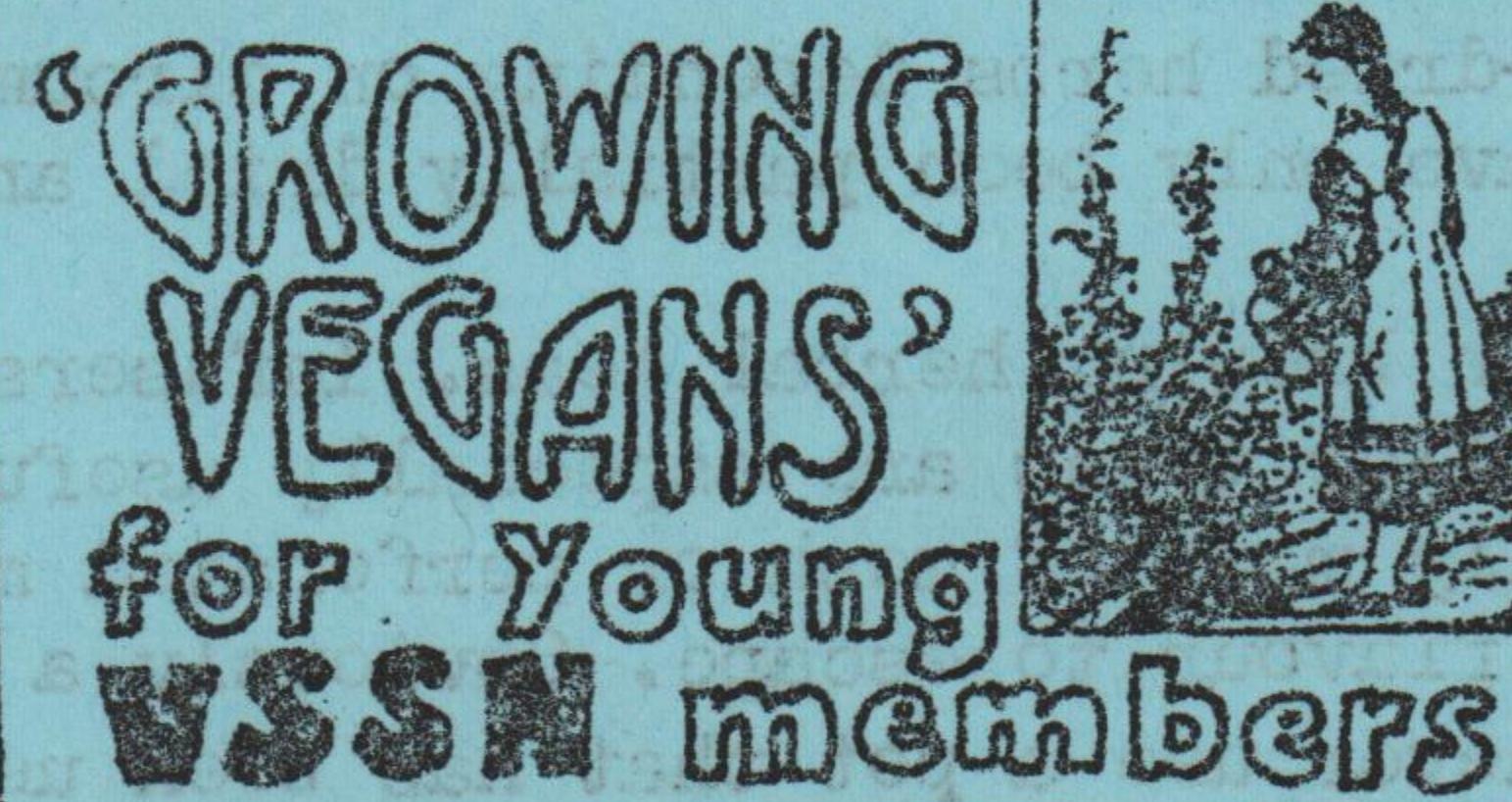
"VEGAN VOLUNTEERS"

Once again, the list of Hosts dated December 1985 remains effective - please note the following change of address:

