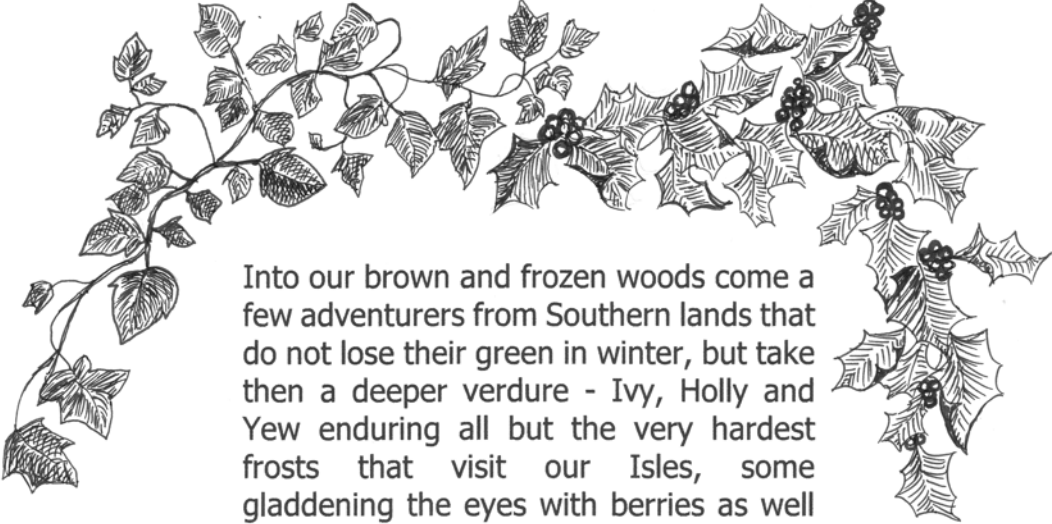




**Somerset
Federation of Gardening Clubs**

Issue LIII

Autumn 2016

A black and white line drawing of ivy and holly branches. The ivy leaves are on the left, and the holly leaves with clusters of berries are on the right. The branches curve across the top of the page.

Into our brown and frozen woods come a few adventurers from Southern lands that do not lose their green in winter, but take then a deeper verdure - Ivy, Holly and Yew enduring all but the very hardest frosts that visit our Isles, some gladdening the eyes with berries as well as verdure.

*William Robinson
The English Flower Garden*

A black and white line drawing of a yew branch with its characteristic needle-like leaves, extending across the bottom of the page.

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Introduction

And the locusts went up over all the lands of Egypt: very grievous were they; and they did eat every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees.

Exodus chapter 10

In 1545 the small village of Saint Julien in the Rhone Alps was disturbed by a plague of weevils which attacked the vineyards and threatened the livelihood of the valley. The villagers felt that Nature and who was responsible had taken a step too far. So, they took their case against the weevil infestation and lodged a complaint before the ecclesiastical court.

The State assigned to the weevils' defence a procurator and advocate. In mediaeval times these things were taken seriously. The presiding Judge was one François Bonnard and he, too, in his wisdom, took things seriously. Having listened to all the arguments he judged the weevils' guilt as 'theologically inappropriate' as God had ordered all creatures on earth to partake of the bounties thereof. He deemed it more fitting that the villages implore the Almighty to pardon their sins and seek God's mercy. They were expected to do this by processing around the vineyards with prayers and penance. This was done and the result was that the infestation came to an end. The weevils departed (or died, since they are not long-lived). The villagers were placated, the judge vindicated and ecclesiastical judgements strengthened.

There is no suggestion here to advocate a more theological approach to pests such as blackfly and gastropods. Personally, I like to keep my options open and we do spend an awful lot of time on our knees. So it's worth bearing in mind - particularly this year when the slugs and snails have cottoned onto the Olympic year in a big way. Nothing was sacred, no barriers too high to pole-vault over, no moat too wide to withstand the medley relay. Even toughies like eupatorium, salvias and spartium succumbed; all kinds of verdure as Robinson used to call it. Softies never stood a chance: lobelia cardinalis – gone in the night. Mind you, there are some survivors and real heroes. Helianthemum 'Lemon Queen' is one. I shall split and plant that everywhere next year. That or I shall seek a good solicitor.

