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The Allotment Gardener

The Journal Of The Allotments & Gardens Council (U.K.)



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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting was held on 18th March, and although the weather was bitterly cold twenty-five members came from far and wide to attend. The Agenda was much the same as other meetings but the comments are always very interesting. As is usually the case there is always somebody who think they know the answer to all of the problems that you are likely to come up against when you are running an organisation like ours and no doubt some will be acted upon in the future but everyone agrees that we get excellent value for our membership fee, it must be or why would some associations who are not members try to jump on the bandwagon to get the benefit of for instance insurance, when they know full well that our scheme can not be bettered? The subject of our newsletter is another talking point. Of course there is always room for improvement but working with a tight budget we do the best we can. The free newspapers that come to our doors every week would love to have the amount of cash at their disposal the same as the Sunday broadsheets have. Obviously there is no comparison, and at the end of the day all we are trying to do is to keep our members informed as to what is happening on other sites. I am sure the editor would love to hear from you to tell him what is being done in your area. Have you a member who is totally organic but finds it very frustrating that his neighbours are not that way inclined and have no worries about using chemicals? Another talking point is the use of peat. Should we be changing to use, for instance, coiro Or are we really helping the environment when these other composts have to be transported halfway round the world to get to these shores? There is plenty of scope to get a good discussion moving in these columns.

It has to be said that we are fortunate in having someone as knowledgeable as Reg. Knowles at the helm in our organisation. Therefore we should be pleased that he is carrying on as the Chairman. Likewise the other members of the committee can all be relied on to give the benefit of their expertise when it is needed.

The AGM for the year 2007 will be on March 17th. For this meeting, it is important that the numbers who intend to be present inform the Chairman in good time because numbers are critical when choosing the venue. This year the room was full and it would have been uncomfortable if many more had turned up. The last thing we should do is turn anyone from attending an AGM.

H.GRANT

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NEWDIGATE ROAD ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

From where do we get the next generation of gardeners?

It all started with a question from my Grandson, who at eight years of age had been gardening on his own on a piece of one of my plots and doing very well winning the local competition for 'Best Young Gardener' in the Borough.

"Why don't you have more children like me on the Allotments Granddad"?

Good question, 'Why'?

"Where would they come from"? I asked him

"My school don't do gardening, but I think they would like to".

So a letter to the headmaster, asking would he be interested in the school taking over a plot on the field, for a school garden so that the pupils could learn about growing their own vegetables, fruit and flowers in a healthy and safe environment?

He replied with an emphatic 'yes'. That it was splendid idea and one which the school would welcome as a unique opportunity for the pupils to broaden their outlook on food production, which would form part of the schools ongoing project on the Environmental Award scheme with the County Education Authority.

After contacting the Education Authority, I learned that the toilet facilities on the field were woefully inadequate for the schoolchildren and raised the question 'How do we update them'? Both for the children and for our members, a large proportion of them are Ladies.

At this juncture, I went to the Association Committee to get their opinion and permission to proceed. Luckily, we have what must be the best group of Ladies and gentlemen in the land, as they all agreed to give me all the support and backing anyone could wish for.

I now had more questions than answers, how much would this cost? What facilities did we want? Who could we get to build it?

I then started with no knowledge whatsoever, to find out about funding this project, getting a set of drawings/plans done, looking for a builder and asking for quotations.

The Allotment officer at the Local Council was unbelievably supportive; pointing me in the direction of several funds that might help. He and the Council would sort out planning permission and give whatever help they could along the way.

I had a set of working plans drawn up with all the requirements needed. For example, the building had to be designed sympathetically to blend in with neighbouring properties and it had to be on the site of the existing toilet and storage facility. It had to have a separate Gents with a urinal, closet and wash hand basin. Plus a Ladies with closets and wash hand basin. Also the Ladies had to have facilities for any disabled members we might have in the future which turned out to be a very prophetic decision.

I contacted five builders for the project and only one came to see what we wanted, giving me a quotation for everything that we needed. Another came to look at the site and never returned. The remaining three never even replied to the letters that I sent them.

Armed with the quotations for the project, I started writing for application forms from numerous and varied funds. Completing them with the answers to questions I did not know the answers to. However, I sought the advice from the elder statesmen within the association with great success.

With a great deal of help from my Daughter and our Vice President, I formulated and adopted policies as requested by the 'Funding bodies' for child protection, Health and Safety and Equal Opportunities. Items such as these we did not have in place at the time of application.