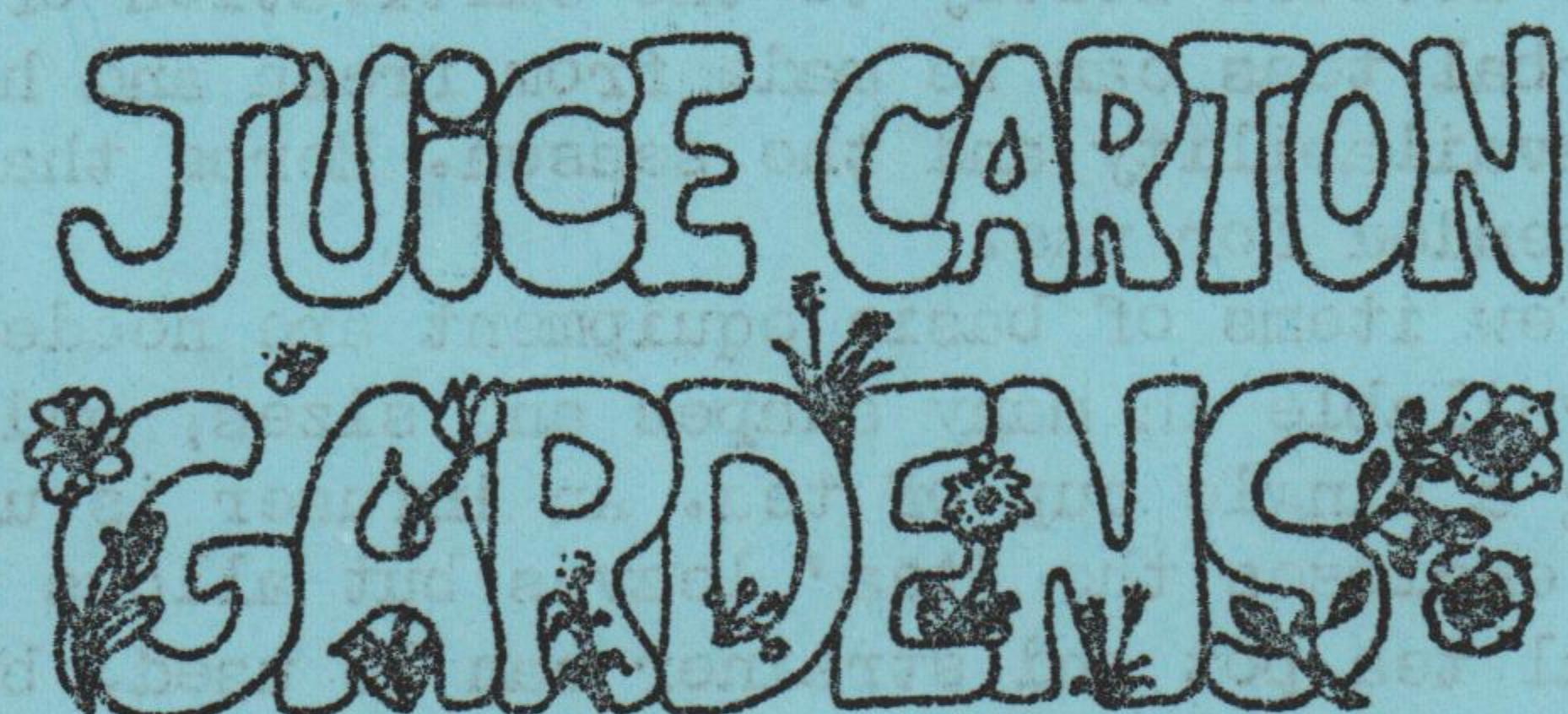
FIONA ASHLEY & JULIAN DEAN - previously at 55 Cranbury Avenue, Southampton, now at 32 CLOVELLY ROAD, ST.MARY'S, SOUTHAMPTON.

We've also heard from KAREN & MERVYN WILLIAMS who have just moved to a new place and have written: "There is much work to be done outside, mostly moving boulders and rebuilding dry stone walls, so if anyone wants to build up their muscles this summer they would be very welcome - maybe they could write first though." Karen and Mervyn's new address is ERW DINMAEL, CERRIG Y DRUDION, CLWYD, LL21 0LE.

Good luck to all Volunteers and Hosts this summer!



TERRARIUM:
CUT OUT THE FOUR SIDES OF A TALL, SQUARE JUICE CARTON, LEAVING A FRAME $\frac{1}{2}$ " WIDE ALL ROUND. CUT 4 PIECES OF CLEAR CELLULOSE (AS USED FOR SEE-THROUGH BOX LIDS) THE SAME SIZE AS THE SIDES. GLUE THESE INSIDE THE CARTON TO THE FRAMES. PUT A LAYER OF PEBBLES IN THE BOTTOM, THEN SOME WEED-FREE SOIL. USE A LONG-HANDED SPOON TO PLACE ONE OR TWO PLANTS IN THE SOIL - HOUSE PLANTS LIKE FITTONIA, PILEA, VENUS FLYTRAP OR SMALL FERNS WILL GROW WELL. WATER LIGHTLY & SEAL WITH PAPER CLIPS.



PARSLEY POT:
CUT SEVERAL 1" HOLES ALL AROUND A LARGE JUICE CARTON. DROP IN A LAYER OF PEBBLES THEN START TO FILL THE CARTON WITH COMPOST. AS YOU REACH A HOLE, PLANT A PARSLEY SEEDLING THROUGH IT. WHEN FULL, PUT MORE PLANTS IN THE TOP AND WATER LIGHTLY.

HERBAL TEAS

The use of herbs to make tea has a very ancient history. Both Plato and Aristotle mentioned herbal tisanes in their writings. When the Pilgrim Fathers (and Mothers!) set sail for America they took seeds of their favourite herbs with them, including chamomile, peppermint, elder and bergamot. After the Boston Tea Party imported tea was regarded by some Americans as unpatriotic and many turned to what were known as 'Liberty teas' brewed from home-grown herbs. During the last two hundred years herbal teas fell from popularity and China tea became a favourite beverage. However, with recent trends towards more-healthy living, there has been a tremendous upsurge in the consumption of herbal teas.

