

**GARDENERS UNDER APPRECIATED**

On being asked "What do you do for a living?", one of my colleagues responded "I'm only a gardener!".

Which got me to thinking as to why gardening is considered such a lowly calling? Why are the wages so low?

Why do some people depict us gardeners as old men, with long beards, flat caps, fermenting necks and with little intelligence?

When I look in the mirror, that's not who I see looking back at me. Well, not entirely anyway!

To me, those who garden are some of the most wholesome, worldly people I've met. They are generous, and enjoy sharing their knowledge, plants, tools and surplus produce with other people as much as enjoying the fruits of their own labours.

Gardening is perhaps the oldest profession, but it has never really recovered from the bad press it got when the first ever gardener started meddling in things that didn't concern him, and stole an apple. Which ended with him getting the sack and being banished from 'The Garden of Eden'?

Some people who employ a gardener, have gardens that are a joy to them, and these same people make the yearly pilgrimage to the Chelsea Flower Show, to gasp at the flower displays and the magnificent vegetables. But do they ever give a thought those who made it all possible?

They see an untidy and unkempt person with a sunburnt neck and muddy boots and say "Wonder who that is" with someone else saying "Dunno, but 'e looks like a gardener!"

Much of our gardens are made up of plants of foreign origin, but they did not just appear here like migrating birds. They were imported centuries ago by gardening pioneers, going to some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world. Some even lost their lives pursuing these treasures.

When the plants appeared in this country, it was the job of gardeners; less travelled to study and research them so as to grow them successfully in our climate. Gardeners of that age came up with theories, that still hold water even today. Which brings me to another barrier that we gardeners are up against. That some people don't know the difference between the use of the word 'theory' in everyday language and its use in the scientific arena.

In everyday language, someone's unusual perspective on life might lead them to have some half baked theory. But in science, the word theory means a fully cooked idea! One which has been tested and observed and experimented with.

So next time you hear a gardener express a theory, don't dismiss it as a half baked idea, he may have spent decades coming to his conclusions by studying his plants.

Also, as the human population increases, so gardeners have invented new ways and new sources to feed those hungry mouths. All those rows of wine bottles out there in the supermarkets, and filled with wine raised and produced by us gardeners. Perfumes are distilled from flowers grown by us gardeners. Medicines are extracted from plants brought into cultivation by us gardeners.

These endeavours gardeners have made have their negative points as well though. The advance in growing techniques have seen new pests and diseases appear that can destroy crops, but so far, we gardeners have risen to the occasion and found a cure in many cases.

Unfortunately, gardening still suffers a hangover from Victorian times, when a gardener would be fed and housed on a straw bed in a warm barn, in return for a hard day's work.

As most people have access to a garden and tools, they feel anybody can do gardening. Whereas, even though we have access to the *December 2008*



tools, boiler and equipment, we wouldn't get up one morning and say "I'm going to be a heating engineer today". But we are happy to wake up and say "I'm going to be a gardener today!"

So next time you sit around the table at a family gathering, to enjoy a sumptuous meal. Just take a moment to look at all the produce, from the vegetables to the salad bowl, from the fragrant flowers in the centrepiece vase to the glorious wine you are about to sup. Then spare a thought to those who made it all possible, on whom we all rely so much, but reward so inadequately.

If we gardeners work together, we might be able to take over the world. But perhaps we already have!

On re-reading this, I think my rates are due a yearly increase!

*Happy Gardening* **STUART MABBUTT**

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