

# THE VEGAN SELF-SUFFICIENCY NETWORK

## Autumn NEWSLETTER



### C O N T E N T S

AN APPEAL	2
VSSN ACTIVISTS' WEEKEND	3
'CONTACT LIST' NOTES	3
'VEGAN VOLUNTEERS' NOTES	3
'VEGAN VOLUNTEERS' REPORT	4
FRUIT LEATHER	5
FENUGREEK AS A GREEN VEGETABLE	6
'SEEDS-BY-SIZE'	6
BOOK REVIEWS: M.C.L. BOOKLETS	7
PLANT FIBRES	8
MEMBERS' ADVERTISEMENTS	12
'GROWING VEGANS': LAVENDER 'RATTLES'	12
BAMBOOS YIELDING EDIBLE SHOOTS	13
BACK-ISSUES, INFO SHEETS, ETC.	14

Hello!

We hope that you have all enjoyed the changeable and unsettled summer. Did your crops survive being alternately scorched by the sun, drowned by torrential rain, and torn by hurricane-force winds? Despite the ravages of weather extremes we seem to have had a fairly good year here for most varieties - hope you have too!

Though the forces of nature have been energetic in the past few months, it does seem as though the spirit of the Network has been flagging a bit (see page 2). Let's not forget that a lot of our energy needs to be directed towards constructive work for a whole, new way of living. If we dwell too much on the 'doom and gloom' of the world as it is today, there is a danger that we may become pessimistic or apathetic. But ~~joy,~~ hope and love are still abundant, and we should use such resources to give strength to each other as we labour to make real the future of our common vision.

We wish you joy, hope and love.

Alan + Eaine

### A U T U M N S O W I N G S

After you have harvested your summer and autumn crops, those vegetable beds don't have to go out of production till the spring! There are still many types of vegetable that can be sown in the autumn months to provide late autumn, winter and spring crops. The following list may give you some ideas:

**BEANS:** Broad beans, particularly 'Claudia Aquadulce' can be sown in late Oct/Nov., overwintering to provide an early crop in spring. Field beans can be sown in Oct/Nov. for food use or as a 'green manure'.  
**BETROOT:** Try sowing a quick growing early variety in Sept. for picking as 'baby beets' before the winter.

**CABBAGE, SPRING:** Sow in early Sept. in seed bed or boxes. Plant out late Oct.

**CARROTS:** Sow a small, round variety in Sept. for use young before the winter.

**CHOP SUEY GREENS (Shungiku), CORN SALAD, and ENDIVE (broad-leaved):** These three green vegetables can all be sown in Sept.

**GARLIC:** Cloves can be planted out in Sept/Oct.

**LAND CRESS:** Sow in Sept/Oct.

**LETTUCE, WINTER:** Sow in Sept/Oct. Plant out in cold frames or greenhouse, or outdoors with cloche protection if needed.

**PEAS:** 'Meteor' and 'Feltham First' can be sown in late Oct/Nov. for an early crop the following spring.

**ONIONS:** Spring onions, such as 'White Lisbon' can be sown in Sept. for salad use next spring. Some varieties of Japanese onions can be sown in early Sept. for mature bulbs to use next summer.

**RADISH, WINTER:** Sow in Sept.

**SPINACH, WINTER:** Sow in Sept/Oct.

**TURNIPS:** Maincrop varieties sown in Sept. will provide leafy green 'turnip tops' for use in the spring.

(Continued on page 4)

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

### A N A P P E A L

The Vegan Self-Sufficiency Network was started in April 1982 with the intention that most of its activity would consist of practical work and support for its members by its members. This was expected to develop most obviously in the 'Vegan Volunteers' scheme and also, hopefully, in other co-operative efforts arising from new contacts and through Newsletter items.

The Newsletter itself was simply intended to be the organ of communication between the membership as a whole, and to be of secondary importance to practical 'grass roots' developments.

As it happens, we have heard from most of those previously or currently listed as Hosts for the 'Vegan Volunteers' scheme that they have had either no Volunteers at all, or just one or two, in the past year. The new list of Hosts (enclosed with this Newsletter) has fewer entries than the previous one - probably a reflection that Hosts are not finding the scheme worthwhile.

As far as we know, from 'feedback' received, few are making use of the Contact List (which covers members at only 27 or so addresses anyway), and those who have advertised, for various reasons, in the Newsletter have only had a poor response or none at all.

The item in the last Newsletter (Summer 1986) encouraging VSSN members to form local groups has so far drawn no response whatsoever, despite the suggestions given whereby such groups could provide important advantages or benefits to their participants.

The Newsletter itself, meanwhile, has become largely dependent on our own articles and reviews to fill the pages originally intended for the use of Network members to inform the rest of us of their various ideas, activities, projects and researches. Comparatively little is contributed for inclusion in the Newsletter, the vast majority of members seemingly preferring to remain 'consumers' rather than 'producers'! Of course, our thanks do go out to those who have sent in items, however brief, and who have thereby helped to diversify the Newsletter content.

Naturally we realise that not all VSSNers have the time or the ability to become involved in either actual or potential Network activities - the membership includes people who are busy with other commitments, or whose time and energy is devoted to children or caught up in the 'daily grind', or who are perhaps infirm. We are not aiming to criticise or point the finger at anyone - we are simply hoping to spur on or encourage those who do have the time, energy, interest and/or ability to take more of an active role in their Network.

Thanks to the untiring work of many vegan activists over the past few decades - particularly those who pioneered veganism - complemented by independent medical research and indisputable facts, the suitability (or even the necessity) of a vegan diet for optimum health is now generally recognised.

As with the health aspect, so with agriculture: for those who care to consider them, the facts are indisputable - vegan food production is both suitable and necessary for healthy soil, healthy food, and a healthy future for all.

Nearly 40 years ago, an article by Alec Martin in "The Vegan" (Summer 1949) stated:

"The relationship between veganism and agriculture is an extremely close one... for, if a system of agriculture which does not rely upon the exploitation of animals cannot maintain a healthy soil and a healthy people (and there are those critics who are satisfied that it cannot) then our whole vegan case and ideal must fall down.

...It may be that a vegan horticulture must be established first: that is, the smaller unit of a more individual and intimate culture of greater variety, as against the large areas of a few types as favoured by agriculture.

...This would mean the dispersal of the population of large towns and cities to homes and gardens scattered over large areas at present devoted to large-scale agriculture..."

The situation remains virtually unchanged today. Who is going to show the way forward for food production? Who is going to develop sustainable lifestyles

that do not exploit either their fellow humans, or animals, or the environment?  
Are you a new vegan pioneer?

During the next few months, we'll be reassessing the value, role, work and aims of the Vegan Self-Sufficiency Network. Now is your opportunity to contribute ideas, opinions and suggestions. We will especially welcome letters and other items for inclusion in the next Newsletter (please mark them as such). Your response may be a key factor in the development or decline of the Network - but don't hold back any criticisms: they may help us to change for the better.

THE FUTURE IS IN YOUR HANDS!

