



MORE FROM THE SHED - 4

Dear DGT Gardeners

This brings good news for those whose garden is still not perfect. There **are** people out there,



like me, whose lawn
could do with cutting



whose seeds haven't
germinated



and whose pots look ghastly

So don't worry!

Enjoy a short break, relax and read about gardens.

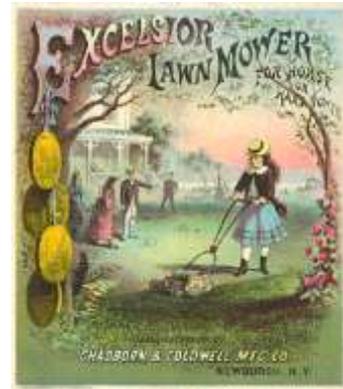
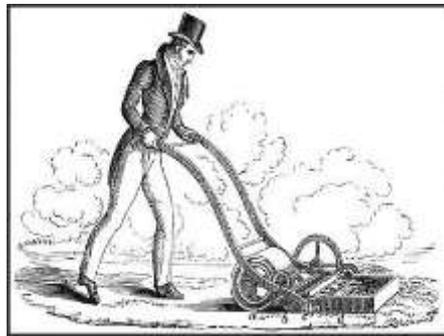
This week I am going to explain why it was necessary to wear platform soled shoes to cut the lawn in the 18th century, how nettles brought a sartorial elegance to WW1 uniforms, present you with a challenge as to which plants offer benefits when grown alongside certain crops and finally how exercising in a garden has always been popular.

First the Lawn

With self- isolation, many of us are extremely fortunate to have a lawn – beautiful to look at and also allowing us to exercise on it; not only with games but by mowing it. And it is timely to give thanks to a weaver in Gloucestershire.

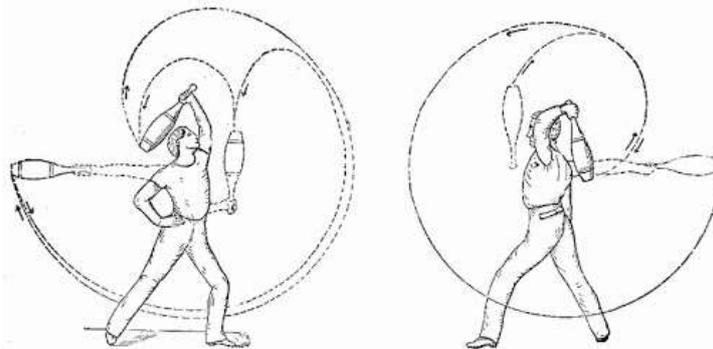
The lawnmower was patented by Edwin Beard Budding in 1830. He was working in a textile mill in Stroud, Gloucester, where he designed a machine originally to trim the nap off the cloth, destined for Guardsmen's uniforms. His revolutionary idea was to use it to cut grass. At the time people thought he was a lunatic and a madman to invent such a contraption, so he had to test the machine at night when no one could see him. Before Budding's invention 'recreational grass' was kept in trim by grazing livestock or with the scythe. When using a scythe the height of the cut was altered by getting the men to attach wooden blocks to their shoes. Scientists and doctors were extremely worried about the damage that pushing a lawnmower might do to a woman's internal organs – and

it should be remembered that the average weight of clothes worn by women in the 1870s was around 26 lb – so various medical tests were carried out. All doubts proved groundless but to ensure the take-up of female lawn mower owners, an American actress was chosen – in flimsy clothing – to show how easy it was to use.



A velvet smooth lawn enabled SERIOUS EXERCISE to take place in the garden. The Victorians aimed for a healthy life which could be obtained by physical exertion, rational dress and an enthusiasm for the word **hygienic**. Thomas Hardy's heroine, Paula Power in *A Laodicean* built a gymnasium in her garden but was spotted by Captain de Stancy who described her as 'an optical poem' – He went on, 'how deuced clever of the girl – she means to live to be a hundred!'

During the Raj period in India, many of the men took up the exercise of swinging heavy clubs that Kushti wrestlers used to build up their strength. Indian clubs eventually became a craze on the lawns of England – it was said that they produced a 'healthy night's rest and muscles in the pink of condition.'



OK - so we have exercised and now it is time for tea. On the lawn. I will be writing more about tea growing in the next Blog but to those English men and women stationed in India a lawn was exceptionally important.



It provided a 'little bit of England'. The lawn was the centre of social life, without it: *"how could one hold garden parties, play croquet or badminton or cricket?"*

Labour was so cheap in India that a gardener could be employed to plant each blade of grass by hand. One memsahib was utterly SHOCKED when she was inspecting her Mali's work to find him gardening completely naked. Aghast at what she had witnessed, she returned with a pair of trunks and exhorted him to wear them the following day. This he did. But unfortunately only as a turban.

However, these garden parties in the days of the Raj were not the popular events that we might imagine, they were described by a somewhat cynical English woman as an event *'where you could not hear yourself think for the gnashing of teeth'*. – such was the rivalry in these small communities .