It took me two and a half years to finally get the required amount of money together. I had a lot of disappointments and setbacks but also had and met with an amazing amount of help and enthusiasm from individuals within the various 'Funding bodies'.

The building work started in November with the turning off of the water supply to the field for the winter, at the time when only a few die-hard gardeners and the old suspiciously 'peculiar' would be on their allotments. Throughout the winter the work progressed steadily and the building is now nearing completion.

We are now almost ready for the pupils to come onto the field this Spring to begin their adventure in what might turn out to be a life long, marvellous, healthy, invigorating and undeniably rewarding, if not frustrating hobby.

The prophetic decision to include facilities for the disabled was realised when I received a request for a plot from a Lady who wanted her two children to experience gardening along with herself. Her husband suffers from a debilitating illness and is in a wheelchair and she was highly delighted to discover that we would soon have the facilities that would enable him to come onto the field and enjoy taking part in an activity with his family.

I have learned a tremendous amount being involved with this project. I have made mistakes along the way, met some extremely good and nice people and I now look forward with enthusiasm and optimism to the first year of a new era for all our members and the pupils of the school.

The credit for all this goes to a Grandson who asked the first question.

NOTES FROM A SEED SUPPLIER

The Dobies discount scheme for A & G C members is now well into its second year, and we are delighted that so many more members are now enjoying the discounts we can offer.

As a supplier to thousands of gardeners throughout the UK we are well placed to notice developing trends, and we can definitely confirm that there is a real boom in vegetable growing, which is still gathering pace. Those of us who have been around for a while remember the last one exactly 30 years ago in the seventies, sparked off by "The Good Life" (recently repeated, and as funny as ever!) And the high cost of shop bought vegetables as a result of several dry seasons.

Much has changed since then, and there will no be no shortage of shop vegetables regardless of the weather – but does flying fresh, dwarf beans in from Kenya really make any sort of sense?

With hosepipe bans and water shortages already a fact in the South East, demand for water butts has rocketed in recent weeks, with both the major manufacturers we know working their machines 24 hours a day, and still not keeping up!

Here at Dobies, the team are busy putting together our autumn planting Fruit and Vegetable catalogue, which will be sent to A & G C members for the first time in June.

We've included lots of interesting new developments, from new varieties of the increasingly popular 2nd crop potatoes (July/early August planting), plus some improved types of onion sets.

If you're a garlic fan we'll be bringing you some Rocambole (hard neck) types, from the USA, which are completely new in the UK. They are a real cook's favourite with very distinctive flavour, and are particularly well suited to growing in the north of the UK, where the widely available soft neck types may not perform as well.

Thanks again to those who have ordered, and if you have any suggestions for products, comments on our service or the scheme, or anything at all, do let us know!

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Mother – 'Son its time for you to go to school, finish your breakfast.

Son – "I don't want to go to school today".

Mother – 'You have to go to school, you know that, I've explained it often enough for you to understand'.

Son – "But I don't like school, I don't like the children there. They are rude to me and call me names all the time, I don't want to go".

Mother – 'I am telling you for the last time, you have to go to school, you're the Headmaster'!

THE COMMITTEE WILL NOT PUBLISH LETTERS OR REPORTS OF AN INFLAMMATORY NATURE THAT MAY CAUSE ANY OFFENCE TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE NOTTINGHAM & DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS COUNCIL

SEED

It might be a double plot but it doesn't really look *that* big. Surely after six years, even with a young family and one year with the plot just left to tick over, it should have been possible to cover all of the available ground with fruit and vegetables? And yet, no, we still haven't quite managed it. There was a giddy moment three years ago when it looked like we were going to make it and even deluded ourselves into thinking it might be worth looking around for another plot. And then it all just slipped away, like the fitness of a sportsman who suffers an injury, and we've been trying to get back to that same decent level ever since. This year we're back in business.

The seeds have been (over) ordered from Dobies and we spent an enjoyable evening with the boys ticking off all the different varieties and sorting them into the order in which they are to be planted. Trays have been filled with vegetables seeds of all kinds (George, 4, helped and wrote out one of the labels), extra staging is being built for the polytunnel and the polythene that's been down for a year to beat back the weeds that grew when the garden was left to go wild for a season is being pulled back to reveal bare ground that is once again being forked over to receive plants. We're optimistic.

