“Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.”

Martin Luther King

Britain’s allotments were created out of the Enclosure Acts of the 18th century and grew with the industrial revolution. The amount of available allotments today, however, is dwarfed by the figures from the 1840’s. Nottingham, for example, was representative of most towns and Harry Wheatcroft (“My Life with Roses”, Odhams 1959) recorded that:

“In those days Nottingham was surrounded by allotments, not in their hundreds but in their tens of thousands, and the great Dean Hole…estimated that in his day, about a hundred years ago, there were some 20,000 of them scattered around what was then an important town but not yet a city, and the home of under 200,000 people- an allotment for about every third family. Most of them, I imagine, were like our family a few decades later, growing virtually all their own vegetables and thereby making themselves independent of everyone else for at least a large portion of the daily diet.”

Dean Hole, the Reverend Samuel Reynolds Hole, was a Nottinghamshire and Victorian sportsman, vicar, squire and horticulturalist specialising in the care of roses. Born in 1819, he lived in Caunton Manor, near Newark with his wife Caroline, where he was the local vicar. Hole was the author of the oldest books in the world on rose growing. He was quoted as saying “he who would have beautiful roses in his garden must have beautiful roses in his heart”. When the National Rose Society was founded in 1876, Hole became and remained its president until his death in 1904.

In his book Portrait of Nottingham, Emrys Bryson added:

The first greenhouse in the country was built at Wollaton, and it has never been disproved that the first rose show was held – in a pub named after the Crimean War general, Cathcart – on Easter Monday 1859. Dean Hole himself, who became the first president of the Royal National Rose Society, battled through hail, rain, wind and snow from Caunton, near Newark, to see for himself the fragrant products of the tiny allotments tended by stockingers on the terraces of the Hungerhills.

In 1860 on the Hunger Hills site in Nottingham some 30,000 people gardened on 10,000 plots, with roses a speciality. Although a rose show on Easter Monday is unusually early, particularly as most roses are only just coming into bud at that time of year, the show was for roses grown in heated glasshouses on the Hunger Hills. Nevertheless, towards the end of the rose growing season in September 1939 the beauty and fragrance of roses were no longer of prime importance to horticulturists.

William Padley of Leicester talking to the BBC of his memory of Nottingham in WW II said:

“Although I was only 7 years old at the time, I still remember the announcement on the radio that Great Britain was now at war with Germany. I felt the atmosphere of gloom and foreboding. But there was a strong community feeling. It was 'Us' against the Germans and the Nazis and later the Japanese.

People seemed determined to carry on as normally as possible. We were urged to "Dig for Victory". Plots of uncultivated land locally were ploughed over and converted into allotments. My
father had one. Crops were mainly potatoes and 'greens' - cabbages and Brussels sprouts, plus some beetroot, carrots and peas. Plenty of rhubarb.

Food became scarce and ration books were issued to try and ensure fair distribution of what was available. However, some families always seemed to have plenty of food. It was said that they got their produce on the "black market". It seemed you could get most things if you had the right contacts and money. Most unfair! Some shopkeepers used to swap supplies with other shopkeepers."

The Dig for Victory! campaign was instigated in Britain as soon as World War II started. The government realised that the population would go hungry if the war was to last longer than a few months. The result was that formal gardens, lawns and even sports pitches were transformed into allotments, large and small, and everybody on the home front was encouraged to become a vegetable gardener.

The first official use of the phrase ‘Dig for Victory’ was on leaflets issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in November 1939 calling for ‘500,000 allotment holders’ as part of the Government’s Grow More campaign. An order was made granting urban authorities wide powers to take possession of land which they could either cultivate themselves or let out to individuals, generally one tenant to a 10 square rod (90x30ft.) plot.

The phrase ‘Dig for Victory’ was first coined in an Evening Standard leader. In September 1940 Dig for Victory became a campaign in its own right, complete with posters and leaflets; for some time both Grow More and Dig for Victory leaflets were produced. An additional 500,000 plots were called for by the minister of agriculture and he estimated that these extra allotments would provide six to seven million adults and nine to ten million children with vegetables for the greater part of the year.