Pip Harwood

Take the poor old gardener who's plagued by blackfly. He'll spend a small fortune on sprays and things when all he need do is take a little soil from the bottom of the plant and sprinkle it like powder all over those blessed blackfly. That'll finish them off..... it gets into their teeth you know!

*Fred Streater - Head Gardener 1877 to 1975
Broadcaster and former Head Gardner
Petworth House*

Chairman's Corner Autumn 2016



I write this just days before I leave to visit my brother in Australia, when I return, autumn will truly be upon us but I am sure like me, you will look back on these past few months as being one of the sunniest, warm (at times very hot) summers we have had for a long time. A local farmer told me that the ground in August here in our part of the Quantocks, was as dry as it was in 1976, the year of the drought! Today, it is raining, and very welcome it is too, something not often admitted, but a necessity of life for

us and for our fellow wildlife. I have written before that we consider our garden a safe haven for all these little creatures, pesty of course they can be, but on the whole, it's surprising how everything has found a balance, 'though my neighbours with badgers and deer trespassing in their gardens, would not agree with me! Somehow they (the animals, not the neighbours!) have left us alone, and I think it has something to do with hedging grown of holly and barricading holes in fences to try and keep them out as much as possible, who knows! Slugs, snails, shrews, mice, even water rats and grass snakes (including an adder) tempt their luck and of course with young to feed, like us they have to survive, but annoyingly not necessarily by eating my dahlias and for the first time ever, Mo's runner beans never got past the 2ft stage, nibbled and desecrated to say the least!

Talking of little animals and reptiles, I read somewhere that one should turn their compost about three or four times a year. I made the mistake of following that advice several years ago and whilst doing so, disturbed grass snakes eggs and numerous slow worms. I am told that the best time to turn the compost (if at all) is during high summer when the young have hatched and that the slow worms are out and about in the garden! However, I haven't turned ours for about three years, I just keep piling it on and next year, I will lift and turn it all into a vacant area, when hopefully I cause the minimum of disturbance to anything living in there.

Now I am off to 'down under' where the animals and wildlife there are a little more foreboding, snakes are bigger and insects much more dangerous, and where my brother lives, very difficult to garden 'prettily' at all...but I will be kept busy mowing acreage, lopping trees and bushes...sounds like a busman's holiday!

My good wishes to you all, and that you have a very happy festive season.
God Bless

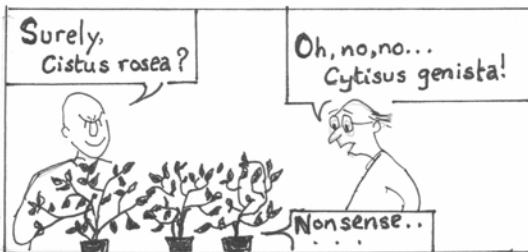
Erl

Musa flowered for the first time

Part of our tropical garden theme at Hooper's Holding has been the planting of hardy bananas *Musa basjoo*, which we have always regarded as useful giant foliage plants. We now have six well established clumps which survive our winters with or without fleece protection. This year however for the first time no less than three of them have flowered. No one could describe the flower as thing of beauty but it is one of infinite curiosity. A succession of large leathery bracts open to reveal rows of off white flowers which fade and fall off to reveal bunches of inedible mini-bananas, which gradually increase in size. The first row are now about 3 cm long and new rows are still appearing. The flowers come from the apex of the stem, so presumably that is its swan song and the subsidiary stems will take over the growth of the plant.

