



When chemical warfare *is the only answer*

A boiling kettle will see off dandelions, but more drastic measures are called for when it comes to the dreaded ground elder

DANDELIONS get their name from the French dents de lion (lion's teeth). It is not the edges to their leaves that I do not like; it is their habit of seeding themselves in cracks between paving and at the base of walls meaning that you cannot dig them up by the root however loose the soil is. My chemical-free, patent way of killing these unwelcome perennials is to dribble, slowly, boiling water on to the centre of the plant from a kettle for about three seconds. My energy spending conscience is salved by the fact that I boil the kettle in the first place for a cuppa. The French are keen on using dandelion leaves in their salads having first blanched them by placing a flower pot over them. This will certainly weaken the plants but the strong deep root will send up fresh growth after cropping.

If only this treatment worked as well for the dreaded ground elder, brought to our shores by the Romans as a cure for gout. Apparently they used to cook it as you would do spinach. Of course it is right and proper not to use chemicals in the garden, but when it comes to ground elder I resort to 'Roundup' which contains glyphosate. This chemical might sound rather sinister but it does become innate once it has come into contact with the soil, and does not, therefore, hang about like ammonia sulphate, a chemical we all used to splosh about with gay abandon in the old days to keep weeds down on the drive.

I find that every visit I make to The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is a learning curve. A number of years ago I was admiring a border containing rare and beautiful plants when I noticed healthy bind weed neatly trained up bamboo canes



dotted about. A gardener there told me that this is the most effective way of getting rid of this menace weed – ie. to encourage it to climb away up such a support and then, once it has started to flower, gently de-twine and stuff into a plastic bag weighted down with a stone on the ground before spraying it with 'Roundup'. You could, of course, spray the bindweed still clinging to its canes but only if there are no precious plants nearby as they could be killed by vapour drift.

One of the most relaxing forms of gentle exercise during July in the garden is a post-prandial stroll with a pair of scissors or secateurs in your hand with one aim in mind – dead-heading. Perhaps the strongest instinct of all organisms both faunal and floral is to procreate. Sweet peas are an

excellent example of a plant that will no longer attempt to flower once seeds in a few pods have been allowed to ripen. It has, after all, produced viable offspring, and so why should it bother to produce any more flowers? So, dead-heading is a very necessary job if you want to lengthen the flowering period of countless garden plants including remontant roses, dahlias, cosmos, most annuals, and so on. Picking small courgettes the minute their flowers fade not only means that you will be eating something far tastier than a fully blown marrow, but the plant itself will be encouraged to continue to produce offspring at a spanking pace.

Another similarly undemanding, very useful thing to do is to look under the fresh and tender leaves of plants. The detection of attack by pests at any early stage should halt them in their tracks and eliminate serious damage. A gentle rub with your fingers to dislodge greenfly on rose buds or blackfly on beans, two insects that produce an alarming amount of young in a very short time without even having to bother with sex, is a very worthwhile pastime which eliminates the necessity to spray later on. Late July and August are two best times for clipping evergreen hedges and topiary.

On the vegetable front, my four, four feet-long rows of spring-sown perpetual spinach which have been producing delicious salads on a daily basis since late April, need to be thinned by up-rooting whole plants until I am left with a mere four plants, each one foot apart. This has proven to be one of my most prolific and useful crops of all, especially when you consider shop-bought packeted salad contains few, if any, nutrients. ■



At home
in your garden
T | 01367 240112

ROGERS GARDENSTONE
www.rogersgardenstone.co.uk