(Alan & Elaine)

\* \* \* \* \*  
\* V . S . S . N . A C T I V I S T S W E E K E N D \*  
\* We are considering holding a weekend meeting here at our home in \*  
\* Portsmouth in October. Obviously only a limited number will be able to \*  
\* attend, though if they don't mind sleeping in shared rooms with cushions \*  
\* on the floor we should be able to manage about 15 or so. Because of the \*  
\* limitation, we'd especially like to see people who have been, are, or \*  
\* would like to be active in the Network or with vegan self-sufficiency \*  
\* projects, e.g. past, present and future Hosts, Volunteers, communitarians, \*  
\* Newsletter contributors, growers, contacts, or anyone else with ideas, \*  
\* experience or anything else to contribute. The meeting will hopefully \*  
\* provide an opportunity to get to know each other better, to discuss the \*  
\* future of VSSN, to share experiences, plans and problems, to develop com- \*  
\* radeship and to strengthen our common bond. \*  
\* If you would like to come for the weekend, please write to us at 115, \*  
\* Eastern Road, Milton, Portsmouth PO3 6EJ, before 22nd September. Whether \*  
\* or not we go ahead with the weekend will depend upon response. If too \*  
\* many write, it will have to be first ones confirming only, or perhaps we \*  
\* can manage two separate weekends for different groups. Elaine & Alan. \*  
\* \* \* \* \*

V . S . S . N . C O N T A C T L I S T

In response to a request, the following list gives a complete update on changes of address and deletions of members on the Contact List (dated August 1985 onwards) which remains current until the next revision.

[Redacted contact list content]

8RP.  
4HZ.

' V E G A N V O L U N T E E R S '

As already mentioned, a new 'Vegan Volunteers' Host List is included with this issue of the Newsletter. This replaces the previous list, which has been in use since December '85.

The reduction of the list to the few remaining Hosts indicates clearly that the scheme is not enjoying the success or support hoped for it. We would especially like to hear comments, criticisms and suggestions from past Hosts and (3)

Volunteers, and we'd be very pleased to hear from anyone who would like to be added to the list as new Hosts.

Thankyou to all past Hosts and Volunteers and to those who are persevering with the scheme!

To anyone who may be considering some Volunteer work we can only say... 'Do it!'. It's a great way to meet like-minded comrades and to give and receive both moral support and practical aid.

### ' V E G A N   V O L U N T E E R S '   R E P O R T

We were happy to be Hosts for a weekend in August to Keith Bird from Bexhill in East Sussex. We first met Keith and his wife Bridget just after starting the Network in 1982 - they were among the very first members - so it was good to meet up with him again four years on.

The Saturday morning had been cloudy at first, but the sky soon cleared and it became pleasantly warm and sunny. When Keith arrived he was keen to get to work immediately, so after a quick cuppa and a stroll round the garden it was down to some weeding!

For a break from gardening we tackled a recycling job that we had planned to do for a while - dissecting an old double mattress. By cutting off the cloth covering, we were able to remove two pieces of cotton-felt 6ft x 4ft 6in and  $\frac{3}{4}$ in thick, and two pieces of hessian-backed coconut-fibre wadding of the same size. We plan to use these materials for mulching in the garden - laid on top of a raised bed, with holes punched through for planting, the cotton-felt and coconut-fibre should make excellent biodegradable weed suppressors/moisture retainers/soil protectors. They could also be used for covering the compost heaps. For anyone else with a similar recyclable resource, the felt and wadding could make excellent carpet underfelt, loft insulation or hot water tank and pipe lagging.

Our morning was rounded off shelling dried beans and crushing dried mint.

During Saturday afternoon we cleared several jobs which had needed doing for some time - planting out lettuces, picking the last gooseberries, sowing spring onions and cutting out old raspberry canes. While Keith continued weeding and grass trimming, we reclaimed our potting bench from beneath a heap of seed trays, pots, boxes and other garden detritus!

All day the weather had been sunny and very warm, but after our evening meal it started to rain and this continued all night.

Fortunately Sunday dawned bright and clear, although the garden was rather soggy. The first task Keith tackled after breakfast was clearing completed compost from the bin and spreading it around the vegetable beds. We then turned the most recent compost heap, layering it into the newly-emptied bin and adding a little lime and comfrey-extract activator.

For a little light relief, and to work up an appetite for lunch, we all took a walk on the common opposite our house. This is all reclaimed land, once the city rubbish tip and now completely grown over. It is an interesting area botanically, with plants such as sea-beet, fennel, tansy, chicory, soapwort, elder, broom, teasels, various fungi, and even a fig tree and grape vine, although these are not actually fruiting yet. There are also abundant brambles which we relieved of a couple of pounds of blackberries while passing!

Keith finished his visit with us the way he had started - with more weeding! We cleared several bucketfuls of weeds from the front garden, providing a good amount of material to start a new compost heap.

Our "Garden Jobs to be Done" list is now consigned to the scrap paper heap! We hope that Keith found the weekend as enjoyable and satisfying as we did. We'd like to thank him for all his effort and enthusiasm. Other Hosts should take note - a Volunteer not to be missed! Thank you again Keith.

Alan & Elaine.

\* \* \* \* \*

(Continued from page 1)

Indoors, seed sprouting can be continued all year round, providing bean shoots, alfalfa, etc. for fresh, crunchy salads. Trays of 'indoor greens' (e.g. mustard, cress, sunflowers, etc.) can be grown in a warm, well-lit spot indoors, such as on the kitchen windowsill.

Don't forget that many 'green manure' crops can be sown now too, covering the ground for the winter and providing humus and nutrients when cut back next spring.

(4) (See 'Green Manuring', VSSN Newsletter No.17.)

# FRUIT LEATHER



Making fruit leather is a little-known method of preserving whereby fruit pulp is dried in thin layers. Once processed, fruit leather can be eaten as it is or chopped and used in cooking.

Any type of fruit can be used to make fruit leather, and fresh, refrigerated, frozen or bottled fruit is suitable. Even quite over-ripe fruits can be used as long as they are not actually bad or mouldy.

The fruit should be washed and any inedible parts, such as stones, removed. Peel the fruit only if really necessary - peeling is particularly recommended for peaches and pears, the skins of which can give the leather a gritty texture. Raw or cooked fruit can be used in leather making, although raw fruit will obviously have a better vitamin content and probably a brighter colour. Puree the fruit in a blender or by passing it through a mouli or sieve. Once the puree is made, flavourings and sweeteners, such as spices or concentrated fruit juice, may be added if desired.

Prepare baking sheets for the drying process by lining them. All books I have read on the subject recommend plastic cling wrap for the purpose, although doubts about the safety of its use are beginning to arise. Certainly any plastic used should be specifically for food use. Perhaps the best advice is to experiment with your own methods to prevent the fruit leather sticking to the baking sheet during drying (some fruits will stick to the tray more than others - cherries are particularly notorious for this). Whatever material is used to line the sheet, make sure the edges do not flop back into the fruit puree, as this will become trapped underneath at the edges and will not become fully dried.

Fruit puree should be spread over the lined baking sheets to a depth of  $\frac{1}{8}$ " to  $\frac{1}{4}$ " (3 to 6mm) - this will ensure thorough drying. If the puree is spread on the sheet so that the edges are slightly thicker than the middle then the entire sheet will dry more uniformly, as the edges dry first.

