

## WEEDS FOR FOOD & HEALTH

Last weeks article was about weeds which prompted a reader to send me an email with a very novel and practical idea.

The email reads; HI Wally

As usual a great article but I have some alternative thoughts on weeds, or nature's most unloved plants.

It is true there was a time when we didn't have roundup (and I can't wait till it is banned) but during that same time we should also let nature do it's thing and let weeds grow in areas where people stupidly waste money spraying. For example along the bottom of hedges or along the edges of paths and road frontages.

We have this obsession with control and tidiness. I want to start helping people understand that weeds have a role in covering the earth when we disturb it and why can't we let weeds grow and be the feature plants?

Where a weed wants to grow is where the soil needs them and aren't we feeding the soil after all?

They attract so many insects and bees and are much prettier to look at along road sides than dead brown strips along drains or edges.

In France they don't spray or control 'weeds' they allow the grass and plants to grow along the sides of roads or other places like meridian strips.

It would save so much money not to spray or even mow, it would give beneficial insects a better chance, bringing nature more into balance and be so much more low maintenance.

You have influence and knowledge but I think it is time we cut the perfect looking garden ties with England where those controlled ideas of gardening originally came from.

I just had to write and share my thoughts and thanks for listening. Julia

I have known Julia for many years and she has excellent ideas, using the plants we often refer to as weeds, which can be easily used for food and health.

Julia has an excellent book on what weeds can be used and the benefits derived.

Have a look at her web site at [www.juliasedibleweeds.com](http://www.juliasedibleweeds.com) for more information including workshops that she does.

The idea of allowing weeds to grow in places to encourage insects, bees and birds is so logical when so much of our environment is threatened by misuse and chemicals.

If I recall correctly the English hedge rows was an area where farmers and owners let Nature do its thing making it a haven a haven for wildlife including our friendly snail eating hedgehogs.

A few years back there was a movement for people to plant wildflowers along their road frontages and other areas.

I turned an area of lawn into a wildflower area and the bees loved it. The flowers were mostly annuals and when they died down the area would be a bit messy until the dropped seeds took over with a fresh display.

I have done similar along the road frontage of my warehouse where annuals and perennials flower and die back as the seasons pass. Low maintenance, looking great for good period then a bit scruffy for a while.

Cottage gardens are another form of gardening where by and large you just allow Nature and the plants to do their own thing.

Road frontages or grass verges are an area where this idea could be constructively employed.

These areas are owned by councils but it falls on the owner of the land behind the frontage to mow the grass and weeds that grow there.

I notice that some owners have placed raised gardens on their strips and growing vegetables in them which is also a good idea.

If we were to plant fruiting trees that had non-invasive root systems along our road frontages they would also be very practical supplying free fruit for all those that would benefit.

The rest of the verge could be left to a selection of edible weeds.

Under trees in parks and reserves where councils spend your rate money spraying herbicides to make the soil bare is not only a waste of money, harmful to children that play there, not environmentally friendly and over time causes the trees to yellow and eventually die due to the buildup of chemicals in the soil.

That reminds me of the mother walking through the park with a toddler running and a baby in the pram, when they came across a council worker covered from head to toe in his protective clothing, mask and breathing apparatus.

The mother asks is it ok to walk through? The council worker replies its quiet safe? Yeah Right.

A problem that I see is that verges are a combination of grass, grass weeds and a few weeds and if allowed to do their own thing by not mowing them down, it would not be such a good mix of plants.

Maybe Julia can help in this respect for instance on her web site she names a lot of edible weeds such as

Alpine Strawberry, Indian Strawberry, Amaranth, Green or Purple, Catsear, Chicory, Chickweed, Cleavers, Clover, Red and White, Creeping Mallow, Bitter Cress, Dandelion, Dock and Dove's Foot Geranium.

You likely have some already established and with a bit of searching you can find many others.

What we need is a seed supplier of mixed edible weed seed packets.

In the herb selection of your garden shop you are also likely to find a few also and if there are packets of wildflower seeds these can be sown to.

Herbs and weeds are very self sowing and once you obtain a few specimens they will perpetuate without any input from yourself.

Insects will have a home, birds will have protein, bees and bumble bees will love the flowers such as borage and catnip.

Make up a sign or signs saying ENVIRONMENTAL SANCTUARY so you won't be criticised or feel embarrassed with your fledgling area. It would likely be a talking point and once neighbours and others see the value of creating a Nature's haven they may do the same.

What a wonderful place that would be. Besides who really likes mowing the council's bit of grass?

Health wise you can have great advantages as Julia's site will show you.

Dandelion for instance, the leaves contain high amounts of Vitamins A, B and C, potassium, calcium, iron, phosphorous, and other minerals. They also contain protein 19-32% in 100g which is an impressive amount just from green leaves. Dandelion leaves are bitter which stimulates the release of saliva and improves digestion.

They are also a tonic, help lower cholesterol levels, increase blood and lymph circulation and are blood purifiers. The leaves and flowers can be used in smoothies, salads, pestos and stir-fries. The flower-heads can be used to make wine the roots to make coffee.

This could really upset the pharmaceutical companies if you grew weeds and became healthy.