Dunchurch Allotment Association



By Paul Sanders

'What gets done stays done' says my allotment buddy as he discusses the tasks he has just undertaken in January. In July, the time I am now writing, it's more like 'What gets done is soon undone.' I have just spent half a day weeding the various vegetable beds and I know that within a week with the mixture of sunshine and showers I will have to start all over again. As I pursue the meditative process of pulling out the weeds. I find myself pondering on the unwanted plants competing with my vegetables. Fat hen is easily uprooted and does not snap, chickweed is quick to grow and can be grasped by the handful, but deep rooted dandelion requires digging. All three of these weeds have been used as edible plants for humans and the first two, as their names suggest. fed to poultry



Cleavers – a familiar weed, ripe for childish pranks but with traditional medicinal uses

In the last few years new weeds never seen on my allotment have made an appearance. Creeping thistle with its long tap root followed by horizontal side roots means that an individual plant later gets surrounded by younger plants as the deep underground lateral roots spread out radially. The seed was most likely parachuted in last year, born on a late summer breeze.

As an allotmenteer walks past, I practise as lots of children do, lightly casting a strand of sticky-bob stem onto her back and smile as I imagine this being pointed out when she meets with friends. Cleavers is the name given to this weed; its stem and seeds are covered in tiny hooks which aid seed distribution and climbing up other plants. Cleavers is a weed which can very quickly overwhelm untended areas. Interestingly, poultices and washes made from cleavers were traditionally used to treat a variety of skin ailments, light wounds and burns.

Without doubt my most troublesome unwanted plant is bindweed. It is also one I have grudging respect for as it just keeps popping up. Hedge bindweed

(*Calystegia sepium)* (left) with its pure white trumpet flowers is a familiar sight, choking plants in borders and twining around any plant shoot or cane. Its perennial spaghetti like roots are usually white and brittle and if broken are able to regenerate from the smallest sections. Field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis)* (below) has only recently invaded my asparagus bed and here the roots grow vertically down making this weed particularly troublesome as I'm reluctant to disturb the asparagus crowns.



I am often asked how I disposed of these most persistent and regenerative of unwanted plants. For most weeds it is fine to compost but avoid including seeds. For those weeds that regenerate from even the smallest of root pieces, for example bindweed, my method is to store in a black, light excluding bag for a couple of years. By this time the plant will have rotted to make a rich compost with no trace of the original nuisance.

The Allotment Association will be producing a gardening calendar for 2023. If you would like to suggest any short gardening tips for inclusion in the calendar, please send them soon to **admin@dunchurchallotments.org.uk.**



THE ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION GARDENING WALL CALENDAR FOR 2023.

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