We have trays and trays of sunflowers (Ring Of Fire and Sunshine Giant) to keep up the level of interest shown by our boys last year and this time we are not making the mistake of putting them on the polytunnel floor for the rodents to get. The extra staging we're making is from an old Ikea futon. Maybe with the amount of sunflower seeds being planted it will be possible to plant a maze for the boys to enjoy, but there are so many other seeds going in that perhaps ground space will be limited and we will be in the satisfying position of being able to give away lots of plants. A couple of our friends in Wales have taken on a plot with their two young daughters and it would be good to give them a boost when they inevitably start to wonder if they can cope.

But we don't have to wonder. We've served our apprenticeship and we are now firing on all cylinders. We know exactly what needs doing. In addition, the boys are a year older and looking for jobs to do; the other day George went around collecting up all the dandelions to stop them spreading. When we get 100% coverage of the ground you might just hear the cheers.

A couple of old gardeners used to sit on a bench on one of the plots telling tall stories.

Every day the stories got more and more outrageous as each one tried their utmost to outdo the other.

We used to gather around every time these two got together, knowing we would get some wonderful entertainment.

Sam came up with the best tall story of all times when he said to his mate one morning, 'Hey up Jack, I've got a story you won't be able to beat'!

"What's that"? Asked Jack.

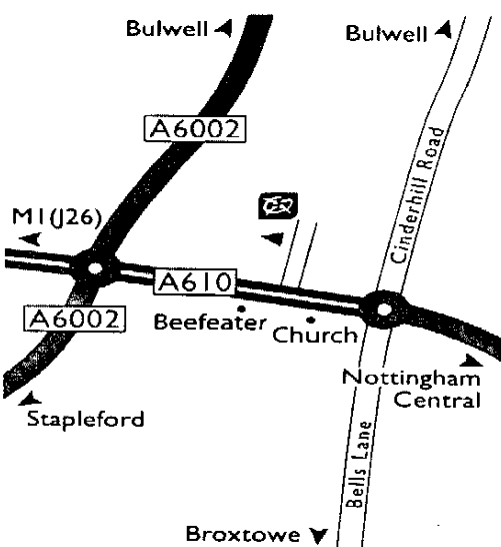
'I UNDERSTAND WOMEN', replied Sam.

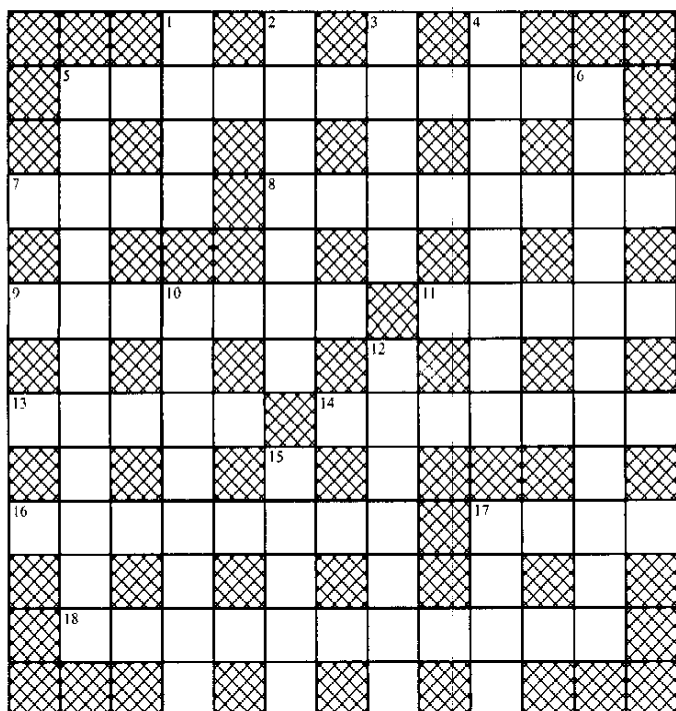
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Across.

- 5 Scottish town twinned with leek? (11)
- 7 Salad potato bred from Pink Fir Apple (4)
- 8 Public House? (8)
- 9 Lines on a map or chart connecting points having the same atmospheric pressure (7)
- 11 & 13 Large rock off the western coast of Scotland better known as a variety of tomato (5-5)
- 14 Damson is the cultivated form of this thorny shrub (*Prunus insititia*) (7)
- 16 Anaesthetic used in child birth (7)
- 17 Anchored navigation marker (4)
- 18 Gives an added impetus when driving (11)

Down.