The Need for Dig for Victory!

Before World War II, Britain imported over 55 million tons of food a year - much of it from Canada and the USA. 80% of fruit was imported. After the outbreak of war, merchant vessels carrying provisions into Britain, especially those coming across the Atlantic, became targets of the German navy and food imports were under threat. At the same time the British government recognised that the merchant ships were required for the transport of troops, munitions and even aeroplanes to the theatres of war.

The winter of 1939-40 was the coldest for 45 years. The shops were bare of vegetables, which could not be dug from the iron-hard frozen earth. Food rationing began on 8 January 1940, but it was not only a matter of making sure that everyone had an equal entitlement to food: it was also a pressing matter of ensuring that there was going to be enough to eat in wartime.

The reliance on imported food needed to be reduced. This was dealt with in three main ways:

- Farming was modernised and the Women’s Land Army was set up to provide labour for the growing agricultural sector.
- Rationing was introduced, which involved every householder registering with their local shops and the shopkeepers were provided with enough food for their registered customers, through a system of ration cards with points.
The government recognised that rations needed to be supplemented and in 1939 the Ministry of Agriculture launched *Dig for Victory!*, one of the most memorable campaigns of the 20th Century.

Allotment and home food production is highly productive in terms of land use and during World War II allotments were estimated to contribute some 1.3 million tonnes from 1.4 million plots. Agricultural production generally is more efficient in terms of labour but not in terms of land usage.

**The National Campaign**

Lord Woolton was appointed Minister of Food in April 1940. He was a charismatic man with great business acumen, which ensured that the Dig for Victory campaign succeeded and the British public did not starve during or after the war. In his first broadcast to the nation he said:

"Last week the Prime Minister (Neville Chamberlain) did me the great honour of asking me to become the Minister of Food. I hesitated, I doubted my ability to do a job so colossal. I turned to my wife, I thought, and then I took the job – believing that I could rely on the women of this country to help me. We have a job to do together, you and I, an immensely important war job. No uniforms, no parades, no drills, but a job wanting a lot of thinking and a lot of knowledge too."

Even before that, ration books had been printed and rationing introduced in January 1940, and the women of the country had already been called to duty, to work not on the 'Kitchen Front' but on the land with the Women’s Land Army. This did lead to unusual situations and, inevitably, to tension. Mr C. Copson a farmer from Rothley in Leicestershire, complained at a meeting of fellow farmers at Leicester:

"My two Land Girls wanted to have a bath before the kitchen fire, and I had to wait outside in the snow. One, a London actress, shouted through the key-hole, ‘Come in and dry my back.’ That is not the type of girl I wanted!"

The whole of Britain's home front was encouraged to transform private gardens into mini-allotments. Not only this, but parks, formal public gardens and various areas of unused land were dug up for planting fruit and vegetables. Acres of Wollaton Park, for example, were ploughed up by Nottingham Corporation for use as allotments. The government also encouraged people to keep a few chickens or ducks for eggs. Some communities set up pig clubs, feeding the pigs on kitchen scraps and sharing the pork when the pigs were slaughtered. Goats were kept for milk and rabbits for stews.

The wartime garden wasn’t all ‘Dig for Victory’ vegetables and fruit. Flowers were still important and the Government encouraged gardeners to keep some. This was firstly to ensure that seed stocks would be available after the war and secondly, because the ‘morale value’ of flowers – their scent and colour – was needed in a world that was becoming ever more utilitarian and drab. It was therefore recommended that, wherever possible, fruit and vegetables be grown in back gardens and flowers in the front to present a more attractive façade.

This also provided better security as, despite the propaganda, there were plenty of people willing to help themselves to fruit and vegetables grown by others. While the back garden was rarely secure from theft, it was less vulnerable to impulse stealing. The problem also extended to allotments, where holders were forced to set up rotas of plot watchers, like fire watchers, to guard against pilfering. Courts imposed harsh penalties on offenders. For
example, in September 1941 a Penryn man was sentenced to two months’ hard labour for stealing potatoes and onions and in October 1942 Ipswich magistrates sent a man to prison for a month for stealing growing vegetables worth 1s 6d.

