



PLANTS WE LOVE TO HATE

Urtica dioica better known as the stinging nettle and well known to Green Gym regulars.

We all know about its more unattractive features such as the nasty rash it can give you when touched and the fact that it seems able to grow anywhere and everywhere in great profusion.

Here are some other facts that might be of interest.

If you do brush past it and get stung, don't scratch. The best thing to do is to apply a soothing lotion and have a nice hot cup of tea. No soothing lotion to hand - use a natural remedy, the leaves from the dock plant or (amazingly) the juice from the nettle. And go to Diane for the nice hot cup of tea.

The University of Plymouth has proved that the stinging nettle can have a beneficial effect on arthritis sufferers, confirming folk law dating back to Roman times which suggested flogging with nettles (urtication) as a cure for rheumatism.

Any takers??

The nettle also can apparently cure head lice! If it fails to remove the lice it will still promote hair growth - hope for all you bald sufferers from head lice.

They can be harvested and eaten - though do use gloves when cleaning and chopping. Wash and put dripping wet into a pan and cook for 20 minutes. You can make nettle soup, tea, porridge, beer and yarg cheese is wrapped in nettles.

More seriously they are a source of food for caterpillars and a wide variety of insects of which they support

about 100 species. They are a good accelerator for compost and a rich source of nitrogen, minerals and vitamins A and C.

Sadly, getting rid of nettles is a slow business and they need to be cut back repeatedly for many years - at least 3 times a year for 3 years (RHS source). So it looks as if the Green Gym will be clearing the Ice House at Greys Court for some time to come.....

MIKE'S ALPHABET

Well of course K means GG is **OKay**. But outstandingly it is silent as in **Knees, Kneepads and Kneelers**. Sooner or later you will have to get down on your knees whatever activity you are engaged in, be it scraping moss and turf to allow the heather to grow back or cutting through low branches growing close to the ground. For a time, changing between knees first one then the other is fine, but eventually you will find it essential to put on a kneepad. Very comfy and cosy I find, if you can get it to stay on!

Talking of **knees**, just think of all the good coming from getting down on your knees, getting up, changing position, getting down again. Despite the ominous creaking and crackling of knee joints the knock-on is terrific. Suddenly lifting your leg up to put on socks and shoes becomes easy-peasy. Bending down to pick up a dropped coin in Tesco's, doing up your shoelaces in the car park, a doddle. But that's the GG effect for you.

K also stands for **Knackered**. But a positive sort of knackered after a session of 3 hours hard work and a sort of **karma** too. Good goes in good comes out, mentally and physically. You're tired so you fall peacefully asleep in the chair after lunch that's the physical bit. But you don't feel guilty as you've put effort in and you've made a contribution that's the mental bit. And the psychological bit, too.

Lots of K's make GG so great. There's the stretching which makes such a wonderful **kickstart** to the morning and the search for **kindling** to start the fire is such fun too. And there's no fuss, no **kerfuffle**, about the organization of the session. But above all I must mention the **Red Kites**. They have become such a lovely, precious part of our GG environment over the years. Gliding,

swooping, calling, silently circling. What a delight they are for us wherever we work. Yet another tinge of pleasure for a confirmed BVAP.

MikeSaunders

Diane Gordon has provided us with a series of wonderful sticky, gooey cakes and the Editor has persuaded her to part with one of her recipes. (Mind you I know it won't turn out half as well when I make it. ED)

PRUNE AND DATE CAKE.

Serves 16

6oz(175g) ready to eat dried prunes, roughly chopped

8oz(225g) dates, roughly chopped

4oz(110g) raisins

4oz(110g) currants)

10oz(275g) butter

1 397g tin condensed milk

10fl oz(275ml) water

5oz(150g) plain flour

5oz(150g) wholemeal flour

3/4 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda

1 heaped tablespoon chunky marmalade

2 tablespoons sieved marmalade - to glaze

1 tablespoon water, salt

grease and line an 8 inch square tin,

Put all the fruit in a **largish** saucepan, add the butter, condensed milk and water. Bring to the boil stirring continually. Turn the heat down and simmer for 3 minutes stirring. Don't worry about the appalling look of the sloppy mixture - quite normal. Transfer to a large mixing bowl and let cool for about 30 minutes.