The sheets of puree can be dried in an airing cupboard, a food dryer, or in the sun on a hot, dry, summers day.

Larger amounts of puree can be dried outdoors by covering a table top with polythene and then dropping 'pancakes' of puree onto it. Given hot, dry conditions, the puree should dry quickly. Fruit being dried out of doors is likely to attract insects so should be protected by some kind of screen.

The leather is fully dry when it can be pulled away from the sheet in one piece, although it may be necessary to turn the leather over during the drying process to ensure thorough drying.

Fruit leather is most easily stored by rolling it up and placing in clean, dry containers - glass jars are probably the best. Cut the fruit sheets to size if necessary.

For sun-dried fruit leather, pasteurisation is recommended before storage. Fill glass jars and loosely screw on the lids. Put the jars into a pre-heated oven ( $165-175^{\circ}\text{F}/75-80^{\circ}\text{C}$ )\* so they do not actually touch. Process for 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the size of the jar. Remove jars from oven and screw the lids down tightly, thus creating a partial vacuum when they have cooled.

Label the jars clearly and, if possible, store in a cool, dry and dark place. Check regularly for mould, which may develop if the drying process was incomplete.

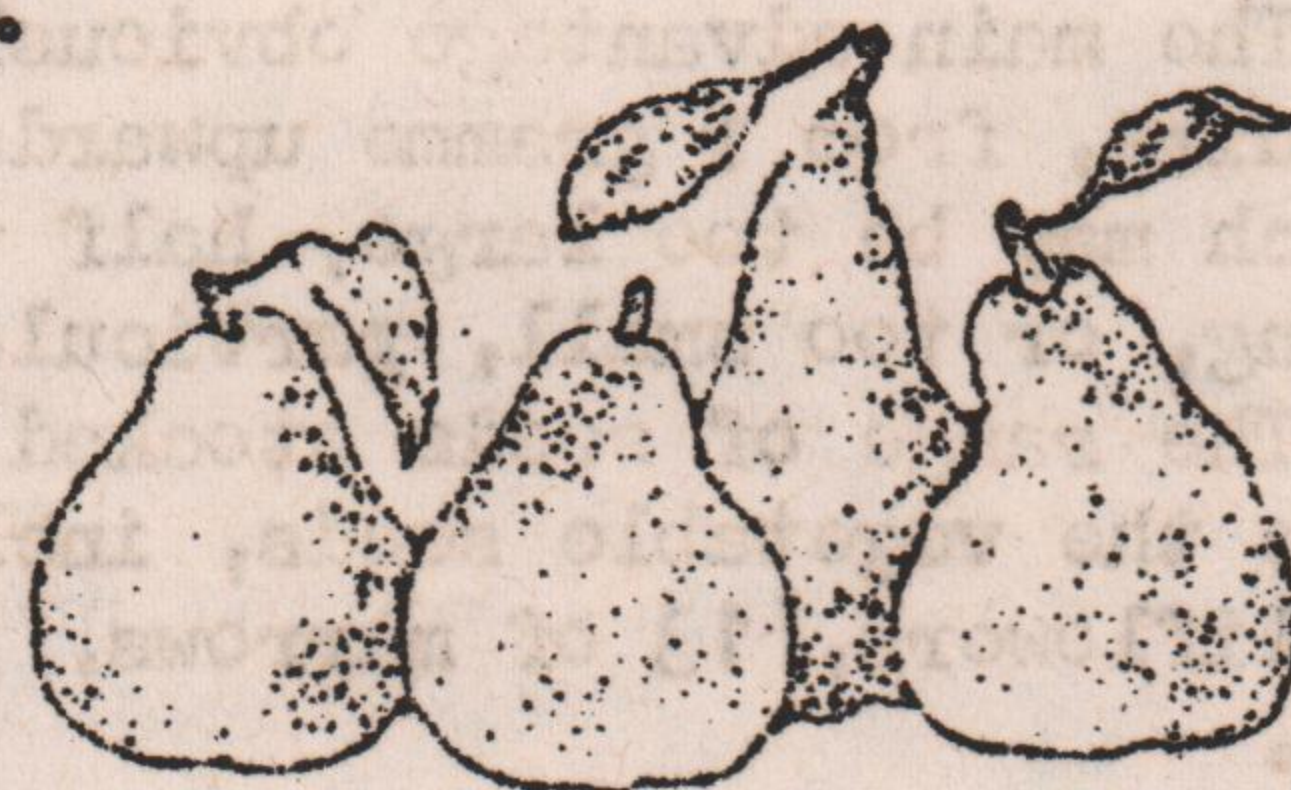
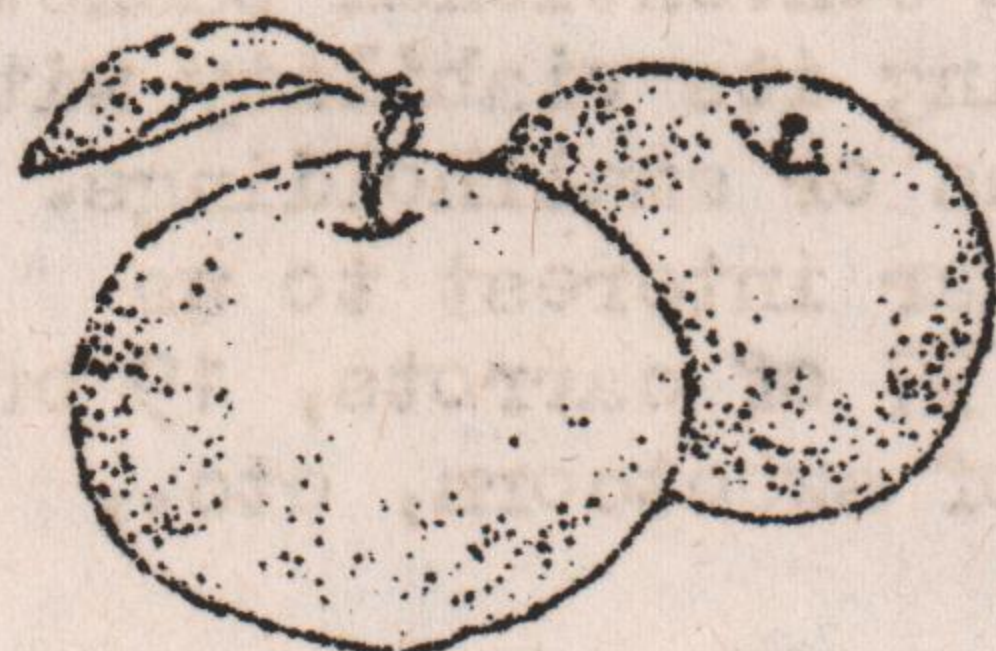
(Elaine)

