



# Sex and the spinach

There are plenty of ups and downs in the vegetable patch, says Sir Roddy!

“**G**ROWING vegetables is the new sex,” said Helen, my dental hygienist, as she debrided my gums subgingivally.

She waved her tooth-polishing instrument around like a conductor's baton as she enthused about her beetroots and onions, her leeks and potatoes. She is not alone. According to the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardens Ltd, there are 100,000 people on waiting lists for allotments throughout the country. According to Bryn Pugh, the legal consultant of the NSALG, local councils are obligated to provide a 'sufficient' number of allotments. But, the word 'sufficient' has yet to be legally defined and, according to Mr Pugh, municipal authorities are in breach of their statutory duties if there be ONE person on a waiting list for an allotment.

According to Mr Pugh, Mr Shahid Kahn, a one-time Minister for The Department of Communities and Local Government, side-stepped the issue when provision of allotments was being discussed in November 2008 at the House of Commons. This is scandalous, surely, at a time when applications for allotments are at an unprecedented level.

What can you do if you are getting nowhere with your application? There are two potential remedies. The local council could be sued in the County Court or the aggrieved would-be allotment holder can apply for a Judicial Review of the decision not to provide. However, there is no guarantee of success in either case.

I am lucky as I do not need to apply for an allotment. My vegetable garden at home has made us self-sufficient since May and the pleasure it has given us and the savings we have made are incalculable. One of the arts in growing vegetables is to know how much to sow at one time to cater for your own particular household. It is easy to sow too much of one thing, meaning that you have to give away to friends produce you could otherwise freeze. For most of the time it is just Tania and I, and I calculated pretty well, although in June and July we were awash with beetroot. By the end of this glut every possible beetroot recipe had been exhausted. For about three months we filled



baskets full of a runner bean called 'Blue Lake', a delicious variety with rounded pods, shorter than the average runner bean. More important, this delicious bean does not appear to become tough and stringy after having been left for too long on the plant. From June until the end of September I lifted potatoes ('Wilja', an early variety, and 'Maris Piper', main crop), and perpetual spinach, a real star of a crop, has proved more than prolific for several months. This latter can be sown quite generously (as opposed to thinly) because the young plants can be added to salads during the thinning process which should result in plants standing one foot (30cm) apart. Each selected plant can be left where it is for three years, and will go on producing throughout the winter as well, although better results are achieved if a cloche is placed over them, especially during cold snaps.

We have had so much wild rocket that we have been using this indefatigable herb for pesto sauce mixed with walnuts, olive oil, garlic and parmesan. I harvested my red onions in early August and tied them up in tresses in the kitchen for winter use, and I am still left with memories of baby carrots melting in my mouth. Crops that will be harvested during the winter include April-sown parsnips, celeriac, grown from small plants in May, and leeks. Parsley, chives, nasturtium, coriander, tarragon and marjoram and thyme continue to burgeon. What a relief it is to no longer have limp

## RODDY LLEWELLYN GARDENING SEMINARS 2009

'Understand Gardening' is a series of seminars with Roddy Llewellyn explaining the basics of gardening in easy terms. Roddy will be answering many questions such as 'Why do we garden?', 'Which are the most useful tools?' and 'How do I cope with weed infestations?'. Seminars will be held on Tuesday, October 20; Thursday, October 22; Tuesday, November 3 and Thursday, November 5 from 9.30am-4pm and will be hosted by Mrs Patrick Ramsay at Burmington Grange, Cherrington, Shipston on Stour, Warwickshire CV36 5HZ.

**Tickets £95 each. 10 per cent will go towards Shipston Home Nursing. Please send cheque with accompanying letter stating which day(s) you wish to attend to Sir Roderic Llewellyn, Bt, Ivy Cottage, Willington, Shipston on Stour, Warwickshire, CV36 5AS. Email: [roddy.llewellyn@virgin.net](mailto:roddy.llewellyn@virgin.net) Tel: 01608 663108.**

**Tickets are limited to 12 places per seminar. Cheques will not be refunded unless we or you can fill your space.**

bunches of herbs from the supermarket that sit on the kitchen window shelf that soon turn yellow in smelly water.

It has not all been plain sailing however. My strawberries were devoured by wasps: next year I shall cover them with a fine-netted cage. My outdoor bush tomatoes 'Maskotka' suddenly collapsed from tomato blight just as the fruits (well over 100) were beginning to redden, and the nasturtiums were partly devoured by cabbage-white caterpillars. Half of the spring onions rotted in the ground because I harvested them too late. We all learn from our mistakes. The fun about growing vegetables is trying out different varieties every year and I shall be keeping a strict record of what I grow and where. This will make crop rotation all the easier in successive seasons especially because my raised vegetable beds are built to certain shapes. If you only have a few square meters to spare for vegetable growing, I implore you to do so. ■