Weigh out the flours and sieve with bicarb and a pinch of salt. Preheat oven to gas mark 3, 325F, 170C.

When the fruit mix has cooled stir in the flour using a large metal spoon, then add the chunky marmalade. Now spoon the mix into the cake tin, cover the top with silicone paper for protection. Put a hole in the centre of the paper. Bake in the oven for 2-2 1/2 hours.

Let the cake cool in the tin before turning out. then, when cold glaze with the sieved marmalade.

Acknowledgements to Delia Smith.

WATLINGTON HILL OXFORD INSPIRES 2007

In the January edition of The Lopper Julia Booker first referred to this project and the Green Gym participation in it. The whole project will certainly be featuring regularly as the year proceeds, and here is an update of what has been happening so far.

As part of the celebrations to mark 1000 years of Oxfordshire the National Trust wants to clear and open up an old trackway that leads from the Icknield way to the top of Watlington Hill at Christmas Common. Various volunteer groups such as the GG and Friends of Watlington Hill are working on the track.

There was a meeting in Watlington in January to launch the project.

Jane Starkey reports:-

On a wet and windy January morning seven of our members met at Watlington Town hall to learn what we could about the trackway we are helping to clear on Watlington Hill. Having negotiated the Fish van parked in the hall entrance the hall itself proved to be a most interesting old building having been constructed in 1664 by Thomas Stonor.

We were joined by Jerry Page the National Trust Warden for Watlington Hill; Robert Palmer of the Watlington Environmental Group; Keith Jackson of the Friends of Watlington Hill; and Gary Marshall, the archaeologist with the National Trust.

Jerry Page talked about the involvement of the NT who had been given the site in 1941 by Lord Esher. It is now an SSSI because of the high quality of the chalk grassland which supports many species which are specific to that terrain, notably orchids and the silver spotted skipper butterfly amongst others. Much of this habitat is being eroded by walking off the track. The juniper which used to thrive on the hill has been virtually destroyed by deer, rabbits and hares; limewood has been cleared by man and large herbivores. The yew trees along the track have grown unchecked and because they are poisonous to many beasts and the cost of husbandry is high it has not been possible to use grazing methods to clear the land.



Robert Palmer showed copies of maps dating from late 18 and 19 C which show there was a distinct track up the hill which was probably used by farmers and was a drovers road from the valley up to the top of the Chilterns. In 1900 the hillside was bare - possibly grazed but after that as shows up clearly on old photos scrub and trees regenerated until they cover the trackway today.

Gary Marshall said that there was some archaeological evidence that

this track dated back to mediaeval times and was well used to walk stock to market.

Those present felt that this gave a real incentive to attack the project with even more enthusiasm. It is hoped that we will finish clearing the trackway by the end of 2007 so that it can be used by walkers, thus preserving some of the eroded chalk grassland.

This meeting was the brainchild of Julia Booker who has gone on to give the project even more publicity as she was interviewed by Radio Oxford; on which programme she gave a clear outline of what was intended should happen and how the Green Gym would help. She sounded every inch the professional broadcaster and spoke very knowledgeably. After that the Henley Standard came and took photos and wrote up another account of the project and stressed the part that the Green Gym have played and will play in the clearance work. It all sounds very exciting and worthwhile. Just the sort of activity the Green Gym is made for.

Chilterns Wildlife Conference

Friday 23rd February 2007

Robert Watson and I went to this along with around 130 others who represent the groups interested in the Chilterns AONB, including Wildlife Trusts and County Councils. Subject matters covered the threats to wildlife from population pressures (roads, houses and leisure), farming and global warming.

It was encouraging to see so many groups under the same roof and singing from the same hymn sheet. On the downside, it was a sit and listen conference with ten speakers! There was general agreement that a follow up conference would be desirable with much more input at the grass roots level. Lunch was very good. Tony

Golly - No Holly !!