## Bibliography:

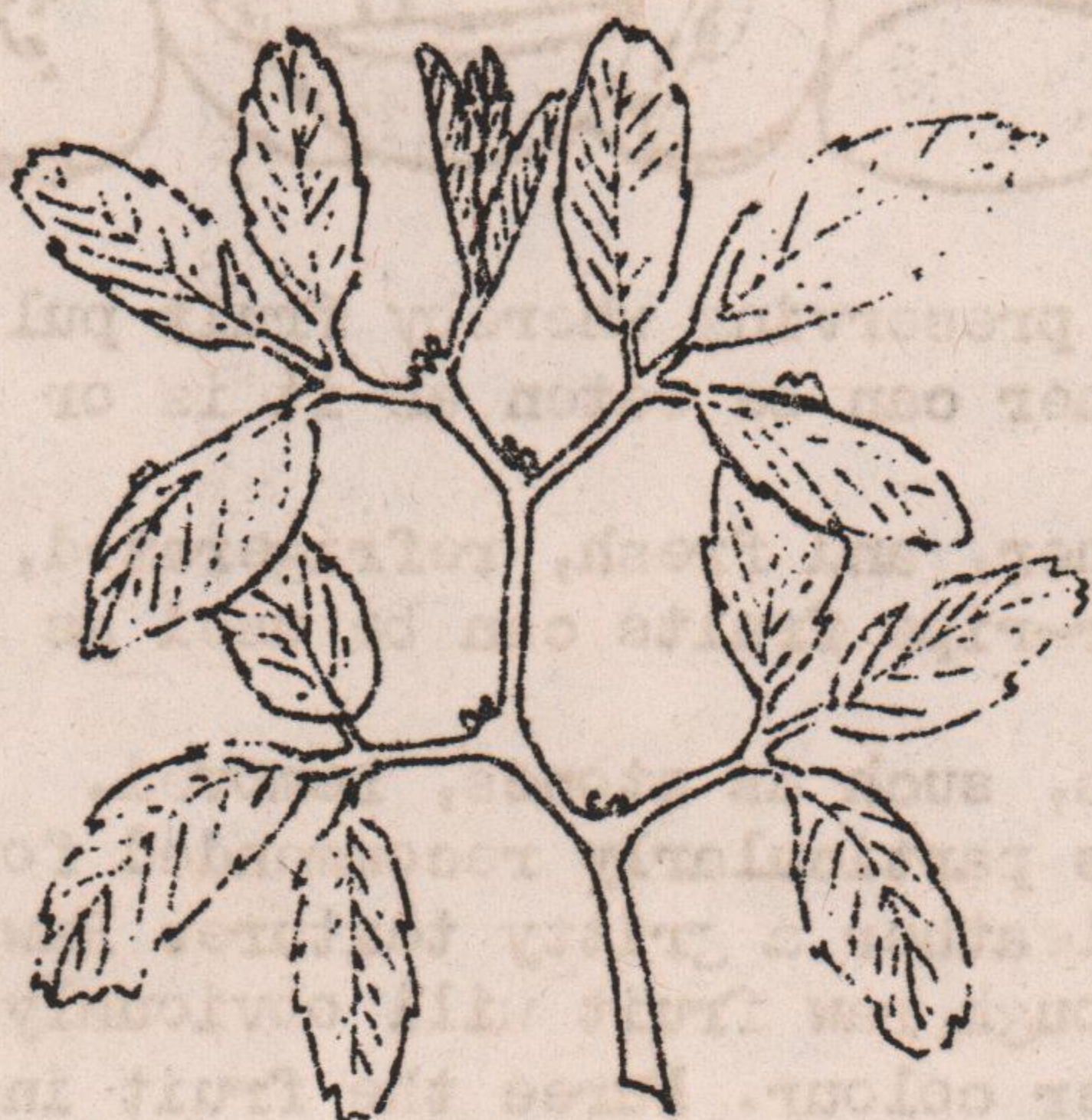
STOCKING UP - C. Hopping Stoner, Rodale Press, 1977.

DRY AND SAVE - D. Flack,  
Woodbridge Press, 1977.

\*(Note: Low oven temperatures are achieved by setting the oven to minimum and leaving the door slightly ajar to permit a through flow of air.)



# fenugreek



AS A GREEN VEGETABLE

Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*) is an upright, leguminous plant with clover-like leaves. Its seeds are commonly used sprouted as a salad ingredient or ground as a curry spice.

In India, fenugreek is also grown and used as a leafy green vegetable. For this purpose, the seed is sown thickly,  $\frac{1}{4}$ " to  $\frac{1}{2}$ " deep in rows at least 9" apart. If the soil is completely weed-free, the seed can be broadcast. The thickly sown seed will produce tender stems - if sown thinly, these may be too tough to use.

Keep the soil moist and clear of weeds throughout the growing season. Germination is rapid - usually less than a week, especially if the seed is soaked in water for 12 hours before sowing.

For a continuous crop, make small sowings every week or two - the crop is ready to use for a short period only, about 5 to 10 weeks after sowing depending on the season. In Britain, sowings can be made outdoors any time from April to September, or in March and October under cloches

or in a greenhouse. The crop is ready for harvesting when 8" or more high and until just before it goes to flower. It can be pulled up, or you can cut the stems off near to the ground and leave the roots in.

The leaves can be used in traditional Indian recipes, in mixed vegetable dishes, or sparingly in salads - they have a strong, spicy flavour.

To raise a fenugreek crop for seed, sow more thinly so that strong-stemmed plants can develop.

As well as for sprouting, fenugreek seed can also be used to provide 'indoor greens' in the same way as mustard and cress or sunflower seeds - sown thickly in punnets of weed-seed-free, peaty soil or compost.

Fenugreek seed is available from wholefood shops and Indian grocers.

## References:

"Growing and Cooking Indian Vegetables" - Paul Gimson, Asian Vegetable Project, Loughborough.\*

"The Salad Garden" - Joy Larkcom, Windward (1984).

(\*Thankyou to Graham Hooper of Oxford for the loan of this useful booklet.)

(Alan)

\* \* \* \* \*

## SEEDS - BY - SIZE

Seeds-by-Size is a small seed company that has only recently come to our attention. John R. Size, who runs the company, tells us that the majority of his very extensive range of vegetable, herb and flower seeds are produced by British growers. What is unusual about this company is that whilst some seeds are available in the usual 'pictorial' packets, the majority are available in plain packs made up to personal requirements by weight. Any quantity from 1 gramme upwards may be ordered.

The seeds are grouped into letter-coded price sections - these then have to be cross-referred with the weight required to calculate the cost. This does appear rather confusing at first, but ready-reckoners are included with the catalogue/price lists to assist your maths!

The main advantage obviously is that you can buy exactly the amount of seed you require, from 1 gramme upwards. This is preferable to buying a conventional packet which may be too large, half the seed never being used or losing its viability with aging, or too small, particularly for those with larger gardens or smallholdings.

The range of seeds stocked is quite impressive. Of particular interest to us were the vegetable seeds, including 21 varieties of beetroot, 37 of carrots, 19 of cauliflowers, 13 of marrows, 37 of onions, 14 of parsnip, 13 of sweetcorn, etc., etc.

Another point in its favour is that this is obviously a small company and not part of a large, multinational concern.