During 1940, Defence Regulations permitted all allotment holders to keep pigs, rabbits and hens to supplement the egg and meat rations. ‘You can use every bit of a pig except its squeal’ was a popular saying. Pigs were fed with potato peelings and other food scraps, all boiled beforehand to destroy any bacteria. However, animals often became the family pet, so Dad would become the ogre of the family when he was obliged to kill Flopsy Bunny, Perky Piglet or Henrietta Hen in order to provide food for the table.

**The Nottingham Campaign**

In 1939 the authorities knew that there could be a disastrous, energy-sapping food crisis. Consequently there was the original Government sponsored advertising campaign: “Help win the War by growing your own vegetables”. In Nottingham during October 1939 the children from Manvers and St Edward’s Roman Catholic Schools responded by clearing old allotments to increase food production. The fact that they had not been evacuated, as many city children had been, appears to have been overlooked.

By the end of May 1941 Nottingham had more than 6,500 allotments occupying 570 acres, but in 1942 further encouragement was provided by the Nottingham Corporation with its publication of *Nottingham at War: Official Handbook of Useful Information and Advice*. The Estates Surveyor produced Dig for Victory posters inviting applications for allotments on the basis that “the Estates Committee have plots to let in all districts”. The Town Clerk, in his foreword to the Handbook, emphasised the mood of the time:

*I commend with pleasure this edition of the Nottingham Citizens Handbook, which has been carefully compiled with the express purpose of providing in a concise and interesting form the essential information on matters of Civil Defence, with which every citizen in Nottingham should be quite familiar.*

*Modern Warfare, waged according to the Nazi technique, respects no rights whatsoever. It brings us all within the orbit of its destruction. Men, women and children are in the firing line today. Youth and Age; the hale and the infirm, the rich as well as the poor are all within the range of Nazi hate and Teutonic barbarism, hence the vital need for trained and efficient Civil Defence Services…………….*

A section of the Handbook was entitled Grow more Food! This included reference to national advice leaflets published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and issued by the Estates Surveyor. A crop rotation lay-out plan was shown along with ‘useful hints and tips for beginners’, including what to grow:

*Turnips, carrots, parsnips marrows, cabbages, winter broccoli, cauliflowers, Brussels sprouts, curly kale, spinach, peas, beans (broad, French, dwarf and runner), onions, beets celery, lettuces, radishes, potatoes, leeks, shallots and herbs may all be grown successfully by the careful beginner, provided the ground is properly prepared and due care and attention is given to the growing crops.*

A local firm of seedsmen advertised in the Handbook, Steward & Brewill Limited of Carrington Street and the Central Market, located on the corner of King Edward Street and Huntingdon Street. They were one of a number operating from the Market; twenty nurserymen were recorded at the Market in the 1941 edition of Kelly’s Directory of
Nottinghamshire. J.M. Stewart & Son Limited supplied a large variety of seed from their shop on Market Street (Kelly’s Directory, 1941) and later on George Street, which only closed in the early part of this century and still retained all its old seed drawers. It would be fair to assume that the St Ann’s tenants bought many of their seeds and plants from these sources.

The national advice on the creation of compost heaps, was also encouraged in the Handbook:

*However small your plot, always start a compost heap. It is a simple matter to convert garden refuse and other waste vegetable material into valuable manure providing all the humus the garden needs. By keeping the plot clean it also greatly assists in the curtailment of damage caused by insect pests. Do not use the compost until it is well rotted. Sulphate of ammonia half a pound per square yard scattered over each one foot layer, will greatly assist decomposition and improve the manurial qualities.*

Demonstration allotments were provided at the following seven parks within Nottingham and expert advice could be obtained from the relevant park superintendent:

- Woodthorpe Grange Park, Sherwood
- Valley Road Recreation Ground, Basford
- Vernon Park, Basford
- Nuthall Road Recreation Ground, Basford
- Melbourne Road Recreation Ground, Aspley
- The Arboretum
- Victoria Embankment