- 1 Large continent (4)
- 2 Breed of small domestic fowl. Comes in Black, Brown or White varieties (7)
- 3 Humiliate another person (5)
- 4 Describes a main road linking large towns and cities (8)
- 5 Originally hand written documents (11)
- 6 Keyboard instrument precursor of the piano (11)
- 10 The ancient Egyptians must have been good _____ (8)
- 12 Sung to put a baby to sleep (7)
- 15 Bird or dockside lifting machine (5)
- 17 French runner? (4)

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A Paradox

We will most probably all agree that the most important factor concerning us allotment people is the weather and I think that most of us will also probably agree that this winter has appeared to be an especially long one or is that just a perception as we get older. I do believe what one of your allotment tenants said is true, this tenant is a retired Russian Scientist. Upon my commenting to him about the weather being cold for the time of year, he informed me that this is due to Global warming to which I replied why then are we not warm instead of being cold? The reason my Russian friend tells me is that it is a paradox as Global warming causes melting of the ice-shelf which then falls into the sea. Since ice and salt do not mix the salt sinks to the bottom and ice at the top is carried on ocean currents down past Cuba, hence the cooling effect on the sea, this in turn cools the Gulf Stream which will consequently make Europe colder. Which all sounds rather dismal. Since we do not want our poor plants to be shivering due to our destruction of the environment. However, my Russian friend comes from Siberia and he and his wife had allotments there and they showed us photographs of them, they were fantastic and about three times the size of our plots and instead of there being a wooden shed, they had brick built (Dacha, I think that is what they are called) they are just like small houses. As it took them a day to journey to their allotments, they used to stay in the Dacha whilst the growing season was on. There is deep snow from January until April but then their few summer months are hotter than ours. The photographs of their plots were absolutely wonderful. Since, they have been on our allotment site they have presented us with some fabulous recipes they have cooked such as a delicious Blackberry conserve, very tasty Pumpkin, casserole, pickled cucumbers, baked marrow and all sorts of inventive dishes. By showing us what can be grown in the harsh climate of Siberia it gives us some hope if we do suffer the Global warming paradox which would cause our temperature to drop significantly in Europe. It is worth having an allotment just to learn about other people's ideas, cultures and survival methods and even more importantly because the language barrier can be breached and good communication is possible if both sides are willing to listen and learn and help the other side. It makes me wonder if all cultures would only listen to one another then perhaps it would be a step towards world peace. I suppose we can always say from little acorns big oaks can grow.



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The bloke on the plot next to mine gave me two lettuces.

'What kind are they'? I asked.

"This one", he replied, "is Webb's Wonderful, beautiful lettuce, you'll enjoy it, the other one's called Martha".

'That's a new one on me,' I said, 'I've never heard of it before'!

"Cultivated that one myself and named it after my wife", he replied.

'What a lovely thought, what made you do that'? I asked him.

With a glint in his eye he replied, "because it's got no heart"!

L	E	U	F	O	V	A	B	C	Z	U	N	G	B	P
C	E	D	E	P	I	L	L	I	M	M	D	U	E	O
O	Q	N	O	I	N	O	R	S	L	C	F	L	E	A
D	C	R	O	H	E	I	J	K	B	N	S	S	T	P
L	I	A	N	S	W	X	N	E	E	R	G	F	L	Z
I	U	N	H	T	E	Q	J	K	L	M	N	P	E	R
N	A	T	O	F	E	R	W	V	J	H	S	B	T	N
G	O	W	P	G	V	Y	L	F	R	E	T	T	U	B
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R	J	X	Z	F	L	I	H	A	U	K	R	E	L	P
R	A	L	L	I	P	R	E	T	A	C	R	W	F	M
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A	C	E	G	P	E	G	D	I	M	J	C	L	H	N
D	B	U	S	S	B	I	J	K	F	Y	P	I	Z	P
A	D	I	H	P	A	M	N	L	O	G	T	Q	B	P
Y	R	I	X	F	H	K	I	X	A	E	U	L	O	G

Two old chaps were doing a bit of autumn rough digging on adjoining plots, when a funeral cortege slowly went by on a nearby road.

One of the old chaps stopped digging, took off his cloth cap and held it over his heart.