You can contact Seeds-by-Size at 60, GLENVIEW ROAD, BOXMOOR, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD, HERTS., HP1 1TB. Enclose an 18p s.a.e. for their vegetable and/or flower seed price lists.

(Elaine)

\* \* \* \* \*

### BOOK REVIEWS

"SUSTAINING AND SUSTAINABLE - Ecological Veganism" by Kathleen Jannaway.

This booklet is a very welcome and well-balanced plea for the adoption of a sustainable vegan lifestyle to help solve the world's present crises. It points out that despite efforts to eradicate hunger and poverty in some parts of the world in recent decades, the methods used have generally resulted in failure.



The adoption of an ecological vegan lifestyle is vital for several reasons. A change to a vegan diet would create less competition for food - particularly from livestock. As the vast numbers of food animals decreases, so too would the detrimental effect they have on the environment - in particular, more land would be freed for tree culture. Tree culture could in turn supply sustainable energy sources in the form of bio-fuels. Soil condition and fertility could also be vastly improved with careful vegan horticultural practices.

As well as the theory for the adoption of such a lifestyle, there is detailed information concerning the constituents of a vegan diet referring specifically to foodstuffs which could be grown in Britain, thus eliminating the need for importing from Third World countries.

The final section of the booklet is devoted to suggestions for menus for a week based on potentially home-grown foods, including simple recipes for several dishes.

This little book is to be thoroughly recommended - not only because of the inspirational value of the theoretical case for ecological veganism, but also for the practical suggestions given for actually implementing the ideas in our daily lives.

"WHOLE NEW WAYS" by Cath and Dean Yates. ("...towards a vegan way of eating without the use of imported food.")

This is an interesting little recipe booklet, containing over sixty recipes which can be made entirely from foods that can be home-grown (and therefore is a useful companion volume to "Sustaining and Sustainable").

Some people seem to think that such recipes are likely to be rather uninspired - these should convert anyone with such doubts.

Imaginative use is made of simple ingredients, and recipes are short and concise. Presentation of the book is delightful - the text is handwritten and interspersed with illustrations.

Recipes include such dishes as Nut Roll with Prunes, Buckwheat and Blewit Pie, Pumpkin West Indian Style, and even an English Curry. Here, to whet your appetite, is just one of the recipes: Vegetable Wellington.



#### "VEGETABLE WELLINGTON"

Chop finely 1 onion and 2 cloves of garlic; fry until soft. Add 1lb ground hazelnuts, 6 oz wholemeal flour, 2oz oatmeal, 1lb tomatoes, chopped and liquidized or sieved, and herbs to taste (thyme, parsley, marjoram etc). Knead to a dough, then roll out onto a large sheet of greaseproof paper to an oblong shape. Steam 1 1/2-2lb chopped mixed vegetables - eg carrots, parsnip, celery, swede, sprouts, onions, potatoes - place these on the centre of the pastry and fold into a parcel. Seal the ends and decorate extravagantly with the remaining pastry. Brush with a little oil and bake in a moderate oven until browned - about 30 minutes. Serve with gravy or tomato sauce and greens.

This dish makes a majestic centrepiece for a dinner!

\* \* \* \* \*

# PLANT FIBRES

The question of what material those following vegan lifestyles should choose for their clothing and other textiles is one that has caused much consternation to many of us.

The use of sheeps wool and other animal fibres (goat, llama, rabbit or whatever) cannot be acceptable as it would require the abhorrent and undesirable farming, breeding and culling of sentient creatures. (Human hair can be spun, and is said to make a "strong and durable" yarn, though of variable texture).

Silk fibre is produced from the cocoons of pupating 'silkworms', the larvae of a small moth - *Bombyx mori* being the 'domesticated' species.

The process of extracting the silk requires that the pupae are killed. Should they be allowed to hatch out (as moths), the continuous filament of the cocoon would be broken (and damaged by the fluid secreted by the moth to dissolve an exit through the silk). Though it is apparently possible for the small-scale silk producer to avoid the killing of pupae, the questionable practice of breeding the moths and raising the caterpillars under unnatural conditions is still required.

It is possible that much Tussah silk, which is produced from wild silkworm cocoons, has been made without killing the pupae. Wild silkworm species, most often *Antheraea mylitta* or *pernyi*, native to east Asia, produce a different type of cocoon with a 'built-in' exit, whereby the moth can escape without breaking the fibres. The cocoons are gathered from the wild for unravelling and spinning into silk. However, the cocoons are sometimes treated to kill the pupae.

Cotton, being a plant fibre, is often considered as acceptable for vegan use. As, hopefully, most vegan folk are concerned not just with avoiding animal products but also those involving human exploitation and non-ecological production methods, the suitability of cotton must come into question. Much cotton is produced using proletarian labour under exploitative conditions, on land that, particularly in the Third World, should be used to produce food for local consumption. Commercial cotton production is also one of the main users of agricultural chemicals, particularly pesticides. Additionally, cotton is a warm climate crop unsuited for cultivation in cooler, temperate regions such as Britain - it therefore uses resources of transport, fuel, time, labour, etc. to import.

Artificial fibres - often all described as 'synthetics', which is a misnomer in some cases - are of questionable desirability, depending on the raw materials required and the compatibility of the industrial processes with a viable and ecologically sound technology. A brief review of artificial fibres is included towards the end of this article.

Obviously, until such time as acceptable alternatives to animal fibres, imported plant fibres and undesirable artificials becomes available, or until those of us with the ability and resources (both acquirable) to produce our own 'home-grown' textiles can do so, we must compromise to some degree.

(Linen cloth produced in Europe is available, but is expensive and may not always be suitable for requirements.)

Our continuing search for alternatives has unearthed some 'new' ideas that have exciting potential. Perhaps 'new' is the wrong word to use for most of the fibres detailed below: 'long forgotten' may be more appropriate, as much of our information has come from a fascinating book - "Vegetable Substances: Materials of Manufacture" - published in 1833 (see Bibliography).

Around the world there are many different plant fibres under both commercial pro-





duction and minor, localised cultivation. Unfortunately a large number of these are tropical species and are not adaptable to our temperate climate. These include some of the better known fibres such as cotton, jute and coir (coconut), as well as the following which are, or have been in recent times, produced in significant quantities: abaca, sisal, kapok, raffia, sunn, kenaf, urena, canton, pacol, cantala, letona, mauritius, sansevieria, caroa, pineapple, pita floja, bromelia, palm, fique, piassava, tree cotton, balsa, kumbi, *Cherisia speciosa*, *Beaumontia grandiflora*, *strophantus*, *calotropis*, banana, etc!!

The following plants will grow in temperate climates and can be used for fibre production:

**FLAX:** Common flax, *Linum usitatissimum*, is an annual plant growing to approximately 3ft in height. It produces a strong bast (stem) fibre which is extracted by a series of labour-intensive preparations. These are covered in detail in VSSN Newsletter No.2 (July-August 1982) and on the information sheet "Home Production of Linen".