There are many reasons for turning towards herbal replacements for the more conventional beverages of tea and coffee. The ill effects of caffeine are quite well documented - symptoms such as insomnia, muscular tremors, constipation and heart palpitations can be caused by caffeine. Most herbal teas are not injurious to health in this way, in fact many are positively beneficial with their medicinal properties being traditional knowledge. The medicinal use of herbal teas is, however, a highly complex subject, and whilst some herbs are perfectly harmless, others should be used in moderation or only under the guidance of a herbal practitioner. The following books are recommended for this purpose:

A MODERN HERBAL - Maude Grieve (Cape, 1974).

A GARDEN OF MIRACLES - Jill Davies (Frederick Muller, 1985).

Tea and coffee are both tropical crops, almost always grown on valuable agricultural land by workers who are paid a pittance and denied their fundamental right to a decent lifestyle. Giving up tea and coffee is one step that can be made towards rebalancing the injustices suffered by the Third World. An enormous variety of herbs can be home-grown or gathered as ingredients for herbal teas - consequently they can be incredibly cheap, if not free. Wild plants should only be picked if they are growing in profusion in an unpolluted spot.

If the space is available, herbs are wonderful plants to grow - the amazing variety of colour and size, together with their beautiful fragrances and flavours, can really enhance a mixed garden. Alternatively, special plots such as knot gardens can be devoted solely to the cultivation of herbs.

Herbal teas can be made from fresh and home-dried herbs depending on circumstances, availability and the season. Herbs that have only been partially dried are not recommended for use.

A few items of basic equipment are needed for brewing herbal teas. Infusers are now available in many shapes and sizes, and smaller types are especially useful when making a single cup of tea. An infuser is usually made of mesh or perforated metal which encloses the 'tea' leaves but allows the flavour to escape. Obviously a traditional tea pot and strainer can be used, but never use a pot that has been used for brewing China or Indian tea. Teapots made from china, earthenware or glass are most suitable, and deep, bamboo tea strainers are preferable. In recent years glass tea and coffee pots with integral infusers have become available. These are very useful for herbal teas as the colour is clearly visible and the leaves are kept separate.

There are two basic methods of brewing herbal teas - by infusion and by decoction. Infusion is the more gentle method, where boiling water is added to the herb and left to soak for between 3 and 5 minutes. Quantities will vary, but 1 teaspoonful of dried herb or 3 teaspoonsfuls of gently crushed fresh herb are usually adequate for one cup of water. The infusion should not be left to stand for too long as tannin may be released which will cause bitterness. For a stronger tea use more of the herb rather than a longer brewing time.

The decoction method is used when the tea ingredients, such as roots and seeds in particular, release their essential oils more slowly. In this method the ingredients and water are brought to the boil in an enamel or stainless steel saucepan and simmered until the tea reaches the required strength, usually between 5 and 20 minutes.

During the summer herb teas can also be brewed by steeping the herbs in water in a covered glass con-





tainer in the sunshine. Some herbal teas, such as peppermint, are pleasant if served iced in warm weather.

There are many herbs which are suitable for herb teas - the following list offers some suggestions and comments:

<u>PLANT NAME</u>	<u>PART USED</u>	<u>TASTE</u>
Agrimony (<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>)	Leaves and flowers.	Bland, slightly apricot.
Angelica (<i>Angelica archangelica</i>)	Leaves, seed & root.	Slight celery taste.
Anise (<i>Pimpinella anisum</i>)	Leaves and seed.	Liquorice-like taste.
Balm (<i>Melissa officinalis</i>)	Leaves.	Lemony.
Basil (<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>)	Leaves.	Spicy.
Bergamot (<i>Monarda didyma</i>)	Leaves and flowers.	Aromatic and delicate.
Blackberry (<i>Rubus spp.</i>)	Leaves.	Tangy and refreshing.
Caraway (<i>Carum carvi</i>)	Seeds.	Warm and sweet.
Chamomile (<i>Anthemis nobilis</i>)	Flowers.	Sweet*.
Comfrey (<i>Symphytum officinale</i>)	Leaves and roots.	Slightly bitter.
Elder (<i>Sambucus nigra</i>)	Flowers.	Sweet.
Geranium (<i>Pelargonium spp.</i>)	Scented leaves.	Appley, lemony, orangey etc.
Hibiscus (<i>Abelmoschus moscheutos</i>)	Flowers.	Slightly lemony.
Hyssop (<i>Hyssopus officinalis</i>)	Leaves.	Bitter and minty.
Jasmine (<i>Jasminum officinale</i>)	Flowers.	Fragrant and sweet.
Juniper (<i>Juniperus communis</i>)	Ripe female berries.	Spicy, bittersweet.
Lavender (<i>Lavendula spp.</i>)	Flowers.	Cooling and aromatic.
Lemon Verbena (<i>Aloysia triphylla</i>)	Leaves.	Strong lemony flavour.
Liquorice (<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i>)	Root.	Sweet liquorice flavour.
Linden/Lime (<i>Tilia europaea</i>)	Very fresh flowers.	Sweet.
Marigold (<i>Calendula officinalis</i>)	Petals.	Pleasant, quite sweet.
Mint (<i>Mentha spp.</i>)	Leaves.	Very refreshing.
Raspberry (<i>Rubus strigosus</i>)	Leaves.	Astringent, fruity.
Rose (<i>Rosa spp.</i>)	Petals.	Delicate, perfumed.
" (" " ")	Hips.	Sharp and fruity.
Rosemary (<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>)	Leaves.	Aromatic and piney.
Strawberry (<i>Fragaria vesca</i>)	Leaves.	Strawberry flavour.
Sweet Cicely (<i>Myrrhis odorata</i>)	Leaves.	Sweet, aniseed flavour.
Woodruff (<i>Asperula odorata</i>)	Dried leaves.	Mild and sweet.