Since we are members of the Hardy Plant Society we decided to sacrifice one "hand" to put in the "Flower of the Month" competition. I picked it overnight, ready for the Saturday morning meeting at West Monkton, only to find that the attached leaves had withered to a tattered mess by the morning. I lost my nerve and took a nigh on perfect stem of *Hedychium coronarium* for the competition and just took along the scruffy looking banana to exhibit "as of interest". Unobserved by me, my husband Ken picked it up and entered it under his name (we are only allowed one exhibit per member). To our embarrassment, the visiting speaker who is always invited to judge the exhibits, awarded first prize to the *Hedychium* and second to the scruffy banana. So the family Spencer-Mills scored five points and loud mutterings of "Cheat!"

Lyn Spencer-Mills





If I was stranded on a desert island the plants I could not do without would have to be edible. My father's one piece of advice to my new husband all those years ago was "Don't worry; anyone as fond of food as my daughter will soon learn to cook!" I might not have made a great cook, but I take great pleasure in growing stuff on my vegetable patch.

My first choice would be asparagus. I would miss dipping it into melted butter, but it would grow really well in sandy soil with liberal amounts of seaweed compost, as would my second choice the Jersey Royal potato. It's another vegetable improved only with the addition of a little butter. They are both plants I could keep going if I was careful and not too greedy.

Third choice would be the deservedly popular Gardeners Delight tomato, which my children used to pinch and eat like sweets. I could keep that going from its own seeds.

Fourth place would go to sweetcorn. I have grown a variety called Lark for several years now and it is early enough to avoid being cross-pollinated with fodder maize, not that fields of maize would be a problem on a desert island. Hopefully I would not have to share my crop with squirrels as I do at home. I could eat my sweetcorn raw, or roast them over an open fire - what bliss!

I could not imagine life without beans so my fifth choice would be a climbing French bean. I have grown a new variety called Cobra for the last couple of years and it has kept going all summer. I know it would be a big mistake to pick a hybrid especially if I am not rescued after the first year, but I do like this one.

My sixth choice is sweet potato on the principle that anything closely related to bindweed is bound to thrive. I grow a variety called Beauregard in the soil between the tomatoes in my greenhouse, where it forms a ground cover. In a good year it produces blue flowers similar to a morning glory (ok blue bindweed). It has lovely sweet orange flesh which would cook beautifully in the glowing embers of the camp fire.

A member of the onion family is in my view essential so number seven is the shallot Jermor. It keeps well, tastes good and grows easily from offsets.

Finally and best of all I would need a tree to shade me from the sun in the heat of the day. Number eight, the very best member of the plum family in my opinion, has to be the greengage.

My luxury has to be my potting shed even if I'm not allowed its contents. We found it buried in brambles and blackthorn when we first moved into our house 23 years ago. It has been patched up many times and I am very fond of it.

Sally Hawkes

The Morns Are Meeker Than They Were



"The morns are meeker than they were,
The nuts are getting brown;
The berry's cheek is plumper,
The rose is out of town.
The maple wears a gayer scarf,
The field a scarlet gown.
Lest I should be old-fashioned,
I'll put a trinket on."

Emily Dickinson



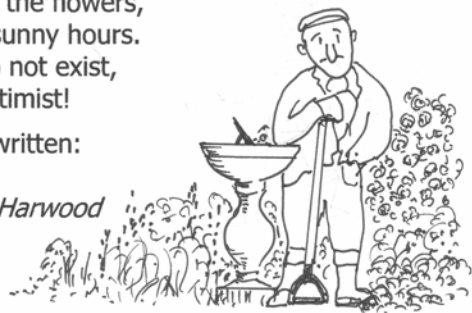
Inside a second-hand book I bought the other day was a pretty bookmark with the following inscription:

The Gardener

Serene he stands amid the flowers,
And only counts life's sunny hours.
For him, dull days so not exist,
Evermore the optimist!

On the back of the bookmark someone had written:
'I thought this referred to a Sundial.'

Pip Harwood



The Making of Midney Gardens

Started by Dave and Alison in 2009, Midney Gardens has been open to the public for five years and will be opening as an RHS Partner Garden in 2017 – quite an achievement in just eight years – but what was it like at the beginning of the project?

