

Golders Green Allotment Association



Growing Organically

By Lynda Woodroffe

Problems with Foods Today

Before the use and overuse of pesticides and fertilisers, gardeners and farmers struggled with pests, weeds and vermin. The old methods meant handpicking off caterpillars, squirting off aphids with a hose, the use of scarecrows or going out at night and picking up the numerous slugs, snails and other pests which were feasting themselves on crops. This still happens in some communities and particularly in communities where they want to eat only organic, chemical-free foods.

BUT, there are other ways of dealing with weeds and pests.

Our most problematic weeds are couch grass and bindweed.

Bind Weed

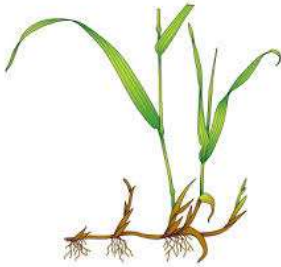


In this allotment, ROUNDUP is regularly used to kill weeds and, until recently, it was thought to be a relatively safe weed killer. But recent publicity about **ROUNDUP** is frightening. Roundup, or **GLYPHOSATE**, has been found to be linked with 'increased risks for non-Hodgkin lymphoma', a cancer of the lymph system (WHO, 2015 and <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/widely-used-herbicide-linked-to-cancer/>) has now been declared as a 'probable carcinogen' (WHO, 2015).



- **Discourage it while young:** Young seedlings can be destroyed when cut several inches below the soil. Whatever you do, don't wait until the weeds are pre-teens. Pull them up during the Spring.
- **Mulch:** Bindweed likes sunshine, so mulch can discourage it.
- **Till:** Hoeing, digging, or tilling more mature field bindweed every one to two weeks for several seasons can reduce plant vigour.
- **Torch it:** using a weed torch. It's a propane tank with a little torch that burns up the weed.

Couch Grass



- **Manual removal and cutting back:** Dig out with as much root (or bulb) as possible, using a hand or border fork.
- **Flame gun:** Scorch off weeds with a flame gun. Use only when the foliage is dry and allow sufficient burn-time for deep-rooted weeds, such as dandelions, to be killed.
- **Mulching:** Use deep organic mulches such as bark or wood chip to smother weeds around plants. To be effective, keep them topped up to a minimum depth of 10-15cm (4-6in) to smother established annual weeds. Keep woody stems clear of mulch to prevent rotting.
- **Edging boards or strips:** These can be used to edge lawns and grass paths to prevent unwanted grass growth into the border. Especially useful where invasive rooted grasses such as couch grass are a problem.
- **Weed-suppressant fabrics** – these are often plastic and very effective.

Dandelions



If dandelions are left to go to seed as in the picture on the right, they will spread throughout your plot and the rest of the allotment. They grow very long roots and are best removed by digging. Getting most of the root out with the flower will suffice for one year, but the plant may return the following year. It is difficult to dig deep enough to remove the whole root. There is a tool for removing dandelions which makes the pulling much easier removing dandelions which makes the pulling much easier. But it will not pull out all of the root but better than nothing.



A dandelion tool

Disposal of bindweed, couch grass and dandelion heads/roots.

When you have collected the bindweed, the white roots of the couch grass and the dandelion heads, it is important to dispose of them properly. They can be kept separately to rot in a closed garden bag or left to dry out and ground up to add to compost. Or you could burn them once dried out.

Slugs and Snails



All of us seem to suffer with these pests and with the recent mild winter and sudden rainfall, they seem to appear in armies ready to engulf anything delicate and tasty like young lettuces, bean seedlings and other delicate plants.

Instead of spraying and putting out poisons, try these methods.

Slugs don't like red lettuces. You can plant the red lettuces encircling the green ones. And slugs cannot move easily over woodchip so it helps to lay it between beds.

Handpicking: is time-consuming but unbeatable. Use gloves to remove visible offending insect and weed pests.

Barriers and Traps: Barriers and traps are types of mechanical controls that can be employed to capture or impede pests.



A beer trap

Collars: To stop hatching larvae from burrowing into the soil surrounding your plants, use "collars" made of stiff paper, heavy plastic or tar paper. Cut a piece a foot square and fit snugly around the stem of the plant and press into the soil an inch or so deep. Use a paper clip to hold in place. This prevents cutworms and other burrowing insects from getting into the soil around your plants.



Copper collars

Coffee Grounds: Save your coffee grounds and put them around a plant. Slugs don't like it.

Sand Paper and Woodchip: Try putting sand paper circles around your plants as slugs do not like the dry, rasping surface. Also, adding woodchip to the space between plant beds may stop them crossing from one crop to another.

Slugs are also killed by **Nema Tode Worms** which burrow inside slugs killing them.



Frogs, newts and hedgehogs will help dispose of slugs as part of their diet. Having a small pond in your plot may help.

Raised Beds: provide a difficult barrier for slugs providing there are no slugs already in the soil you are using in it.

Avoid using salt as it poisons the soil.

And if you must use **slug pellets** try always to use the organic version to avoid danger to garden birds, ladybirds and bees.

Aphids

Netting: Fine netting such as thin fleece, placed over the bed, will protect seedlings from chewing-insects, keep cats and birds away, and prevent flying insects from laying eggs.

Sticky Paper: A thick piece of paper painted yellow and coated with a sticky substance will attract and intercept aphids and other small flying insects. Sticky fly papers can be bought inexpensively to catch and trap aphids.



Fly paper

Soapy Water: Insects have breathing holes in their abdominal areas. If you add some organic detergent, such as Ecover washing up liquid, to a spray bottle of water and spray it on invading insects such as aphids, it may block up the breathing holes and destroy them. Additionally, it will no harm the plant or poison the soil.

Trap Plants: Some insects, if given a choice, will opt to feed on one type of plant or another. For example: maggots prefer radishes over corn and tomato worms prefer dill over tomatoes. Therefore, certain plants can be strategically placed so that they lure harmful insects away from plants you wish to protect. These are commonly referred to as "trap plants." Once the trap plant has become infested, the target insect can be picked off and dropped in soapy water or the entire plant can be pulled up and disposed of.



Companion Planting: Some plants possess the natural ability to repel certain types of insects. Companion planting is the practice of strategically placing insect-repelling plants next to crops that will benefit from their natural properties. For example, planting garlic among vegetables helps fend off Japanese beetles, aphids, the vegetable weevil, and spider mites; basil planted near tomatoes repels tomato horn worms; and marigolds interplanted with cucurbits (i.e., zucchini, cucumbers, etc.) discourage cucumber beetles.



Crop Rotation: Planting different kinds of vegetables in each different section of your garden plot each year will help reduce pest infestation. In the fall, some insects lay their eggs in the soil a couple of inches below the surface. The eggs hatch in the spring and immediately begin the search for their food source. Many insects will feed on only one or types of vegetables. If the plant they prefer to eat is located several feet or yards away, the insect must migrate to the source. Many will die along the way or fall prey to birds and other insects. Also, certain families of plants (e.g., potatoes and peppers - nightshade family) attract the same pests. In addition, many crops predominately absorb a particular nutrient from the soil. By rotating your crops each year, the soil in a particular section of the garden will have the opportunity to rest and regenerate.

Diversified Planting: A common practice among home gardeners is to plant a single crop in a straight row. This encourages pest infestation because it facilitates easy travel of an insect or disease from one host plant to another. By intermingling different types of plants and by not planting in straight rows, an insect is forced to search for a new host plant thus exposing itself to predators. Also, this approach corresponds well with companion planting.

Tagetes and marigolds distract aphids; **basil** attracts pests from tomatoes.