Local manufacturers also took advantage of the gardening surge in order to promote their products. John Players included within one of their advertisements a drawing of a gardener wearing a bowler hat and smoking a cigarette and Boots advertised that ‘Garden Aids help you to produce more Home Grown Food’. They utilised government advice in the wording of their advertisement for fertilisers and garden chemicals:

*Digging for victory is one of the most satisfying ways of hitting back at the Hun. What is more, it can be one of the most effective. For we all know that success on the Food Front is going to be a decisive factor in the outcome of the war.*

But zeal alone will not be enough to get the very best out of your food-growing effort. Everything you use in your garden or allotment must be planned and made to give excellent results. That’s why you should make full use of the fine selection of Garden Aids available at Boots the Chemists. Together with Boots’ half-century of chemical research and experience in production these goods bring to your aid the effective knowledge of that famous expert, Mr. Middleton. *With Boots Garden Aids to help, you will be sure of good results in the Battle of the Larder!*

Boots also contributed to the ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign by planting out vegetables on approximately 40 acres of land around its Beeston factories, vegetables that were used in its factory canteens. Assistance was also given to the Ministry of Agriculture by the distribution of advice leaflets through the Company’s stores.

The ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign for 1942 was launched by the then Ministry of Agriculture, Robert Spear Hudson. He particularly appealed to women and older children to relieve the men involved in other war work by working in allotments and gardens or to cultivate plots
on behalf of their absent husbands and fathers in the forces. This message was communicated in one of the ‘Dig for Victory’ posters of the time:

Women! Farmers can’t grow all your vegetables. Farmers are growing more of the other essential crops – potatoes, corn for your bread and food for the cows. It’s up to you to provide the vegetables that are vital to your children’s health – especially in winter. Grow all you can. If you don’t, they may go short. Turn your garden over to vegetables. Get the older children to help you. If you haven’t a garden, ask your local council for an allotment. **DO IT NOW!**

A former parks superintendent at Oldbury in Worcestershire estimated that 50% of allotment holders were women. Women’s gardening achievements were also highlighted in the 16 October 1943 edition of the *Gardeners’ Chronicle*. It carried a glowing account of the Nottingham Business and Professional Women’s Club, whose members included policewomen, doctors and teachers. Forty of the women supplied themselves with fruit and vegetables from their own gardens and allotments, but also shared their produce with friends and neighbours, contributed to works canteens and organized their own produce shows, netting £400 for charity.

### Seeds

Most allotment societies bought supplies of seeds, fertilisers and tools in bulk and sold them to members at cost price. Allotment holders who could not make use of this facility could usually get their supplies from the local council and also buy seedlings and plants raised in corporation glasshouses. Section 21 of the Land Settlement (Facilities) Act 1919 had given councils the power to sell to the public in this way and during the war years the Government encouraged them to adopt the practice.

The web-site of Thomas Etty, heritage seedsman, provides comprehensive lists of vegetable seeds that were probably available during the period 1939-45. He makes reference to seed varieties referred to in *Profitable Culture of Vegetables* by Thomas Smith (1911), updated by W E Shewell-Cooper in 1937, and to a combined list from 1948 based on *The ABC of Vegetable Gardening* by W E Shellwell-Cooper and *The Vegetable Grower’s Handbook* by Arthur J Simons.

During the early war years seed merchants had ample supplies in stock, but by 1942 the seed trade were beginning to worry about shortages. A large percentage of seed had formerly come from Holland, Italy and North Africa, but the war had cut communication with many of these overseas sources. Suppliers such as Suttons produced their own seed and one worker can recall cutting beetroot seed heads and laying them out to dry, along with brassica seed heads, beans and peas.

Seed output was stepped up and by November 1945 the Association of Pictorial Seed Packers estimated that sufficient vegetable seeds had been produced to fill 650 million packets. However, this was still an insufficient supply for all ‘Victory Diggers’, so the Ministry of Agriculture urged gardeners to save their own. The safest seeds to save were from vegetables that produced seed which came ‘true’ to type, such as beans, peas, tomatoes (a fruit), lettuce onion and leeks.