There were times when I thought we must be crazy to take on something so challenging, especially when the weather was against us, but then I'm very much an amateur gardener....what did I know! I drew confidence from the knowledge that Dave, who has gardened all his life, knew what he was doing. (Perhaps it was just as well he didn't tell me then that there were days when he had the same thought!)

We moved to Midney in the spring of 2009 to make a garden which we could open to the public. We started propagating and selling plants almost straight away to bring in some money which we knew we'd need later. But much of the 1 1/2 acre plot was under car-park and weeds, so the main project had to wait. There was a little garden around the cottage which we enjoyed through that hot summer, before putting all except the largest trees and shrubs into potsthereby making a start on the garden.

In November a friend came with a digger and started the major earth moving process.....beginning to re-shape the garden. Inspired by the vision of what we wanted to create Dave and I then continued the work to refine the shape by relaying turf, raking soil, weeding and preparing paths. We just managed to get the layout in place before the start of the cold weather. Then it froze – you probably remember that winter – with temperatures falling to -13 degrees here in Somerset!

And the winter continued on and on – it wasn't really until about April 2010 that we started planting – and then it rained and the soil was sticky – you know the thing – 2-tonne boots and mud getting everywhere. That was when I had what I call my "Margot" moments! But we did start planting and it was hugely exciting. Looking back at the photographs it looked like nothing really – little plants dotted about here and there. But we could see we had started something.

Dave had designed what was to be the plants-man's garden around the cottage. He drew inspiration from Gertrude Jekyll and Sylvia Crowe and at the same time added something of his own unique style. He loosely divided the garden into sections which were primarily colour themed. By creating circular areas of lawn he was able to maximise the border space and to connect the spaces with curving paths which all help to create a feeling of space and flow.

At that stage we worked only on the first half of the garden because of course it all needed to be weeded and maintained as we went along. We planted vegetables in rows that spring – creating a temporary plot to keep us in greens

through that first season – it was the only time we've planted things in rows here!

Through 2010 and the following year, we continued in this mode..... gradually extending the areas of the garden by clearing, shaping and planting. Little by little, we 'reclaimed' land that had been used as a small quarry, a saw-mill, and a tar pit to create garden. We moved concrete and gravel, even dug some of the vegetable garden with a pick-axe and many nights we hurt as we climbed the stairs to go to bed. But we were so encouraged as things started to grow! And once established things did seem to grow quickly – even by summer 2011 we felt that we were "in the garden".

In the spring of 2012 we opened for the NGS and then in June we opened to the public, having converted one of the outbuildings into a little tearoom. There was still about half the garden to develop but that came gradually over the next three years as we added the vegetable garden, woodland walk, wildlife pond and undercover gardens from round the world. As the plants grew they became further sources of plants for the plant nursery enabling us to sell most of the range of herbaceous plants which grow in the garden.

Slowly we are getting known and the people who come, generally seem to love the garden. By reflecting shapes and colours of the surrounding landscape and old buildings Dave has created a garden which seems to belong in its landscape and this enhances the sense of peacefulness in it. The garden is different though – his belief that the rules of gardening are there to be broken – has given rise to some original (sometimes quirky ideas) and some unconventional planting schemes. The garden is full of planting ideas, surprises and places to sit to enjoy the views. And of course – there's cake in the tearoom!

Now in the winter of 2016 we will be replanting some of those original borders in the plants-man's garden – after their first six years they need a bit of a revamp! Rest assured that the style of the garden will remain the same and Dave will continue to work his magic with the vistas and planting combinations.