After harvesting, the plants are dried, deseeded, tied into bundles, then 'retted' (rotted) to remove the gummy substances that hold the fibres and woody parts of the stems together - the retting process involves either immersion in water or exposure to dew, rain and air for some time. After retting, the woody matter is removed by breaking and beating it away from the fibres. These are then cleaned and combed ready for spinning.

Coarser fibres are used for rope-making and for weaving into hessian-type cloth and canvas. Fine fibres make quality cloth and sewing threads.

**NETTLES:** Traditionally used in Scandinavia for the production of fibre for sail cloth, three types of indigenous nettle have commonly been used for fibre in Europe: the common or great nettle, *Urtica dioica*, the small or annual nettle, *Urtica urens*, and the Roman nettle, *Urtica pilulifera*. The common nettle is perennial, the latter two are annuals.

Harvested nettle stems are retted in much the same way as flax, then boiled to release the fibres. These are next hackled (combed) and oiled prior to spinning.

Nettle fibre can be made into twine, rope, canvas, and also finer fabrics for clothing and furnishing. Richard Mabey writes in "Plants With A Purpose" that some military clothing was made from nettles in Germany during the First World War, and that 40kg (about 90lb) of stems would furnish enough fibre for one shirt.

**SPANISH BROOM:** Renowned for its ability to grow on any soil, even a very poor one, Spanish broom (*Spartum junceum*) is a hardy shrub that is easily raised from seed. It produces strong growth, eventually reaching 9ft or so in height.

The seed is sown in late winter, and the shrubs left to develop for three years into multi-stemmed clumps. Young shoots are cut from the clumps in August, spread out to dry, then beaten with wooden mallets. They are next immersed in water for a few hours before being laid in shallow pits and covered with ferns or straw. For the next nine or ten days the shoots are drenched daily with water. They are then removed, washed, and the outer rind is peeled off. This leaves the fibrous parts of the shoots, which is again beaten to separate the filaments. These are then spread out to dry, after which they can be cleaned of any remaining woody matter, combed, and spun.

The resulting yarn was once used, particularly in the south of France, for canvas, sack cloth or clothing, depending on its quality. It was apparently not under commercial cultivation, instead being produced by each family for its own use.

**MILKWEEDS:** *Asclepias syriaca* (also known as silkweed or Syrian dog-bane), *Asclepias incarnata*, and *Asclepias tuberosa* (butterfly weed) are perennial plants which all produce a seed floss that can be of practical use. Often referred to as 'milkweed floss' or 'vegetable silk', this has a soft, lustrous texture. Though difficult to spin, being brittle, it can be combined with other fibres or, alternatively, used as a substitute for kapok to stuff pillows, upholstery, padded clothing, etc.

The stem fibres of milkweeds, particularly *Asclepias syriaca*, can also be



flax.

extracted and prepared in the same way as flax.

The plants grow from 3 to 5ft tall, so produce long fibres - these are fine, white and glossy.

**HOP:** Apparently, the "Transactions of the Swedish Academy" for 1750 include an account of the manufacture of a fine, strong cloth from the stalks of the hop plant (*Humulus lupulus*).

The hop stalks were gathered in autumn and kept in water for the whole of the winter. In March they were dried out and prepared, in a similar way to flax, for spinning.

The process can be accelerated by cutting the hop stalks into lengths of 2 to 3ft and boiling them in lye (an alkaline solution, usually of caustic soda). However, the final product from this method was reported to be of inferior quality and difficult to work.

**HEMP:** Once widely grown throughout Europe, including Britain and Ireland, hemp (*Cannabis sativa*) provides a strong fibre which was mainly used to make ropes, though various qualities of cloth were also produced. The hemp stems were processed in a similar way to those of flax.

Unfortunately, under today's laws the home production of hemp fibre cannot be considered a feasible proposition - because of the potential use of hemp as an illegal drug, it is currently a criminal offence in Britain to possess, grow or sell the plant or its seeds.

**NEW ZEALAND FLAX or PHORMIUM:** *Phormium tenax* is a perennial plant with sword-like leaves, similar to those of the iris. Depending on variety, the leaves may grow to between 3 and 8ft long. It is these that yield an abundant supply of fibres.

The leaves are cut when fully grown, then macerated in stagnant water for a few days. They are next crushed with a weighted roller which separates the fibres. These are cleaned by washing in running water.

Rope and cord of renowned quality are made from phormium fibres, as well as cloth. Like many of the plant fibres, the quality of textiles produced can be variable - both coarse and fine cloths have been produced.

**BEAN STALKS:** This is one plant fibre source that must be easily available to vegan growers! Our 1833 reference mentions "tick, horse and other beans" - tick and horse beans are both usually referred to as 'field beans' nowadays.

The bean haulms contain filaments beneath their thin outer skins. The removal process is similar to that required by flax and nettles, involving maceration, beating, rubbing and hackling.

The "other beans" referred to are not named - however, broad bean plants are similar to those of field beans so may be worth trying. Whether or not runner and other climbing beans will produce usable fibres from their stalks is a matter for future research and experiment.

**PAPER MULBERRY:** The bark taken from young branches of the paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyfera*) during the growing season will provide an especially fine, silk-like fibre for spinning and weaving into cloth.

After the bark is cut, it should be steeped in water then beaten with wooden mallets. This will separate the fibres from the woody matter of the bark.

**RAMIE:** Also known as rhea or China grass, there are two sources of ramie fibre grown - *Boehmeria tenacissima* in tropical areas, and *Boehmeria nivea* in warm temperate areas. Members of the nettle family, these both yield a quality bast (stem) fibre.

Since cultivation of the plant became well established in the Western world in the eighteenth century, ramie fibre has been produced in such European countries as France, Italy and Spain. Ramie spinning mills operated in England, France and Germany towards the end of the nineteenth century, though whether or not the crop was actually grown in England we have yet to ascertain.

The ramie plant is a nettle-like hardy perennial with many stalks. These grow to between 4 and 6ft and are harvested when they start to turn yellow from their bases and new shoots are developing from the roots.

The bark and fibre layers are peeled and/or beaten from the stalks soon after harvesting. The bark is then soaked and the fibrous layer scraped off with knives. The



long strands of fibre are then sun-dried.

The fibres are stuck to each other with a gummy substance which needs to be removed before the spinning process. Commercially this is done with caustic soda, bleaches and acids, but by hand repeated soaking and scraping of the fibres must be carried out until they are clean and separate.

Where it is in commercial production, ramie is generally used for canvas and net making, furnishing and clothing materials, and sewing threads.

MALLOW: "Several species of mallow, if macerated like hemp, will afford a superior thread for spinning, and are said to make textures surpassing in beauty those manufactured of flax." ("Vegetable Substances" - see Bibliography).

The stem fibres of common mallow, *Malva sylvestris*, have been used in Spain to produce cloth and shawls, and were also known to have been used by the Romans. The tree mallow, *Lavatera arborea*, also yields a fibre from its stems.

#### OTHER POTENTIAL SOURCES OF PLANT FIBRES:

A fibre can apparently be extracted from the needles of the SCOTS PINE, *Pinus sylvestris*. This is said to be "warm and durable, like coarse wool" and has been used to make clothing and blankets in Germany and Sweden. Unfortunately, we have yet to discover any information on processing methods. The roots of the Scots Pine also provide a fibre which has been used for cordage in Scotland.

