



Your Living Environment

Vol. II No. 7

July, 1971

GOOD! -- YOU'RE STARTING A GARDEN!!

"As the result of a recent speech in Spokesman's Club a number of people have secured garden plots [Council-owned land that is rented out for vegetable production at a nominal sum to interested families living in Britain's congested cities]. And on this land they are commencing to grow some of their own food."

This information was communicated to the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Research at Ambassador College, Bricket Wood, a few days ago. It was some of the most refreshing news in a long time! Why?

Because the average family in our sophisticated Western World has become so specialized that it has lost all the crafts and simple skills which were common in the not so distant past. Today the mass of Western humanity has even lost the knowledge of how to produce its own food!

Most of us would literally starve to death if confronted with the problem of feeding ourselves. Not because we lack the land on which to do it -- but simply because WE NO LONGER KNOW HOW!!

Knowing that many in God's Church ARE interested in growing some of their own food, (as indicated in the above quote) -- this issue of Your Living Environment brings you some helpful points on family-vegetable production.

First let us have a look at some of the pitfalls to be avoided.

If Satan has his counterfeits -- his churches, his priests, his healing, his art, his music, etc; then why not his AGRICULTURE? If he has his methods of food production, then why not his priests of agriculture, expounding false methods of soil, plant and animal management.

AMBASSADOR COLLEGE, AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT, RESEARCH NEWS

You know that Satan aims to bring man to a physical self-destruction; to end our physical existence before God turns man into Spirit. Should we not therefore understand by what laws we continue to live, in this physical environment?

Satan has blinded this world on environmental-management, just as he has blinded it on the very god it worships. And as in religion, so in agriculture -- he has something for everyone. You can carelessly partake of chemically grown foodless-food. Now you can get synthetic food. Alternatively you may become a fanatic about food. There must be at least 100 variants of the latter -- some even linked with "religion" -- should one desire it! Satan has something for everyone.

Man can even practise a form of food production that looks indistinguishable from God's way. It is called "Organic Farming". Does that surprise you? It probably DOES, but it shouldn't. Is Satan not smart enough to counterfeit God's right way in infinite detail? Yes he is and that includes agriculture!!

In the past we have been exposed only to Satan's system and we know that it takes years of teaching and exposure to God's way through The Bible, to throw off the influence of this world. But in food production and environmental management most of us act as though we can pick up a few rough guidelines more or less by accident! IMPOSSIBLE!!

Why -- even those working directly in God's Agriculture Programme take years to completely throw off in-grained false concepts, so where does this leave you?

The transforming of one's mind in this aspect of life is just as much a miracle as understanding the right principles of child-rearing, marriage, finance or those showing which is God's true Church. Though the process of change is a miracle, it requires teaching, study and time to learn God's way in Agriculture! But most of all it requires the attitude indicated in Matt. 18:3.

Beginning God's Way

Most of our initial efforts to produce food God's way will be full of commendable zeal, but if that zeal is misguided it will surely be followed by disillusionment! Our opening quotation could have included a fact that tiro gardeners are launching themselves into vegetable production on 90 x 30 feet strips of ground!! Perhaps we can save you much discouragement by showing you how to go about it on a much smaller scale.

A garden of that size will feed not just your family, but also half of the neighbourhood! Better to see the refreshing

results of a small well-managed area, than become a backache-ridden slave to a large wilderness.

A Council allotment of 90 x 30 is probably five times bigger than the beginner should start with. That raises the question -- "What do I do with the remainder?" That is not only (as they say) a good question, but in its answer lies the whole key to your success. And not only your success as a gardener, but your success in learning how to correctly manage a tiny portion of this planet. Come to think of it, that's quite a challenge. If you and your family can properly manage a plot 90 x 30, then you're qualified to manage a far larger area! (Think how many less deserts and slums there would be, if every man had to meet this qualification early in life.)

Beginning a garden is like painting your house, or re-decorating a room -- everyone makes the same impulsive mistake. Has there ever been an amateur house-painter with the strength of character to keep his brush out of the paint-pot until AFTER he has done the work of preparation? Some experienced men perhaps, but never a beginner!!

"New-born" gardeners are of the same breed! We always want to charge in and get on with the "brush work" -- in other words, get something planted so we can see it growing. And what is the result? In house decoration, the new paint flakes off in six months, we blame the brand of paint and find that the second time around is twice as hard! In gardening -- bugs and disease take over, we blame the system (we didn't follow) and have to start again by building fertility on poverty-stricken soil!

How do these beginners get started? We have recently heard of some not-so-robust types, moving-in on their 90' strip of weeds with a little garden-fork and a lot of enthusiasm. Digging your way on a 30' front, through 90' of couch-infested clay, is no picnic! One can hardly imagine a less favourable introduction to home-grown vegetable production. And chances of success may be equally unfavourable!

Bashing each clod to death with the back of the fork and shaking the weeds free, is really going-at-it the hard way!

Some Broad Principles

You have been treated to a sample of the methods by which many people go forth to do battle with "nature". (Knowing that nature is a euphemism for God, is it less than symbolic that men arm themselves with a three-pronged fork for this battle?) Well that's just the misguided system of this world, but we hope that we have something better to offer God's people. Our efforts should be aimed at working WITH God's Creation and His laws governing food production. That's what this Department is all about.