If you'd like to visit in 2017 – Midney Gardens is open to the public Thursdays - Sundays (13:00-17:00) from 13th April to 1st October and open for groups in the mornings or on other days (Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays). For 2017 group bookings made before 31st December, 2016 prices apply: £7.50 pp to include entrance, plus tea/coffee and homemade cake or £8:00 pp to include entrance, plus cream teas. Groups numbers, minimum 10, maximum 36. Please pre-book by email davidandalison@midneygardens.co.uk or phone 01458-274250. Further information: www.midneygardens.co.uk

Website News

WWW.SOMERSETFEDERATIONOFGARDENINGCLUBS.ORG.UK



Have you had a look at the Federation Website recently as it is full of information that may help you - notices of upcoming special club events, list of member clubs and their contact details, insurance details, past Newsletters, useful forms, photos of members gardens and contact details of all your committeeand more - well worth a visit or two or three....

We have said this before but will say it again - the website is yours for you to use - if you have something you would like broadcast then get in touch with the webmaster for it to be included. I always try to acknowledge receipt so if you do not get a reply within a few days of transmission then get in touch. Items for the website should be for special occasions and not just normal monthly meetings (some monthly meetings are special events and can be included). More photos of your gardens would be nice - everyone likes to see a good garden and most people are proud of their gardens and like to show them.

Items submitted can be in almost any form, Word, PDF, JPEG, Open Office, Apple Pages etc. Please do not submit items for publication in HTML format even if your programmes allow.

David

webmaster@somersetfederationofgardeningclubs.org.uk

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2017

23rd May 2017

by kind invitation of

WEST COKER GARDENING CLUB

Speaker : Martin Young of Weymouth on *Nectar Plants*



GOD AND ST. FRANCIS DISCUSSING LAWNS

GOD: Francis, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistle and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect, no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colours by now. But all I see are these green rectangles.

ST. FRANCIS: It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

GOD: Grass? But it's so boring. It's not colourful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

GOD: The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy.

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it-sometimes twice a week.

GOD: They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?

ST. FRANCIS: Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

GOD: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

ST. FRANCIS: No Sir. Just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

GOD: Now let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

ST. FRANCIS: Yes, Sir.

GOD: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

ST. FRANCIS: You aren't going to believe this Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

GOD: What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground

and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves form compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

ST. FRANCIS: You better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

GOD: No. What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter and to keep the soil moist and loose?

ST. FRANCIS: After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

GOD: And where do they get this mulch?

ST. FRANCIS: They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch.

GOD: Enough. I don't want to think about this anymore. St. Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have they scheduled for us tonight?"

ST. CATHERINE: "Dumb and Dumber", Lord. It's a really stupid movie about.....

GOD: Never mind, I think I just heard the whole story from St. Francis.



Public Liability Insurance

There have been a few instances recently where some clubs have not taken out public liability insurance, as they were under the impression that they were covered by their Village Hall insurance.

In most cases Village Hall public liability insurance only covers any claim for accidents or injuries where it can be proven there was neglect on their part, say for instance a chair collapsing or by a faulty electrical appliance.

In these circumstances therefore it is necessary for the Garden Club to provide public liability insurance in order to protect their members from any claim which may be made against them or the club where negligence on their part can be proven.

This may not be correct in all cases, but if any club believes it is covered by their Village Hall insurance it would be worthwhile checking with The Village Hall Committee.

John Dunster - Treasurer

IMPORTANT NOTICE/UPDATES OF CLUBS DETAILS!

To ensure that all clubs/societies receive correspondence from the Federation, it is very important that we have notice of any change in details i.e. contact name address/'phone number/email address.



We have on numerous occasions been approached by member clubs, that they have not received any documentation from us, only to discover when checking our records, we have not been advised of any amendments to their circumstances! One cannot rely solely on a crystal ball, or tarot cards or reaching out into the wide unknown for clues, unless we have the correct information!! These days, technology is so much more advanced..!! So ***please***, any alterations - do let us have them, in order that we can update the data base to ensure that you receive all communication efficiently!