SPRUCES, particularly *Picea abies/excelsa*, the common or Norway spruce, and *Picea glauca/alba*, the white spruce, also yield a root fibre which has been used in Lapland and Canada for cordage.

Several trees - especially the LIME or LINDEN (*Tilia europea*), the ENGLISH ELM (*Ulmus procera/campestris*) and the SCOTS PINE - have bark fibres that may be extracted. These have been used for cordage and mats, etc. in Europe, Scandinavia and Russia.

"Permaculture One" indicates that a fibre can be obtained from JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE plants (*Helianthus tuberosus*), but no further information is given. Perhaps other *Helianthus* (Sunflower) plants will also yield usable fibres?

"There is room for research - the re-identification of the 'bulb' which yielded a fibre from which ancient Greeks made socks, for example - and for experiments with European plants." ("The Spinner's Workshop" - see Bibliography).

#### ARTIFICIAL FIBRES:

These are classified into two groups - REGENERATED FIBRES, the raw materials for which usually consist of industrial by-products of plant or animal origin, and SYNTHETIC FIBRES, which are generally produced from chemical derivatives of oil and coal.

Regenerated fibres include those made from cellulose, the main constituent of natural plant fibres. For regeneration purposes, this is derived from such plant materials as wood pulp and cotton linters (the shorter fibres of cotton that are rejected by the spinning industry). The cellulose is chemically extracted and processed into fibres such as viscose and other rayons, and cellulose ester (acetate).

Though the technical process involved is beyond the capabilities of self-supporters, the industry is one that may well be considered compatible with a viable 'alternative' plan for the future, particularly as a means of recycling timber wastes and other coarse plant materials.

As points of interest, other regenerated fibres include those manufactured from protein, derived from milk (casein fibres), hides (collagen fibres) and various plants. Protein fibres have also been produced from peanuts, soya, maize, egg albumen, feathers, gelatine and silk waste (though some of these may not be in current commercial production). Alginate fibres are produced from seaweed, and glass fibre is also a regenerated fibre, though from mineral sources.

Synthetic fibres include the nylons, the polyesters (e.g. Terylene), acrylics (e.g. Acrilan, Orlon, Courtelle, etc.) and other polymers. These are generally, but not exclusively, produced from petroleum or coal by-products and as such are not compatible with any change towards an ecologically viable lifestyle.

#### SEED AND PLANT AVAILABILITY:

Chiltern Seeds, of Bortree Stile, Ulverston, Cumbria, LA12 7PB, list all of the following in their 1986 catalogue: *Linum usitatissimum* - COMMON FLAX; *Spartum junceum* - SPANISH BROOM; *Asclepias syriaca* - SILKWEED/SYRIAN DOG-BANE; *Asclepias tuberosa* - BUTTERFLY WEED; *Humulus lupulus* - HOP; *Phormium tenax* - NEW ZEALAND FLAX (several varieties); *Broussonetia papyfera* - PAPER MULBERRY; *Malva sylvestris* - COMMON MALLOW; *Lavatera arborea* - TREE MALLOW.

Flax seed is also available from many other seed suppliers.

Nettles and hops can be found growing wild.

Field beans can be obtained from Chase Organics, Gibraltar House, Govett Ave., Shepperton, Middlesex, TW17 8AQ, or Peggy Ellis, 64 Blenheim Road, Caversham, Reading RG4 7RS, or from wholefood shops.

Phormium plants are often available from nurseries and garden centres. Two specialists are: Bressingham Gardens, Diss, Norfolk, IP22 2AB, and Sandhurst Nurseries, Hansel, Dartmouth, Devon, TQ6 OLN.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

VEGETABLE SUBSTANCES: MATERIALS OF MANUFACTURE - published, under the superintendence of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, by Charles Knight, London (1833).

HANDBOOK OF TEXTILE FIBRES - J. Gordon Cook, Mellow Publishing Co., Watford (1959).

THE WHOLE CRAFT OF SPINNING - Carol Kroll, Dover Publications, New York, USA (1981).

PLANTS WITH A PURPOSE - Richard Mabey, Collins, London (1977).

PERMACULTURE ONE - Bill Mollison & David Holmgren, Corgi, Australia (1978).

THE SPINNER'S WORKSHOP - John Mercer, Prism Press, Dorchester (1978).

TEXTILE MANUFACTURE IN THE NORTHERN ROMAN PROVINCES - J.P. Wild, Cambridge University Press, London (1970).

(Alan)

\* \* \* \* \*

MEMBERS' ADVERTISEMENTS

Does any member know anything about a possible recycling plant being set up somewhere in our neck of the woods? If so, we'd be pleased to know (a) the address, and (b) what they recycle. We have an ever-increasing heap of recyclable paper we're desperate to do something useful with! Please contact: NICOLA MILES, BLAENBEREM, MYNYDDCERRIG, nr. LLANELLI, DYFED, CYMRU.

URGENT! I'll be in Leamington Spa starting an acupuncture course on 15th September, and I'm seeking a VSSNer/vegan/sympathiser with floor space for 5 or 6 nights. I don't expect to stay with anyone for 'free'. Please would you let me know if you can help, or if you know of anyone near Leamington/Coventry/Kenilworth who might do me this favour. Thanks! VICKI CREEK, VARTEG, 49 NANT Y CI, SARON, AMMANFORD, DYFED, SA18 3TP.