(* Should not be taken if strong and bitter)

Herbal teas can be blended in interesting combinations to suit individual tastes. Blends can be simple or complex, but it is more difficult to achieve the correct balance of flavours with a lot of ingredients. It should be remembered that herbal blends may settle, so the contents of a container should be stirred before use. It is possible to make home-made tea bags using about a teaspoonful of dried herbs tied up in a square of muslin. Remember to keep records of successful blends.

A variety of other ingredients can be added to herbal teas to enhance their flavour, for example dried lemon peel, concentrated fruit juice, spices, and even small pieces of dried fruit such as apple flakes. Essential oils can be added to herbal teas to strengthen their flavour, but these should be used very sparingly.

(Elaine)

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THE COMPLETE BOOK OF HERBAL TEAS - M. Marshall Marcin (Collins, 1984).
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GARDEN PARTY

for MCL and VSSN members

SUNDAY 15th JUNE

2.30 p.m.

at Kathleen & Jack Jannaway's

47 Highlands Road

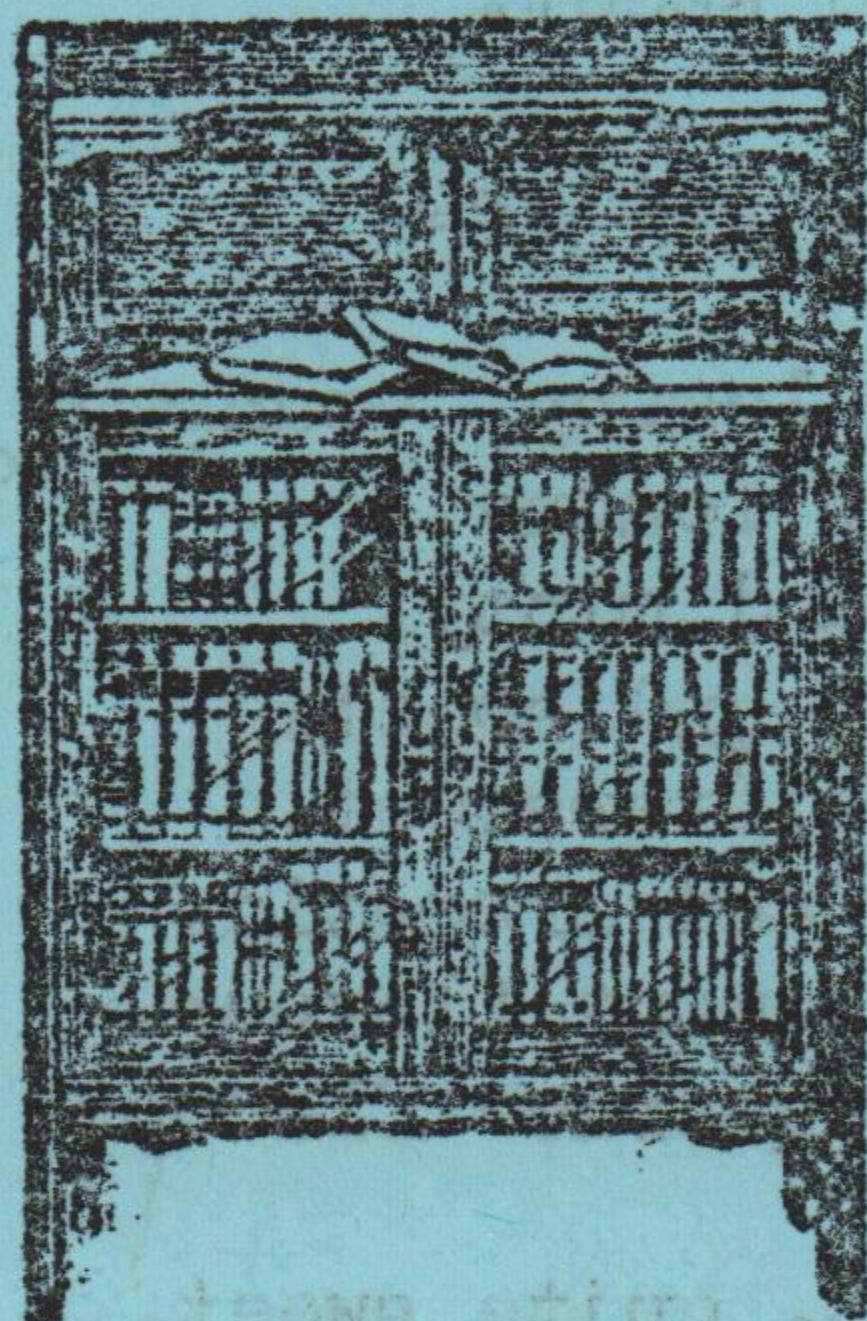
LEATHERHEAD

Surrey.