His companion looked over at him and said, 'Fred, I didn't know you were the sentimental type. You do surprise me!'

"Well"! Said Fred, "it's the least I could do, I was married to her for forty-five years"!

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At our Annual General Meeting held in March, Chairman Reg Knowles received a lot of criticism due to the fact that some members were of the opinion that he was not doing enough to help them resolve their problems.

This may be fair comment from those members but we at Liverpool have always had help and advice from Reg. Sometimes we may have disagreed with the advice and help he has given but nevertheless we have had help and advice from him.

What we have to remember is that Reg is an unsalaried Officer of the Allotment and Gardens Council U.K and the time and effort that he puts into running it for the benefit of all is entirely voluntary and is to be applauded. The Honorarium he receives as a token of our gratitude, would hardly cover the cost of a mini-break to enable him to recuperate from all the hard work which he does on our behalf.

It's up to us as members to act on and use the advice and help that Reg gives freely and do our own grafting to resolve our own problems. If, as I suspect most of those complaining are field secretaries or chairmen, we should be able to formulate our own agenda for resolving our problems. By trying to cope with our problems ourselves with some guidance from AGCUK would perhaps make us more self reliant and free Reg to manage the Allotments & Gardens Council and promote its benefits to a wider world.

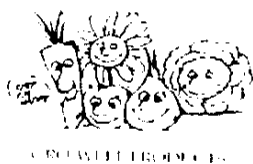
Whilst, I, perhaps am complaining about the complainers, maybe if those of us who do the complaining were to divert their energies into a more positive and active force by promoting the Council instead of sitting back and griping, we could become a more efficient and stronger body.

Think about it!

Graham Mallanaphy. New Area Allotments Liverpool.

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A group of us allotmenters were standing around chewing the fat when we were joined by old Tom.

'Hey what do you think of this'? He said,

With that, he put a boney old finger into his ear and pulled out something that looked for all intents and purposes like a runner bean seed.

"What the devil that"? Somebody asked him.

'Its new hearing aid'. He replied with obvious glee, 'I can hear what you're saying about me now, using this marvel of sophisticated and new high technology. It has a range of 1000 yards and is powered by micro cadmium, self-charging anti flecular single molecular cell battery. It's based on a new design using a computer chip that can detect sound at a long range using a 600 mega hertz varyfinder coupled with a an antifrastic filter system working on a wave band of 500 micro beads per second. It incorporates an anti virus semi duvalli screen to eliminate screech and wash out all unwanted sounds. With this I can hear all the birds singing and the beat of a butterfly's wing at the bottom of my plot. So you'll all have to be careful what you say from now on'. He then popped the earpiece back into his ear, with an almost beatific smile upon his face.

"Tom, that's wonderful". One of us said, "what kind is it"?

Tom pulled up his shirtsleeve and replied 'Twenty past four'.

Answers to Crossword on page 6

ACROSS: (5) Musselburgh, (7) Anya, (8) Hostelry, (9) Isobars, (11) & (13) Ailsa Craig, (14) Bullace, (16) Epidural, (17) Buoy, (18) Springboard.

DOWN: (1) Asia, (2) Leghorn, (3) Abase, (4) Arterial, (5) Manuscripts, (6) Harpsichord, (10) Builders, (12) Lullaby, (15) Crane, (17) Bean.

L	E	U	F	O	V	A	B	C	Z	U	N	G	B	P
C	E	D	E	P	I	L	L	I	M	M	D	U	E	O
O	Q	N	O	I	N	O	R	S	L	C	F	L	E	A
D	C	R	O	H	E	I	J	K	B	N	S	S	T	P
L	I	A	N	S	W	X	N	E	E	R	G	F	L	Z
I	U	N	H	T	E	Q	J	K	L	M	N	P	E	R
N	A	T	O	F	E	R	W	V	J	H	S	B	T	N
G	O	W	P	G	V	Y	L	F	R	E	T	T	U	B
M	X	Q	H	W	I	G	Y	T	J	U	O	D	K	A
R	J	X	Z	F	L	I	H	A	U	K	R	E	L	P
R	A	L	L	I	P	R	E	T	A	C	R	W	F	M
K	Z	B	D	W	I	U	V	Q	N	C	A	M	E	W
A	C	E	G	P	E	G	D	I	M	J	C	L	H	N
D	B	U	S	S	B	I	J	K	F	Y	P	I	Z	P
A	D	I	H	P	A	M	N	L	O	G	T	Q	B	P
Y	R	I	X	F	H	K	I	X	A	E	U	L	O	G

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We provide a full range of legal services to businesses and individuals and are now providing a legal advice helpline to members of The Allotments & Gardens Council (UK).