Please contact the secretary Philip Harwood 01749 679182



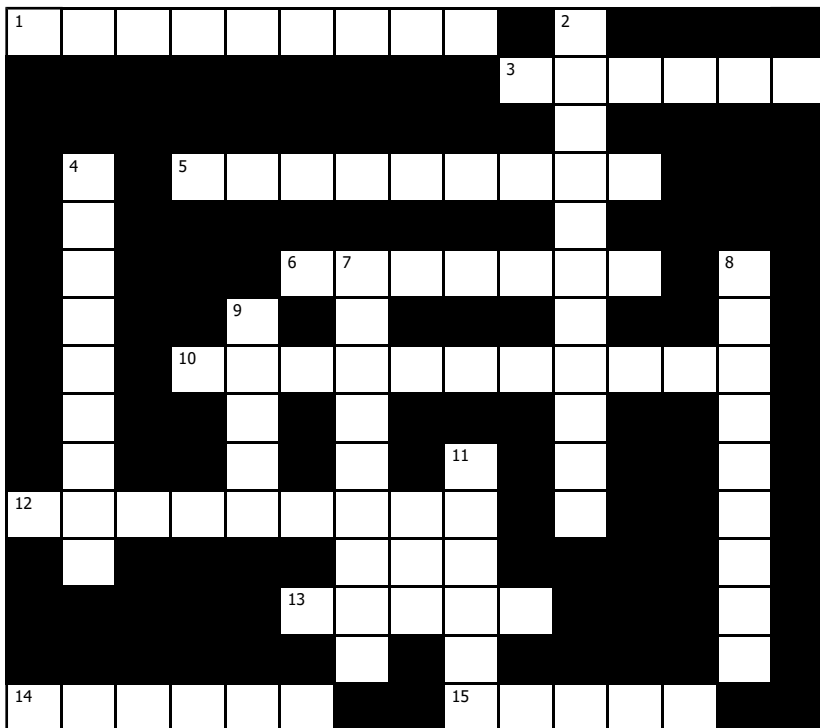
Or.....email:

enquiries@somersetfederationofgardeningclubs.org.uk



Thank you, Mo (Plomgren)
Data Base Secretary

Gardening Crossword



Across

1. Quota
3. Fruit thought of as a vegetable
5. Swimming stroke
6. Really coming down
10. Creating
12. Painting genre
13. Soil enricher
14. Christmas time
15. Garden crawlers

Down

2. What bees help to accomplish
4. Plant renewing itself yearly
7. Shoots for dinner
8. Squash for one
9. Green stuff
11. Deals in stolen goods

Answers, if required, will be published on the Federation website in December

Gardening Crossword - Spring 2016 Answers

Across: 2. Rod 5. Cowslip 7. Eggplant 11. Marigold 12. Lizzie
 13. Carnation 14. Dense 15. Honesty 16. Stock 17. Golden

Down: 1. Busy 3. Osier 4. Potato 6. Wallflower 8. Primrose
 9. Pasture 10. Pink



My Wife the Gardener



She dug the plot on Monday – the soil was rich and fine,
She forgot to thaw out dinner – *so we went out to dine...*

She planted roses Tuesday – she says they are a must,
They really are quite lovely *but she quite forgot to dust...*

On Wednesday it was daisies – they opened up with sun,
All whites and pinks and yellows – *but the laundry wasn't done...*

The poppies came on Thursday - a bright and cherry red,
I guess she really was engrossed – *she never made the bed...*

It was violets on Friday – in colours she adores,
It never bothered her at all – *all crumbs upon the floors...*

I hired a maid on Saturday – my week is now complete,
My wife can garden all she wants – *the house will still be neat!*

It's nearly lunchtime Sunday – and I cannot find the maid,
Oh no! I don't believe it! *She's out there WITH A SPADE!*

Author Unknown

GARDENING DEFINITIONS

Gardener - A person who calls a spade a spade until they trip over one.

Pruning - One method of killing plants.

Hoeing - A method of killing plants whilst distributing stones.

Compost Heap - The only thing growing.

Bulb - A potential flower buried in Autumn, never to be seen again.

Broad bean - A vegetable grown as food for Black Flies.

Annual - An unwanted plant that insists on re-seeding itself year after year.