Our efforts at Nuffield Place should ensure that the Beech wood cleared of most of the invasive holly will give a splendid display of bluebells this spring.

SUN 6 MAY

ANDREW HAWKINS WILL
LEAD A GUIDED WALK FROM
PEPPARD CHURCH AT
2.30PM

ALL WELCOME

AGM GREEN GYM

MONDAY APRIL 16

AT 8PM IN

THE ELIZABETH ROOM
(THE MEETING ROOM)
BEHIND

ROTHERFIELD GREYS
CHURCH

WORKING AT ASTON ROWANT

It's possible that some of you Saturday lot have never been to Aston Rowant Nature Reserve – if so you've missed something! One of over 200 National Nature Reserves, Aston Rowant is perhaps one of the most glorious sites that SCGG visits. Run by Natural England, it used to be under the supervision of English Nature until the government in its wisdom decided to amalgamate the latter with two other outfits – more expense in changing all the notice boards.

Straddling the M40 motorway where it climbs up to the Chiltern escarpment, the nature reserve has the most fantastic views across central Oxfordshire; we all look on with some smugness as the traffic grinds its way in endless processions. It is as good an example of woodland and downland pasture that you will find, most of it set on an often precipitous slope. Here you can get above the numerous red kites as they circle and really appreciate their size and colouring.

In charge of this magical place are the two wardens Mick and Ann who provide possibly the most varied work we get anywhere on our sites. In recent times we have herded sheep, installed fencing and gates, cleared scrub, planted juniper bushes, cleared a dewpond, and even installed an electric footpad run by solar power to monitor the number of visitors. And of course



the annual spud roast is held here.

There are a few challenges! First the slope – at the very least you will have an uphill struggle one way or the other to reach or leave the worksite. And you may be struggling up and down the slope for much of the session. Then there's the weather – we must have been up here in more climatic extremes than anywhere else. We've worked in a snow blizzard so that in the end even Jules had to admit we could neither see the ground or where we were!

We've been up here in over thirty degrees planting and enclosing juniper bushes with the sweat pouring off us! We've experienced rain driving across the Oxfordshire plain with a wind to match.

But if you're coming, beware! Aston Rowant boasts not one but three car parks so unless you're tuned in for Jules e-mail you've a good chance of ending up in the wrong place! But don't let that put you off. (If in doubt go to the Office early or wait for the directional signs to be in place.

John Hasler

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"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

No 11 April 2007

WEATHER

The weather has dominated our headlines this quarter and possibly for the first time it caused a session to be cancelled. This was due to that snowfall in February, when, sensibly, it was decided that we would only add to the problems on the roads if we tried to make it to Oak Farm.

Another session there was curtailed as the rain fell in buckets. Long suffering, intrepid - and soaking wet - Green Gymmers finally had to call it a day after coffee and go home to a complete change of clothes. Heavy rain also cut short work at Greys Court spreading bark chippings on the shrub borders. The weather, however, enabled the group to take coffee in in one of the elegant greenhouses where the Trust's geranium cuttings and pots of tender exotic plants were much admired.

Finally one work party on Kingwood Common was enlivened by the rapidly rising wind making the overhead branches wave about alarmingly, so that we finished the path clearing task rather more rapidly than usual. This was on February 18, the day of the big storm that blew trees down all over the area, cutting off Henley and causing power cuts- a close shave!!!

HOWEVER THERE WAS SOME PROPER GREEN GYM WEATHER

Heavy work clearing rushes at Ewelme was eased by the beautiful warm sunshine and clear bright light sparkling on the water.



A smallish group enjoyed more sunshine at Reading Golf Club where the task was to clear scrub from an area of chalk grassland, so that appropriate chalk loving plants can flourish.

The area is an AONB and the golf club want to make sure the land is maintained appropriately

Working on Fiddle Hill enjoying a good bonfire as the group cut back regrowth and extended the open area farther down the hill. It is always a challenge to cope with the steep slope on this site.