We can help you to a new understanding and knowledge of environmental management that will produce real satisfaction and rich rewards. However, regardless of the teaching, instruction and information you receive -- you will need much practical experience. Don't blame the system when success does not come first time! Don't quit and don't "cut-and-run" for the cover of familiar old bad habits when your confidence is tried.

Vegetable production is a form of environmental management!! And that should be our No.1 goal in gardening. Too many are interested only in what they can GET from the soil. They GIVE little or nothing back!

Don't become a soil-robber. If you do, you will be in a battle from start to finish. Cultivation is difficult, weeds become more persistent, moisture is "never" right, disease threatens constantly and pests multiply in profusion!

On the other hand, building soil-fertility, then guarding it and managing it, calls for real skill, but the results are worthwhile and bring great satisfaction.

Under such a benevolent eye, abundant and nutritious produce is an automatic blessing. That such rich rewards come easily, must seem quite unfair to "chemical" gardeners who find themselves fighting -- soil-structure, drainage, weeds, disease and "bugs". Remember also that they end up producing NUTRITIONAL JUNK!!

No one seeks a fight against the ravages of bugs and disease, or a struggle to either retain or get rid of moisture, or a battle against unyielding clay and persistent weeds. Yet it seems ironic that man will always gravitate away from the very system that will bring him everything he most desires.

Key To Success

You will have gathered by now that SOIL PREPARATION is the great key to your success in any garden venture. This subject can't be covered in the space we have available, but here are a number of brief points for your consideration:

- A. Don't waste your time trying to grow vegetables in low-fertility soil! Raising the level of fertility should be your first task if you want to establish a successful garden. This point is so vital that many would be wise to continue buying vegetables -- for a year, if necessary, while you take care of the problem!

Generally there will have been some build-up of soil fertility from the plant and root residues on your plot of land. However, if you insist on getting a small area started quickly, a soil test will give you an idea of the condition of your ground.

An enquiry at any office of the Ministry of Agriculture, a farmer's organization, a grain merchant, or a plant nursery will give you information on where you can get a soil test done for a few shillings.

If the soil is not in a balanced state, you can take a few simple steps to bring this about. Soil lacking organic residues is "unbalanced" and will usually be in what is described as an acid condition. In rare instances (such as chalk and limestone areas) it may be alkaline. Most vegetables do best in conditions chemically near neutral.

The pH scale is a set of numerical values which indicate how far a soil is one way or the other from "7" (neutral). Readings above 7 indicate degrees of alkalinity and below 7 show acidity. The addition of ground limestone will neutralize acidity. Whoever tests your soil will give you a fairly accurate guide on quantities, otherwise we can advise you.

- B. To control undesirable "weed" growth on any new area you wish to incorporate in your garden, the grass should be cut down and let decompose where it falls. Immediately after cutting, the whole area should be given a heavy dressing of farmyard manure or compost and straw.

This thick layer of organic matter has a number of beneficial effects:

1. Preserves an even soil temperature all year round.
2. Reduces evaporation under dry, hot and windy conditions.
3. In wet weather it absorbs large quantities of moisture, thereby reducing the chances of water-logging and soil erosion.
4. Its buffering effect on acid soils helps correct pH.
5. Ensures a rapid build-up of micro-organisms.
6. Moisture and temperature control promotes rapid organic decomposition by microbes and earthworms.
7. Reduces sunlight preventing unwanted "weed" growth.

- C. If you have bare ground and completely lack access to organic residues, sow in season, a cereal/legume mixture. Then mow it every time it reaches 3" to 6" in height and leave the clippings spread evenly over the

entire area. (Remember, too many clippings at any one time will kill the plants you are relying on to produce more "green manure".)

Don't assume that you can continue growing healthy plants year after year, simply by adding more STRAW. Our researches indicate that on its own, straw will eventually unbalance the C/N (carbon-nitrogen) ratio.

As the proportion of carbon rises relative to available nitrogen, the rate of micro-organic decomposition decreases. This slower turn-around of plant nutrients reduces rate of growth. Then, outright deficiencies develop and finally disease and pest attacks take over.

- D. Whatever tillage you decide to do should be confined to the top 4" of the soil and any action that buries organic residues should definitely be avoided. The old practice of "digging the manure well-in" is not recommended. It slows down decomposition and puts much of the plant food out of reach of surface rooted species.

These points are the foundation of your future success in soil management, so they are worth taking some time and trouble over.

We can do no more than whet your appetite now, but this Dept. has other material available. It includes some seven directly related articles. Though brief in themselves, they will take the reader a stage further. The first six cover the following subjects:

1. The effects of chemical fertilizers.
2. The effects of organic fertilizers.
3. Sources of minerals for plants.
4. Nitrogen availability.
5. Soil destruction.
6. Conquering plant disease.

The seventh article deals briefly with twelve specific points of gardening mechanics, including Tithing and The Sabbatical Year.

If you are interested, we can help you. And remember, whether you have a window-box in inner London or 2,000 square miles in Outer Mongolia -- the same principles apply. Success will depend upon diligent application of God's Law!