Perennial - Should appear each year but doesn't.

Weeds - Main crop plants.

Allotment - Gardening area used for chatting.

Digging - Wife's nagging about the garden.

Rockery - Left over builders rubble.

Manure Heap - A gathering place for flies.

Shed - A building used to store junk & sit down in, thus avoiding working.

New Allotment – More Backache!

In September 2012, upon moving to Somerset, not only did I acquire a new garden but also made sure I put my name on the village allotments waiting list. I didn't have long to wait, went straight away to my new plot to see what sort of state it was in, saw, swallowed hard and handed over my rent. The allotments here are on a north-facing – but surprisingly sunny – hillside, which is usually quite breezy but has wonderful views over several miles of the River Parrett valley. With an attachment on his tractor and for a very modest fee, a friendly farmer cut down the thigh high crop of couch grass, weeds, docks and thistles which came with my newly acquired allotment. I let it all dry off, had two or three evenings of splendid bonfires, after which I covered the entire area with thick black baling plastic and left the whole thing for 9 months. By February 2014 the black plastic had done its light-preventing work, some 90% or so of the earlier weeds had completely died and the lovely, light, friable, somewhat alkaline soil was ready to dig. The digging was pretty hard work (well, it always is) as the soil was quite compacted – probably from the tractor – but it was nothing like as bad as it would have been in the heavy London clay I had left behind on my two Surrey allotments. In 2014 I managed to bring almost half of the plot into successful cultivation, and for the past two years have cropped from the whole area. I have also planted roughly a quarter of the plot with permanent soft fruit bushes and three fruit trees. At the outset my plan was to grow fruit and vegetables without resorting to chemicals of any sort and, so far, I have managed to stick to this plan.

As I write, my 2017 seeds orders have started to arrive and this has prompted me to reflect on last year's efforts to be nearly self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables. First, the failures and disappointments: the broad beans cropped well to start with but then succumbed badly to rust and gave up. Similarly with the garlic, but I dug the bulbs up early while they were still smaller than I would have liked, but I am eating my way through a reasonable crop. Many of the strawberries went mouldy on the plants in the unusually cold, wet June weather and my wonderful crop of well over 50 sweetcorn cobs was completely trashed by a badger even while they were still unripe. For the first time ever I seemed unable to get carrot seeds to germinate and, from three separate sowings, ended up with precisely eleven carrots. But it's the successes that stay in the mind – and stock the freezer! I ate two plums and three greengages from the still very immature trees. The peas and calabrese were prolific, early and, grown under Enviromesh (as are many of my crops), completely bug free. The autumn raspberries were huge and delicious and there were plenty of them. I picked pounds and pounds of climbing French beans and the twelve pumpkins I grew for my grandchildren for Halloween were very well received and carved. Successive sowings of two different sorts of lettuce provided me with lunchtime salads from June to November and, at the end, slowly ripening in a large box in

the kitchen, my tomato crop lasted until the first few days of December. Other root crops, brassicas and leeks have provided me with fresh vegetables and soups throughout the winter and there has been enough of everything to fill three freezers as well!

So, what shall I do differently this year? I'll try talking more encouragingly to the carrot seeds. I'll start earlier in the season with animal and bird exclusion projects: a plastic netting cage round the strawberries and wire netting, sunk into the ground, round the sweetcorn. I've already dug up about half of the summer fruiting raspberries and shall concentrate more on growing an autumn fruiting variety. I'll research the causes and non-chemical cures for rust. I'll try to minimise allotmentee's backache by pacing myself better with shorter, more frequent bouts of digging, watering and weeding. But there's one thing that won't change and that is the pleasure and delight I derive from growing much of my own food.

Vee Cockerill



The Snowdrop King of Shepton Mallet James Allen 1832 – 1903

Highfield House in Shepton Mallet used to be the home of James Allen, a leading authority on snowdrops during the nineteenth century. More prosaically nowadays it houses Mendip District Council. Allen was a great breeder of the genus *Galanthus* producing over a hundred new varieties, in particular Omega, a late flowerer, Balloon and Crimean G. *Plicanthus maximus*.