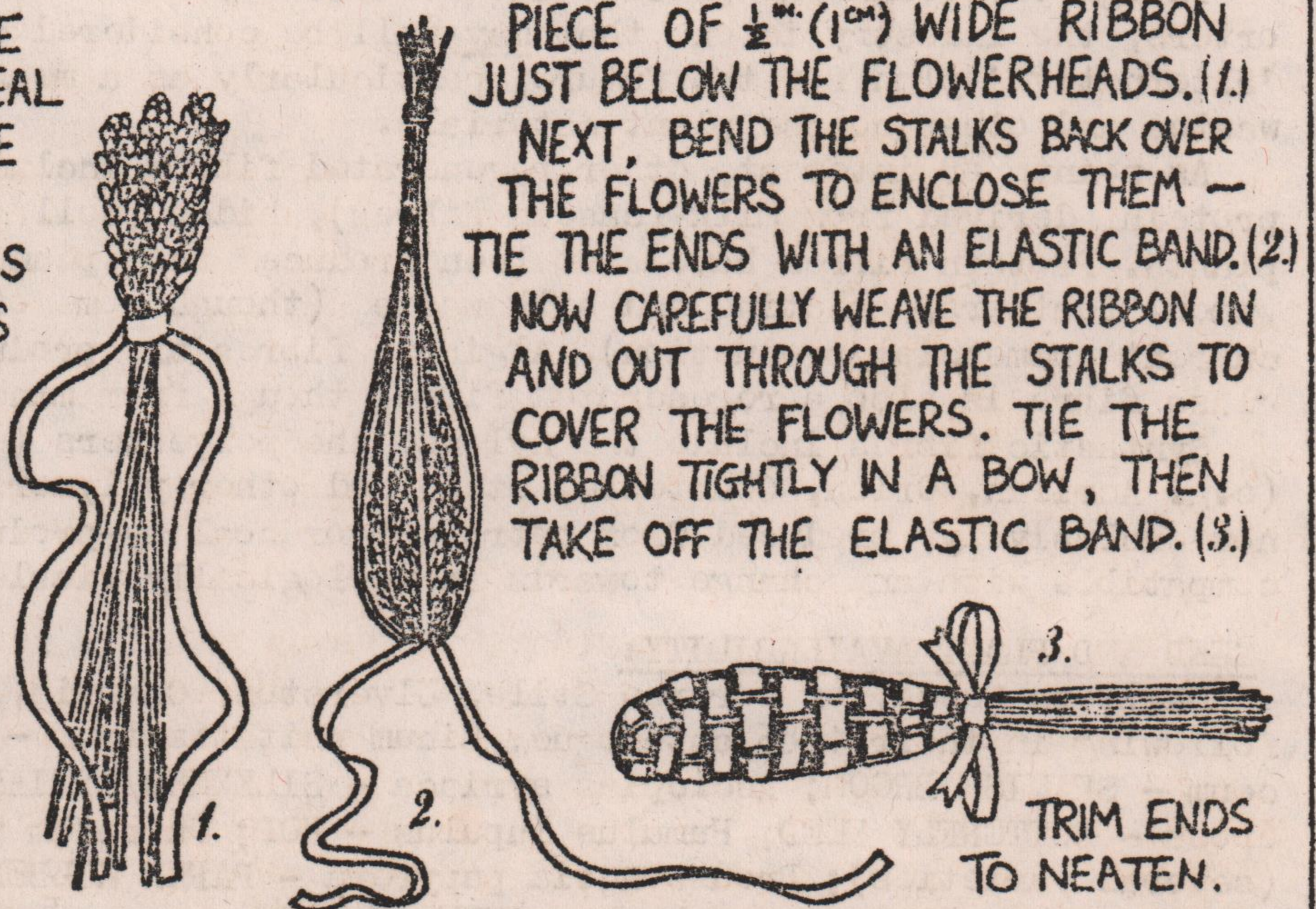
\* \* \* \* \*



# LAVENDER 'RATTLES'

LAVENDER 'RATTLES' ARE EASILY MADE AND ARE IDEAL FOR GIFTS. THEY CAN BE USED AS A SCENTED DECORATION FOR ROOMS OR PUT INTO DRAWERS AND CUPBOARDS WITH CLOTHES TO GIVE THEM A SWEET, FRESH SCENT.

TO MAKE A RATTLE, CUT SEVERAL SPRIGS OF LAVENDER, LEAVING 9" (23cm) OF STALK BENEATH THE FLOWERHEADS. TIE THE LAVENDER INTO A BUNDLE WITH A LONG



PIECE OF 1/2" (1cm) WIDE RIBBON JUST BELOW THE FLOWERHEADS. (1.) NEXT, BEND THE STALKS BACK OVER THE FLOWERS TO ENCLOSE THEM - TIE THE ENDS WITH AN ELASTIC BAND. (2.) NOW CAREFULLY WEAVE THE RIBBON IN AND OUT THROUGH THE STALKS TO COVER THE FLOWERS. TIE THE RIBBON TIGHTLY IN A BOW, THEN TAKE OFF THE ELASTIC BAND. (3.)

TRIM ENDS TO NEATEN.

(Members' advertisements - continued)

I've just been listening to 'On Your Farm' on BBC Radio 4 and what I heard was rather disturbing. It was about a seven hundred acre organic stock farm and it sounded very good in some ways, the animals are well cared for from birth right up to slaughter and their environment was better than on most farms, but just a couple of things bother me. The first is that some vegetarians have taken to eating meat again because organic meat is more humanely produced and tastes better, and the second thing is that organic meat could start a trend back to meat eating which could undo a lot of work towards vegetarianism and veganism.

The organic movement and the vegan-organic movement are fundamentally at odds and the vegan-organic movement is much smaller. However, all is not lost - we have a more watertight case than the organic beef producers and more than just the thought of more profits to keep us going. The organic meat producers want more meat to be eaten, we want none to be eaten. (I'm speaking here for those of us who want to see a vegan world, even if it can never be in our lifetimes.)

If we are to ward off the threat of more (organic) animal farming we will have to get more people established in vegan-organic farming. Wouldn't it be fantastic if those who believe in vegan-organic farming and self-sufficiency and are in some way established would help those who want to get into it. The 'Vegan Volunteers' scheme is a start but it doesn't seem to be helping very many people to come together yet. What might be better, if we could afford to purchase the right property, is a base where vegans can get together to work and learn from each other until they can form groups to buy their own properties. I believe that without some such system of help the vegan-organic movement will not grow anything like rapidly enough to become significant and vegans will remain a tiny minority.

I only have £5,000 saved up so far but I will put it all into setting up a base to help get people into vegan self-sufficiency if others will also contribute towards it. If this is done on a shares basis we will all get our money back, plus a profit, when the property has done its job and is sold off after a few years. Please let me know if you are at all interested in investing £1 or £1,000 or more, any sum is better than none. One person has pledged at least £100 and even sent me part of it already. I'm not asking you to send any money to me, I just want to gauge the interest at this stage. If enough interest is forthcoming among VSSN members then we will have a basis for asking for help from other parts of the vegan movement and even further afield.

It will cost you 12p to let me have your name and address and say that you are interested, 24p if you include a s.a.e. It would be really nice if 50 or more letters dropped on my mat a couple of days after this copy of the VSSN Newsletter drops on yours. Any extra stamps would be appreciated but a post card with a stamp and an address on it would be more than welcome at this stage.

BOB HOWES, Bridge Green House, Gissing Road, Burston, Diss, Norfolk, IP22 3UD.

\* \* \* \* \*

### B A M B O O S

with particular reference to varieties yielding edible shoots

Bamboos are members of the Grass family, Gramineae. They are clump-forming perennials, producing stems that mature to the familiar woody canes - these may be straight, curved, wavy or 'zig-zag' and of various colours and sizes.

There are a large number of varieties suitable for growing in our temperate climate, and they can make very ornamental screening plants and hedges. The canes have many practical uses, both in horticulture and for various crafts. In addition, the young shoots of many varieties can be used as a vegetable - these are produced and harvested in the spring.

The following list briefly outlines those that are especially recommended for their edible shoots:

ARUNDINARIA FASTUOSA is very hardy and a tall, vigorous grower - up to 15ft/4.5m.

ARUNDINARIA SIMONII is hardy and vigorous and may also reach 15ft/4.5m.

CHUSQUEA COULEOU forms dense clumps and is usually about 10ft/3m tall, though may reach 30ft/9m. It differs from most bamboos in having solid rather than hollow stems. It is hardy.

PHYLLOSTACHYS AUREA, as well as producing edible shoots, is cultivated in the Far East for its canes which are used for walking sticks, umbrella handles, etc. It forms large clumps up to 11ft/3.5m in height, and is hardy.