(15 minutes walk from Leatherhead railway station)
Please try to bring a contribution to a shared tea.

book



reviews

"FLAX AND LINEN" - Patricia Baines, Shire Publications Ltd., 1985. (Shire Album No.133). £1.25.

This little book is likely to be a source of interest to anyone wishing to learn about the production of linen fibre and fabric from flax. The text follows the history of the use of flax, and is accompanied by fascinating old photographs - the majority from Northern Ireland, one of the traditional centres of the linen industry.

Illustrations follow the various stages of processing the fibre, from pulling up the plants, through rippling (the removal of the seed heads), retting (the rotting of the stems to separate the fibres from the rest of the plant), breaking (when the fibres are broken away from the strawy remains of the plant), scutching (when the straw is removed), to hackling (when the fibres are combed to remove the short fibres and align the long ones).

The various methods used to spin flax through history are covered in a short but comprehensive chapter which is liberally illustrated with an interesting variety of pictures ranging from an Egyptian tomb painting to a photograph of an early twentieth century industrial spinning machine. A similar chapter covers the weaving of linen.

Other sections are devoted to the types of patterns available in woven linens, finishing linen cloth, and the linen industry today.

The emphasis of this book is very much a historical one, but that does not mean it is of no practical use. As the methods covered include pre-industrial devices, ideas for home production by the self-supporter can be gleaned from it.

"A GARDEN OF MIRACLES" - Jill Davies, Frederick Muller, 1985. £6.95.

This is a fascinating book for anyone interested in the cultivation of herbs, and herbal teas for both pleasure and medicine. The book covers every aspect of the subject, including designs of knot gardens and the types of plants that can be incorporated in them. There is a thorough section devoted to the special requirements of each plant, as well as a table describing the taste of individual tea ingredients. Blending of herbs for teas is discussed in detail and there are many suggestions for combinations as well as recipes for more complex mixtures, some of which are sold from the author's herb business based in a walled garden in Suffolk. Her 'China Light' blend of lavender, rosemary, peppermint, linden flowers and hops is one of my personal favourites.

The use of herbs as natural healers, being one facet of wholistic medicine, is covered in considerable depth: nearly 50 pages are devoted to sections relating

to specific ailments, and special tea blends are suggested, for example vitamin, mineral and nutritive tea, pre-natal tisane, blood purifying tea, heart building tea and influenza, colds and fever tisane.

The book is available from the Suffolk Spice and Herb Company, Thornham Herb Garden, Thornham Magna, near Eye, Suffolk, IP23 3HA, or through booksellers.

(Elaine)

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MULCHES

& MULCHING

The application of organic mulches (biodegradable matter spread on the surface of the soil as an aid to horticulture) is an imitation of Nature's system of soil fertility. In the cycle of life and growth/death and decay, organic matter, both vegetable and animal, returns ultimately to the soil on dying. Leaves and plants fall to the ground at the end of their lives, and the action of worms, insects, fungi, microbes and the weather breaks them down until they are incorporated into the soil. Undisturbed land under vegetation usually has a layer of topsoil rich in humus, made from decaying plant debris - a prime example being forest, with its 'litter' of twiggy leafmould over dark, crumbly soil. Except under extreme conditions, bare soil is an anomaly in Nature - even when soil is exposed, by human activity or in 'landslides', it is soon colonised and covered by a diversity of green plants. We can follow Nature's example in our gardens and allotments by avoiding leaving bare soil between plants or on temporarily vacant beds. (The latter can either be mulched or sown with a green manure crop). Mulching has many advantages, as outlined below.

There are several ways mulching can be practiced in gardening: the mulching of trees, shrubs and other perennials; the yearly or twice-yearly application of a compost mulch to vegetable beds; the use of mulching as part of a 'no-digging' or 'minimum-dig' system; and the all-year-round maloh garden, such as that advocated by Ruth Stout in her "NO WORK GARDEN BOOK" (see Bibliography).

