

chemicals are short-term and suppress many organisms in the soil, but do allow a certain take-up of nutrients.

Chemicals also allow the take-up of things the plant does *not* want, so it becomes greedy for water to dilute this intake. All the extra water increases the cell size, and we do get bigger flowers and leaves etc. But at a price, which is weaker plants, with obviously more water content, and a far less healthy and less regenerative soil. This leads eventually to a sterile soil because all the micro-organisms are dead.

So, as I understand it, we need these bacteria and yeasts in vast numbers to help us get the best out of the manure and compost that we dress the ground with.

Crucially, the increase of the surface area of the roots is what it is all about. More roots mean more enzyme-attaching points, means more food going into the plant, means a stronger plant. 'Get more out of what you put in' should be the catchphrase.

There are other organic root growth promoters on the market and they seem to rely upon fungi, but it would appear that they are best used for growing trees.


For those amongst you who want to read a more scientific paper on the benefits of using EM, and the history of where and when EM was discovered, you can. Please email me at seall@ukonline.co.uk with 'EM trials request' in the subject line, or send an SAE to *Kitchen Garden* magazine.

The whole process of EM is self-regenerating, compared to using chemicals, and the making of EM at home is fantastically easy and cheap. I will tell you all about that next month.

All this sounds very much like how our bodies function. The more in balance we are, the better we can survive the demands and turmoil of daily life. Since reading about EM, I have been amazed by how long it has taken me to understand what is under my feet compared to how much I know about the far side of the moon for example: and that is nearly nothing.

I spoke to another plot-holder, Robin, about EM and he made a good point that we don't have a problem growing in this country, compared to some, it is just that we can't always control which plants do grow on our plot.

I think that EM can help with that because it will give the plants we want to grow a fighting chance against weeds. Talking of weeds, I have pulled all the visible roots out by hand and fork, and had the backache to prove it. I think I am going to invest in some longer tools soon. I will let you know how I get on. Bye for now.

Andrew 

GROWING TO SHOW

A tug and a



A black cloth is optional, but an unbroken tap root is vital.



Giving a good soaking before lifting helps get the tap root out intact.

Andrew Tokely's tips for preparing parsnips for the show bench.



The parsnip is one of the hardest vegetables to master when growing for the show bench. Firstly, you don't know the quality of your roots until you've lifted them. Secondly you will have some work ahead of you before you can see whether you have produced prize specimens. You must be patient and take your time when preparing and exhibiting them. And, before lifting, get the rest of the family to stand with their fingers crossed in the hope that what comes out of the ground will be of exhibition quality.

But don't let this put you off. Over the years I have seen many parsnips on the show bench – mine and other exhibitors' – that match so well, with

roots so clean and white you would think they had been dipped in whitewash.

Hopefully after following my tips, you too will be able to exhibit such specimens.

Lifting in one piece

Parsnips discolour quite quickly once lifted, but often take a long time to get out of the soil and to be prepared for the show bench. So I tend to lift them the day before the show. This allows me to take time over them and not rush the job. A little haste now could break that all-important tap root, and reduce the length of the parsnip you end up with.

If you have grown them in barrels filled with sandy compost – as I used to do – then before lifting, carefully scrape a little compost away from the shoulders of the parsnips, so you can try to match up the size of the tops. Once you have made your selection, turn on your hosepipe and push this down beside the parsnips you wish to lift. This will gently wash away some of the compost and loosen the root.

Once you think it is loose enough you can grab hold of the foliage and try to pull