

CHEMICALS IN THE GARDEN

The most important item in cultivating flowers, fruit and vegetables is the soil in which they are grown. But soil is very complex. It is no good adding more and more chemical nutrients and expecting the vegetation to thrive. Fungi and bacteria in the soil are of enormous importance, as are living and dead organic matter. The right combination of natural fertilizers (compost, manure ect) will hold and help the disbursement of nutrients without allowing them to be washed away, and they will also enliven and improve the texture of the soil. Fertilizers and pesticides applied to gardens and allotments eventually end up in streams and rivers. Pesticides and nitrates are serious contaminators of our drinking water. As more potent chemical fertilizers and pesticides come onto the market it becomes easier to find the so-called remedies for all gardening problems in bottles and tins. But what are these remedies doing to the soil and the plants we grow? It has been proved that when we spray a plant - whether with pesticide, fungicide or nutrition - 80% of the spray either misses the plant or falls in droplets into the soil. The Association of Public Analysts (Annual Report 1985) reported that one quarter of the foods available in this country contain pesticide residues. Pesticides and herbicides applied to kill one insect or plant (including weeds), can rarely be prevented from harming other insects or plants. For example earth worms eat the poisonous soil and are killed with a knock-on effect on soil

fertility. Similarly bees can be killed, bees which are needed to pollinate our Suburb flowers, fruit and vegetables. Slug pellets may kill slugs, but the thrushes which eat the poisoned slugs may also die.

Ten years ago Organic gardening or farming was practically unheard of. Now the need for a return to the more natural methods of growing, whereby the cultivation methods maintain the quality of the soil, are repeatedly and urgently being called for.

As a country which imports 50% of its foodstuffs, it is not surprising that on a national scale grants and subsidies are paid for the increased use of fertilizers and pesticides. The only way to discourage this is to change our own methods of gardening (away from chemicals), and by purchasing, and thus creating a demand for, organically grown foodstuffs, (using natural fertilizers and natural pesticides). It is easily proved in one's own home that organically grown food keeps better, contains less water, and that growing slowly, without unnatural chemical stimulants, it tastes better and has a higher nutrient content.

Individual choices include choosing resistant varieties of plants (Rust resistant antirrhums or parsnips), finding a wilt resistant rose or Michaelmas daisy etc. Make a few enquiries about biological control of insects (eg, encouraging lady-birds which devour aphids). Finally, try doubling the size of your compost heap and return to natural gardening.

CLAYFINGERS

ENVIRONMENT WEEK ON CAMERA



Roy Schutz, Mr Benson, Veronica Soskin, Mayor Dot Benson, Peter Loyd and RA Chairman Eileen Whelan before a Litter Free Zones reception.



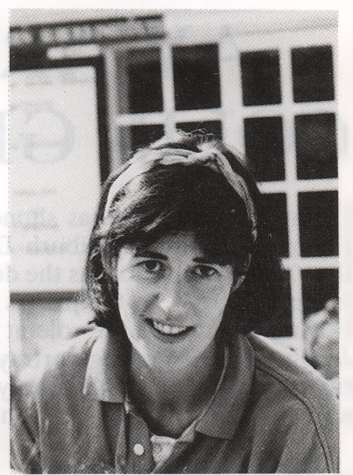
The big Bigwood Clean-up brought out lots of residents and several skips-full of junk.



Chris Kellerman.



Roy Schutz gets everywhere.



Liz Tarn at the Mad Hatters Tea Party and winners of the hat competition.



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Rupert Terry who chaired the Environment Week committee and lent a hand on the day.



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