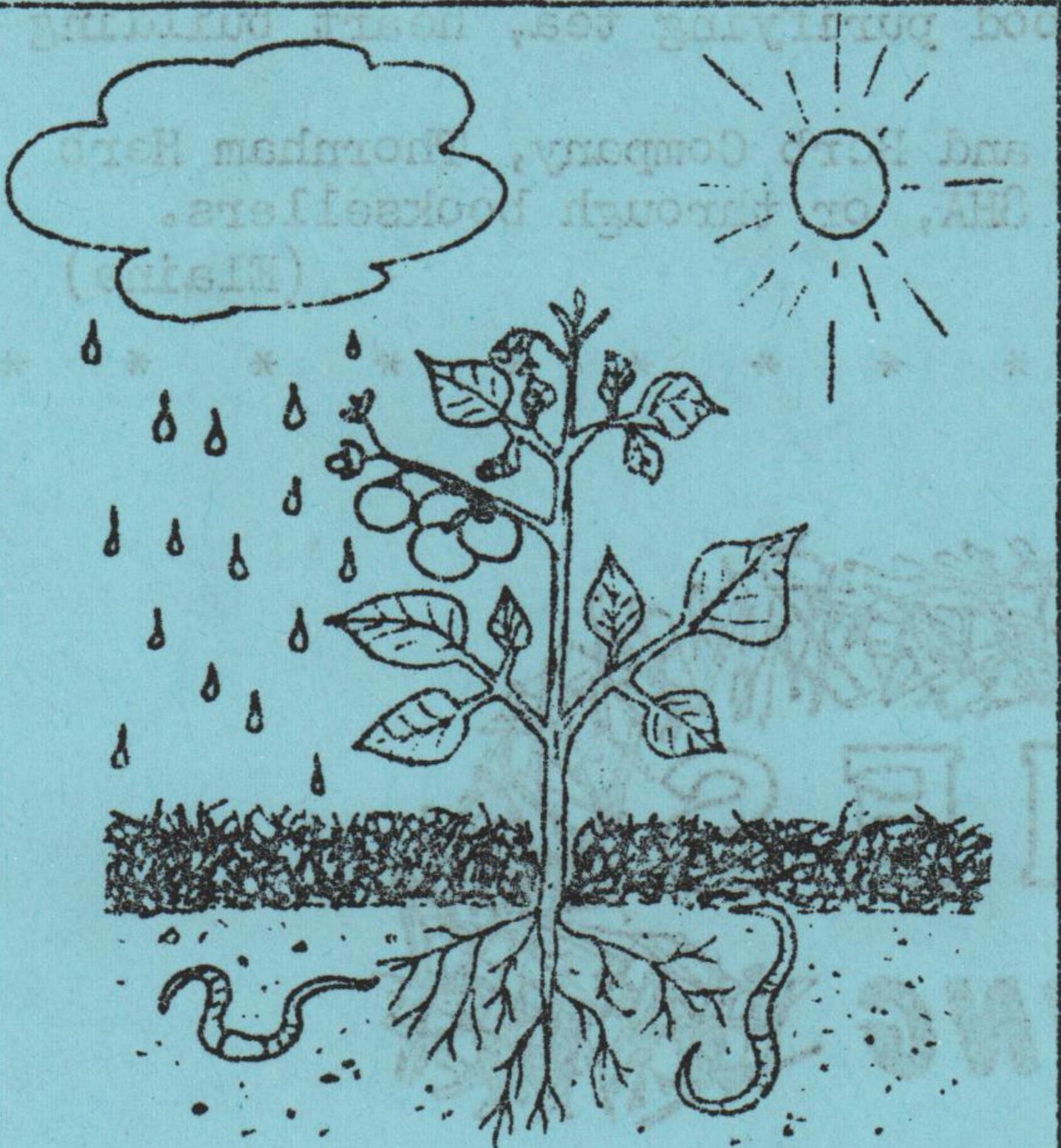
A layer of mulch on top of the soil can be a first line of defence against:
Frost - early and late frosts can be less harmful to plants that have been mulched, as the soil is insulated from the air above and can stay slightly warmer. Hard, midwinter freezes will probably still penetrate to the soil. Extra protection can be given to some plants by temporarily covering them (if possible) when a frost is expected - cloches, sacking, straw, hay, polythene, etc., can all be used for this purpose. Overwintering root crops and strawberry beds can be protected with thick mulches of straw or leaves.

Drought and sunshine - bare soil may 'bake' to a hard crust in hot, dry, sunny weather. A layer of mulch on the soil will prevent it from being dried out, either by sunshine or by wind. If the layer is thick enough and the soil is rich in humus, you may not have to water at all, even during prolonged dry spells.

Rain - even heavy rain falling onto an organic mulch will gently filter through to the soil and not splash mud onto plants or fruits (such as strawberries and tomatoes). The soil will not become compacted by heavy rain, nor washed away to expose plant roots and stems.

Weeds - a layer of mulch will prevent weeds from germinating or developing, and any that may come through should pull out easily. However, it is not a good idea to eradicate all weeds from the garden - they can be an excellent and constant source of compost material, deep rooted varieties especially being useful in bringing up minerals from the subsoil.

Mulches will encourage the activity of worms, the most efficient soil workers of all, and the added humus will improve the texture of the soil and increase its ability to retain moisture and nutrients. As mulches break down and release their minerals, the fertility of the soil will be increased. However, some of (11)



MULCHES ALLOW MOISTURE TO PENETRATE BUT RESTRICT ITS EVAPORATION BY PROVIDING A BARRIER TO ATMOSPHERIC CONDITIONS.

the coarser mulches, such as straw, bark, sawdust and other 'woody' materials, may consume soil nitrogen as they break down, to the detriment of growing plants. Such materials are best used after being left to 'ferment' or rot for a year or so in an open heap.