In his honour under the guiding force of Shepton Mallet Horticultural Society and others, a snowdrop festival is being organised for next year. In particular the local landmark of the Rock Flock roundabout with its sculptured sheep is being planted with thousands of snowdrops. The Secretary of S.M.H.S., Angela Morley admits that this is only the start as snowdrops are reputed best planted in the green. But a start has been made and the town of Shepton Mallet will be drenched in snowdrops next February and much changed for the future. A town for Galanthophiles!

Pip Harwood

Final Cuttings

Aside from the usual small plagues of garden nuisances this summer our plot in suburban Wells had a visitation of about a score of Oil Beetles – *Meloe proscarabaeus* – an insect I had never encountered before. I kept coming across these long lumbering black beetles all over the garden clambering across the lawn or floundering in the borders, mostly females looking for a suitable site to deposit their huge mass of eggs. The life history of these Beetles is both peculiar and precarious.



Once hatched from the nest on the ground the minute larva proceed to climb upwards to reach a flower head, preferably one which will be visited by a particular species solitary bee. Now the larva seizes its chance sticking itself onto the hairy back of the bee. It is then carried back to the bee's nest where it starts to predate both food store and larva of its hosts, emerging when transformed into beetle. The major problem is obvious. Like the hazards involved in catching any bus or train, the larva is faced with the chance of hitching a lift on the wrong bee and being carted off to oblivion. So the whole thing is pretty much a hit and miss affair.

Rather like sending out the newsletter! If you think it's worth reading, pass it on or email it out to all the all the members of your club whether they want it or not. And do, please fill in the events form with the dates and venues of your Flower Shows, special events or Village Gardens open if you are involved. Anything from April onwards apart from your usual to a program. After all, you did vote in favour of the Calendar at the lovely AGM in Martock.

And another thing; use the website. It's yours, so stick notes to the noticeboard and post pictures of your garden on the relevant site. It will be something for the rest of us to look at on the long Winter Nights.

During The past year we have said goodbye to a number of clubs, some who have folded after many years; among them, Taunton Gardens, Seend and District, Winford Amateur Gardeners, Dowlish Wake festival, Shapwick G.C., Sydenham and Bower Manor Show and Combe Bissett and Homington.

On the other hand, we welcome or welcome back in some cases, Nynehead, Wellow, Merriott, Burnham on Sea, U3A Gardening Group, East Coker Flower Soc. and Corsham Gardeners Society. We wish them all well.

A highlight of the year was the thoroughly enjoyable evening at Martock who hosted and entertained us for our General Meeting. The splendid event was capped off by West Coker Gardening Club's kind invitation to host the 2017 AGM. Make that a date in your diary.

Lastly, or nearly lastly, my thanks to David Talling, who not only looks after the website but makes sense and order of all the articles for the newsletter. And thank you, too, all those who have contributed. Keep the snippets coming.

And finally, your Committee extends to all Federation members good wishes for Christmas and hopes for a productive and fertile 2017.

Pip Harwood

Herewith a couple of cosy mid-winter thoughts from the nineteenth century.

From the latter weeks of October to Christmas - eve, therefore, is the period during which happiness is in season, which in my judgement, enters the room with the tea tray.



Thomas de Quincy 1785 - 1859



.....and the streets are comparatively silent; and the wind rises and falls in moanings; and the fire burns blue and crackles; and an easy-chair with your feet by it on a stool, the lamp or candles a little behind you, an book just opened where you left off, is a bit of heaven upon ea



Leigh Hunt 1784 - 1859



Now here's the weather forecast.....

Winter. If the latter end of October and beginning of November be for the most part warm and rainy, then January and February are likely to be frosty and cols, except after a very dry summer.

The Shepherd of Banbury's Rules 1670

As a seasonal bonus the new edition of the Speakers & Judges Register will be with you shortly.