If you have any legal issues in relation to your allotment that you would like to discuss, please contact Reg Knowles in the first instance on:

0115 927 6860

or alternatively, you can email your enquiry to:
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WHO WILL WE BE THE BUTLERS TO NOW?

I believe that The Ancient Egyptians were right to treat cats as sacred beings because there is something mysterious, other worldly and ethereal about them, maybe that is why some people don't like them because they find them rather knowing or spooky in their demeanour. However, I find them very enigmatic, somewhat telepathic because they send us telepathic messages about what their requirements are and we like the humble and obedient cat butlers that we are tend to their every whim, they are also fascinating in their aloofness. Some of you will probably scoff at me and call me maudlin but I am in mourning for our beautiful Ginger allotment cat, whose Sunday name was Moscow but whose everyday name was Cupboard Love. He was the biggest domestic cat that I have ever seen. When I say domestic, he was probably a factory cat but when the factory closed he found his way onto the allotment by following some of our tenants onto the plots. He was very well fed and cared for before he came to us. He had also been neutered (castrated) which was great really (although he probably didn't think so) although this was beneficial to both him and us since neutered tom cats don't smell nor do they go out on the prowl looking for she cats. I am told that the reason that he was so big was because he had been castrated. I am also told that hundreds of years ago male opera singers were sometimes castrated before they reached puberty, in order for them to retain their high singing voices. Also, because of being castrated they grew to a huge size, and I am also told that this is probably the reason that Cupboard Love was so big. Every male that I have told this story to has replied that they would rather have a crap voice than be castrated.

However, back to Cupboard Love, he weighed 15lbs in his prime and had supremely long legs but was as agile and as strong as a hunting dog, he was a marvellous controller of unwanted wildlife and vermin on the allotments. He was always bringing me presents of rabbits and rats etc. much to my shock upon seeing him with a dead rat or rabbit in his mouth. I of course had to praise him and tell him how clever he was, since we have got a real rabbit problem on our allotments. We think that the reason for the rabbit problem is that all of the open space around our allotments is being built on so the wildlife has nowhere else to go to except onto the allotments. We have objected most vociferously about the loss of open space and wildlife habitat but the planners cannot see the problems that they are creating for future generations-see my other article about global warming.

Anyway, I am not the only allotment person who is upset about the loss of Cupboard Love he was loved by lots of others and even those without affection will miss his prowess as a hunter. Cupboard Love, coincidentally died during the same week as another much loved allotment cat whose name was Tiddles and who belonged to Terry, another of our tenants, who has looked after all of the stray cats and unwanted kittens on our allotments for about 30years. Although, there other allotment cats on our site, I think that we have lost the best red hunter. We have made a nice grave for him and planted a plum tree on it, alongside the grave of Tinkerbelle whom Cupboard Love replaced when she was killed by two dogs that got onto the allotments. She was that well fed by everyone that she must have been too fat to jump out of the way and escape from the dogs. There is a cherry tree planted on her grave, which is very productive, the birds usually get to the cherries first but I don't mind. Tinkerbelle probably killed a few birds during her lifetime, since she was also another prolific hunter. How many other allotments have cats? Do write and tell us your cat stories.



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For further information, you should write or telephone:-

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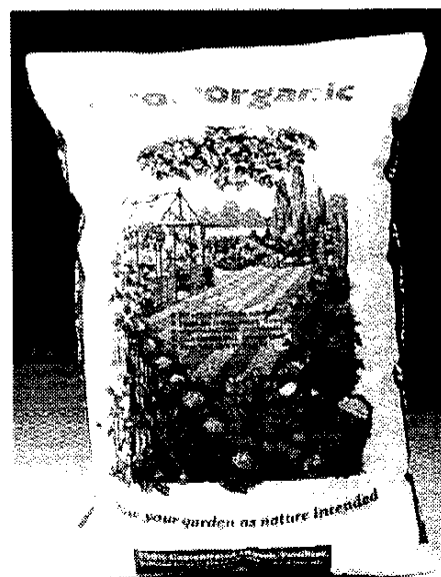
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