Coarse mulches can help to break down heavy clay soils, and the mulching of lighter and sandy soils will, in the course of time, greatly improve their structure.

'Smelly' mulches - i.e. ones that were made of fresh material that has started to rot - are claimed to deter root flies, which locate their target plants by smell.

Heavy mulches are best applied for the first time around midsummer when the soil has fully warmed. Lighter mulches can be applied at any time. Wait till there has been a good rainfall, then sprinkle a top dressing of fertiliser (mature compost, seaweed meal, old wood ash, weathered soot, etc.), if available, onto the soil. If lime is needed, rake the required amount into the top inch or two of the soil. The mulch can then be spread - the final thickness depending on the material used and whether or not the plot or bed is already planted out - and, of course, on

how much material you have available. Generally, compost, peat, leafmould and similar mulches can be applied up to 3" deep on unplanted ground, or 1" to 2" deep around plants. Lighter materials such as straw, hay, leaves, etc., can be laid deeper, but don't smother small plants or seedlings - leave space around them and pull the mulch in as they grow. Coarser mulches are best used under perennial fruit bushes, trees and shrubs.

The following list comprises most of the vegan-organic mulches available - you may be able to find other materials from local sources. Bear in mind that most 'cultivated' plant materials brought in from outside are unlikely to be strictly 'pure' - various residues from inorganic growing methods may be present.

Compost can be used at any stage of decomposition, but the more mature is preferable. Composts offered commercially are almost certain to contain animal manure, by-products and/or chemicals.

Grass cuttings - use only $\frac{1}{2}$ " deep if fresh, as the heat generated within a thick layer may damage plants. Make sure 'imported' cuttings are not from lawns that have been sprayed with moss or weed killers.

Peat - keep peat mulches moist, otherwise they may form a crust that light rain will be unable to penetrate.

Leafmould is an excellent soil conditioner. A mulch of oak leafmould is claimed to repel slugs, cutworm and rookworm.

Leaves - autumn leaves are best used as a mulch under shrubby fruit bushes, etc. Elsewhere they may blow away. Leaves are more manageable converted into leaf-mould.

Straw - fresh straw will rob nitrogen from the soil: old, rotten straw is preferable.

Hay is not recommended for a thin mulch layer as it may contain weed and grass seeds. It is best used thickly in a Ruth Stout system or composted first.

Finished plants e.g. bean, pea, tomato, potato, sweetcorn, marrow and sunflower haulms, etc. - chop up softer ones with a spade, smash tough ones with a hammer or axe.

Green manures can be left on the surface of the soil as a mulch after cutting. Leguminous crops are especially useful as their roots fix nitrogen in the soil.

Weeds and green plants can be chopped and used as mulch. Remove ripe seed heads. Nettles and comfrey are especially rich in minerals.

Kitchen waste will break down quickly if shredded, and will boost the worm population, but it may attract slugs and ants - if these are a problem, put waste on the compost heap instead.

Seaweed can be used fresh or composted and is especially rich in minerals.

Bark - chopped bark should be available from saw mills or can be bought from horticultural supply merchants. It will use up soil nitrogen as it decomposes, so is best used after it has rotted down.

Sawdust, wood chips, shavings, etc. are often available free for the asking from sawmills, joinery works, etc. Though best used when well rotted, they can be used fresh on paths and around acid loving crops such as blueberries. Piney sawdust is said to be good around strawberries.

Newspaper - ordinary newsprint (not colour magazines) can be used either whole or shredded. Whole newspapers, soaked in water, can be laid out and covered with a layer of soil or some other mulch, making an excellent weed suppressant. Shredded paper can be used as a general mulch, and will soon weather and age.

Cardboard - flattened boxes can be used in the same way as whole newspapers, as detailed above.

Sacking and rags made from natural fibres can be spread out and covered with other mulches.

Pine needles, being acidic, are especially good for blueberries and any acid-loving shrubs you may have. Strawberries like them too, and as a pine needle mulch repels slugs and snails, it is better than straw for keeping the fruits off of the ground.

Bulk wastes may be available from local sources. Some are best composted first. Look out for spent hops from breweries, fruit wastes from processors, throw-outs from markets, as well as some of the previously mentioned materials such as grass cuttings, leaves, sawdust, etc.

Ground cover plants - not strictly mulches, but they can have a similar effect in preventing the soil from drying out or crusting, and in suppressing weeds. Strawberries under trees is one example, and one that we have found very successful is tansy under raspberries - tansy is a companion plant to raspberries, and ours have never been affected by any harmful bugs: with a sprinkling of wood ash on the bed every winter, we always get bumper crops. Remove any perennial weeds before setting ground cover plants out. The plants may take a year or two to become well established.

Non-biodegradable materials: Black polythene is often recommended as a 'mulch', but it can suffocate the soil and also prevent rain from reaching it. It may also encourage slugs. Old linoleum is also not recommended, and old carpet is not always biodegradable, although discarded straw mats and other natural floor coverings do make good mulches.

Gravel and pebbles can also be used around trees and shrubs to suppress weeds and prevent the soil from drying out, but they add no humus or nutrients to the soil. Ground brick rubble can add some minerals, but should not be used around lime-hating plants or shrubs.

