



# KING HENRY'S WALK garden

## AVOIDING TROUBLE – the organic way



### Cultural care

#### Prevention rather than cure

**Aim for top health** so that plants will shrug off pests and disease. To achieve this, grow your plants in the right conditions and in their season. Go with the grain, not against it. Make sure they have the right soil, enough light, water, space and air circulation for their particular needs.

**Practise rotation.** It helps to prevent devastating diseases that lurk in the ground – club root in brassicas, potato blight, onion white rot, eelworm etc.

**Get the soil into top condition** with repeated applications of well rotted compost and manure. Once it is fully fertile, feed the soil, not the plants, except when they need a boost.

**Be vigilant and catch problems** before they take hold. If you see damage, look for the cause. It could be the caterpillars eating the leaves (in which case pick them off), the beginnings of fungal rot (remove all damaged leaves, get air round them perhaps by thinning), virus (this is fatal, so dig up the plant and burn or bin it post haste before it spreads to other plants).

**Hone up your detection skills.** As a rule of thumb, creatures that move fast are predators and those that move slowly are the ones that are after your veggies. Not always! Many creatures are friends at one stage of their life and pests at another. The ladybird is your best friend as it vacuums up aphids, but the larvae could easily be mistaken for a pest. Some pests are large enough to be seen but others are not or they dine at night. You can find clues from the type of damage.

**Hygiene.** Be careful not to carry diseases from one plant to another on your tools or boots.

## Barriers, traps and predators

**Barriers** which include cloches and netting like enviromesh, fleece or aerated polythene are highly effective against flying pests and birds. The gauge of the nets needs to be in proportion to the particular pest.

Brassica collars will deter root flies and soil borne creatures from laying their eggs under plants for the larvae to eat them when they hatch out.

**Traps.** Sticky ones to catch pests on the wing. Pheromone traps to lure codling moths in under false pretences. These are generally used to gauge the seriousness of an infestation. Beer traps for slugs and snails. Rotting vegetation and sacrificial plants.

**Beneficial insects.** Bring in the beneficial insects by providing plenty of nectar and a good variety of different plants flowering at different times of the year, particularly in winter when food is short.

**Camouflage** with a variety of plants. Don't make your plot into a billboard for pests that go by sight.

**Biological control** gets the approval of the organic camp. You need to get things right however as you are dealing with living creatures. Identify the pest correctly, get the right temperature for the predator, the right season etc. and follow the instructions to the letter. In an allotment situation you would need the co-operation of your neighbours. Biological controls usually only destroy one generation of the pest.

**However,** keep in mind that you need a few slugs and snails for the birds – quite a few in fact. A thrush needs 1,000 snails to feed each brood, a pair of blue tits needs 10,000 caterpillars for the young. A single lacewing gets through 50 aphids a day.

**Last resort.** Even organic chemicals, which don't persist in the soil for long, should only be used as a last resort. They kill innocent bystanders and pollute, though not nearly as badly as the chemical ones. Soft soap is one of the mildest.

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