The Indians found it strange that the English used their gardens not simply as a place for reclining at ease for quiet enjoyment of music and the hukkah. But for exercise and amusements of an athletic description. Even odder to the Indians was the sight of the English rolling up their sleeves and pitch into gardening.

GARDEN ENEMIES



A morning of scarifying produced this moss and that prompted me to investigate what we tend to regard as one of our garden foes – MOSS.



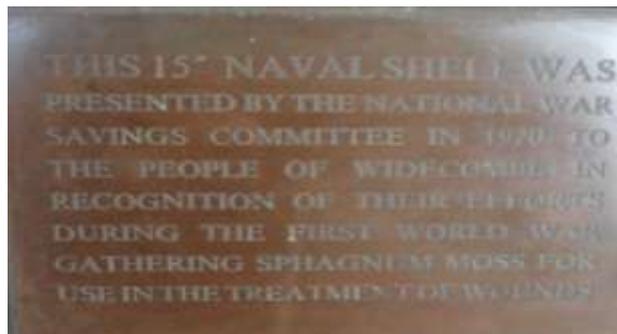
But it was a different story during WW1.

During the war, a request was put forward for supplies of sphagnum moss as it was needed instead of cotton wool. There were difficulties in obtaining cotton wool for use in hospitals and sphagnum moss was found to possess advantages over cotton wool, one being that it is far more absorbent.

Consequently, moss collecting parties were set up all over the UK and the moss sent to collecting points where it was packed in white cotton bags before being sent to ships and field hospitals. Gertrude Jekyll worked hard setting up these groups in the Surrey area.



In the centre of Widdicombe in the Moor is a naval shell which was presented to the village in recognition of the moss gathering work



Although these days we often grow a patch of nettles to encourage wild life, many do still regard them as a nuisance – a garden foe -but in WW1 Germany children were encourage to pick nettles for the war effort.

But why nettles?



Nettle fibre is similar to that of hemp or flax. During WW1 the German Empire, plagued by textile shortages, used nettles as a substitute for cotton. Captured German uniforms were found to be 85% nettle fibre,

WE GROW TOGETHER – a quiz

Can you match the main crop with its companion plant?

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Carrots | A. Chamomile |
| 2. Runner beans | B. French marigolds |
| 3. Tomatoes | C. Calendula |
| 4. Roses | D. Borage |
| 5. Radishes | E. Spring onions |
| 6. Broad beans | F. Garlic |
| 7. Courgettes | G. Sweet peas |
| 8. Sweetcorn | H. Sunflowers |
| 9. Cabbage | I. Summer savory |
| 10. Strawberries | J. Mint |

GOOD LUCK!

The answer to last week's question about my bean sprout is 198 days. Every day it increased its height by one half of its original height. In 198 days it reproduced its height 99 times and was therefore 100 times its original height.

MORE ECCENTRIC GARDENERS

Churches are having to shut their doors but I am reminded that in the early C19 a George Durant of Tong Castle inserted a pulpit into his garden wall that enabled him to preach randomly to passers-by. History does suggest that the villagers were not that keen on this situation, despite the fact that many of the villagers were his illegitimate children. Tong Castle is no more – it was demolished to make way for a new motorway. Although the grounds of the castle had been designed by Capability Brown, they didn't suit Durrant's taste – he was rather addicted to pyramids and built not just an ornamental pyramidal piggery but also a similar building for his hens. On the outside of his super hen coop he wrote signs such as ' *Scratch before you eat*'. And to ward off poachers? He used harps strung up in trees around his grounds so that unearthly music would be heard when the wind blew.

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We are all so grateful that newspapers and magazines continue to be published. They inform, comfort and inspire. *The Garden* kept going throughout the WW1 – here is the cover for the May 1915 edition.



The conflict is described as 'dreadful warfare is still raging' and the sub-editor of *The Garden*, Herbert Cowley had been injured and was in hospital. He returned to work as soon as he could – unable to return to the front – and wrote books to encourage those at home to grow more vegetables.



In the same issue a new dwarf rhododendron R. Racemoisum which had been sent home from China by Forrest flowered for the first time. Life goes on.

NEXT TIME.....

I will be featuring , HOOKER'S LIPS



And finding out more about the dangerously grisly lives of the Plant Hunters.

KEEP SAFE and GOOD GARDENING



AN ACTIVITY SHEET FOR CHILDREN – see next page.

IDEAS for CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN.

There are many sites on the internet that can provide inspiration for garden activities. The RHS Schools section on their main website is chock a block with things to do. Also Pinterest comes up with some great ideas. Perhaps there is a project you could tackle ready for a visit by children when we can all get out again. Or there are simple projects for children to have a go at themselves.

A fairy village in a wheel barrow



A path with different textures to feel and to hear when they walk through the garden.



If you haven't been able to get bedding plants for a hanging basket why not make it into a bug hotel



And pebble and stone art is great fun!



And musical chimes thanks to painted tin cans



A plastic bird feeder – I liked the way that wooden spoons act as perches.