Mulching and slugs: Newly laid mulch, especially if made of fresh materials rather than composted or rotted matter, may encourage slugs. However, over the course of time the increased activity of earthworms will make the soil more alkaline and unattractive to slugs. A better balance of Nature is likely to develop too, so that no one species can achieve plague proportions!

As an initial measure to discourage slugs, sprinkle wood ash, soot or lime onto the soil before spreading the mulch.

Happy mulching!

Bibliography:

"THE GARDENER'S GUIDE TO BETTER SOIL" - Gene Logsdon, Rodale Press (1975).

"THE NO WORK GARDEN BOOK" - Ruth Stout, White Lion Publishers (1976).

"THE NATURAL GARDEN" - Roger Grounds, Magnum/Methuen (1976).

(Alan)

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"NATURE JUST ALLOWS LEAVES AND OTHER DECAYING VEGETATION TO DROP DOWN ON THE EARTH WHERE IT COMPOSTS... WHY SHOULDN'T WE DO THE SAME?

YOU DON'T SEE BARE SOIL UNDER NATURAL CONDITIONS. ONLY MISGUIDED MAN PLOUGH'S AND CLEARS HIS LAND SO THAT IT IS LEFT NAKED TO THE WIND AND RAIN."

Robert Waller, in the foreword to Ruth Stout's "No Work Garden Book".

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MEMBERS' ADVERTISEMENTS

Any vegans willing to lend a hand in our biggish veganic garden are very welcome. Our five star vegan cuisine is renowned, and we are a good stopping off point for Loch Lomond, the West Coast, Trossachs, etc. for any would-be holiday-makers. KEVIN & ROSIE, CLAYMIRES COTTAGE, BUCHLYVIE, STIRLINGSHIRE, SCOTLAND.

JOINT PROPERTY PURCHASE. People with capital needed to buy a property suitable for living, food growing and business (house, land, outbuildings). Sufficient capital for cash purchase might be £5,000 per couple or single (singles so easily become couples). Land prices are falling now due to agri-quotas, etc., so we should be able to buy at more realistic prices soon. Please write if at all interested, even if short of capital.

BOB HOWES, SUNSEED, 2 BRIDGE HOUSE, LONDON ROAD, ST. IVES, CAMBS., PE17 4EW.

COPY DATE FOR THE AUTUMN NEWSLETTER IS 21st JULY though small items may be acceptable up to the first week of August. Newsletter due out first week of September.

Letters, news, reports, articles, adverts (free to members), and any other contributions of a relevant nature always welcome for inclusion in the Newsletter.

Please indicate on your correspondence whether or not it is intended for publication, and write as clearly as possible - this will help us greatly. THANKS!

BACK-ISSUES OF THE V.S.S.N. NEWSLETTER:

No.12 (Raised Bed Gardening/Tree Surgery). No.13 (Agroforestry/Insect-Deterring Companion Plants/Coffee Substitutes). No.14 (Growing Food Without A Garden/Wheat, Rye, Barley & Oats). No.15 (Gardening With Children/Self-Sufficient Contraception/Misc. Reports). No.16 (Edible Fungi/The Deer & Squirrel Problem/Feeding The World). No.17 (Wholesome Food/The Onion Family/Green Manuring). No.18 (Why Vegan Self-Sufficiency/Recycling/Summer-Sown Salad Crops). No.19 (VSSN Gathering Report/Franck System Review/Misc. Reports). No.20 (Energy Saving/Leaves & Leafmould/Field Beans/Misc. Reports). No.21 (Some Members' Reports/Edible Flowers/The Marrow Family).

BACK-ISSUES 12 - 14, 30p each; 15 - 21, 35p each.

(Please note that members' addresses, etc., appearing in back-issues may no longer be correct.)

INFORMATION SHEETS:

Food Additives, Are They Safe?, 5p. Growing Nuts, 5p. Growing Unusual Fruits,
15p. Home Production of Linen, 10p. Natural Tooth Care, 5p. Seaweed and Its Use
in Gardening, 10p. Seed Saving, 10p. Slugs & Snails, 5p. Soap & Soapmaking, 5p.
NEW: Growing Sunflower Greens, 5p. (Extracted from Newsletter No.19).

BOOKLETS:

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|---|------|
| "FIRST HAND - FIRST RATE" (Recipes + self-sufficiency hints, by K.Jannaway) | 65p. |
| "SAVE YOUR OWN SEED" (HDRA) | 50p. |
| "RAISED BED GARDENING" (HDRA) | 60p. |
| "DIG FOR SURVIVAL" leaflet/chart (HDRA) | 10p. |
| <u>NEW:</u> (Movement for Compassionate Living booklets.) | |
| "SUSTAINING & SUSTAINABLE" (Ecological veganism + recipes, by K.Jannaway) | 60p. |
| "WHOLE NEW WAYS" (Vegan 'home-grown' recipes, by Cath & Dean Yates) | 60p. |

A contribution towards postage costs would be appreciated with orders for back-issues, information sheets and booklets. Thanks!