In April 1941 the Women’s Institute received 40 tons of vegetable seeds as a gift from an association in New York. America became the source of many benefactors, including 90 tons of seed delivered to the National Allotment Society in January 1943 from the British War Relief Society of America. The seeds came in boxes which held seventeen or eighteen different varieties, with each box containing the name of the American donor.
lot of pen pals we made when British gardeners wrote their thanks. Gifts of seeds also came from Canada, Australia and New Zealand. However, some of the seeds were unfamiliar to British growers, such as gourds and squashes, or, like maize and certain varieties of lettuce, were not always suitable for the climate.

**Vegetables Grown**

Some private gardeners had been used to supplying unusual vegetables as delicacies for their employers and these were promoted in certain books and magazines. They included endive, scorzonera, salsify, Jerusalem artichoke and kohlrabi. Although they had a number of benefits most people were reluctant to try growing them. As one wartime gardener recalls, ‘Quit honestly, we hadn’t got time to muck about with things we didn’t know.’

Lots of potatoes were grown as a healthy food that prevented fatigue and helped fight infection. The bigger a potato, the more vitamin C it contained, so commercial growers were bound by official orders not to lift immature tubers. Potato varieties included Arran Pilot, which gives a good early yield. Home Guard became a popular variety of first early potato, introduced by McGill & Smith in 1942.

Root vegetables were popular because they could be successfully stored. These included carrots, parsnips, turnips, swedes and beetroot and would form the basis of stews, pies and hotpots. Raw swede juice contained almost as much vitamin C as orange juice and the sweetness of parsnips, beetroot and carrots meant that they could be added to buns and cakes. Carrots and parsnips were increasingly used in sweet dishes. Parsnips could be flavoured and substituted for pineapple, or banana, while carrot cake was baked instead of Christmas cake. Carrots were eaten as sweets, sometimes dipped in toffee, much like toffee-apples.

Beetroot also provided a couple of unusual uses, as a colour rinse on dark auburn hair and to provide a colour tint to marzipan!

In the winter of 1940-1 there was a surplus of carrots. The Ministry of Food encouraged people to eat more by telling them that they contained vitamin A which would help them see in the black-out. Carrots do contain more vitamin A than other root crops, but not as much as leafy green vegetables. The ferny foliage of carrots was a good source of vitamin C, so if the foliage was boiled first of all the strained water could then be used for boiling the carrots themselves.

To encourage the consumption of greens the Ministry also tried appealing to a woman’s vanity: ‘You can look right if you feel right and you can feel right if you feed right. An ounce of cabbage is worth an inch of lipstick.’ In July 1940 a 24% tax had been placed on cosmetics, so this analogy was perhaps a way of softening the blow!

Shoppers were advised to ask their greengrocer for the outer leaves of a cauliflower, as well as the ‘flower’. The leaves could be cooked like cabbage and there was even a cooking method for the cauliflower stalk. Apparently if it was boiled until tender, rolled in browned breadcrumbs and then fried quickly or browned in the oven, it apparently had ‘a nutty flavour’.
People were also encouraged to eat other parts of vegetables normally discarded, such as pea and broad bean pods. Pea pods could be boiled and served as a green vegetable and young broad beans could be eaten in their pods.

Spinach was grown as a ‘catch crop’ between rows of other vegetables. As well as adding variety to greens, it also had the merit that the more it was cut, the more it re-sprouted.

The Ministry of Agriculture did promote the haricot bean, because of its high protein content. Although commercial growers did turn acres of land over to growing haricot beans, gardeners ‘north of the Trent’ were not particularly successful because they were a difficult crop to ripen.

There was an acute shortage of onions, particularly after the beginning of July 1940 when the Germans occupied the Channel Islands, which exported ample supplies in peacetime. Gardeners then found that crop after crop was destroyed by a particularly virulent variety of blight. Onions were a stock item for those who grew their own food and the shortage continued right up to the last year of the war. Indeed, onions became so scarce that they were considered a luxurious gift.

As a result there are some amusing stories relating to onions. A wartime cartoon showing a duchess lovingly touching a string of onions round her neck and saying, ‘They’re real, my dear!’ A report in the 18 January 1941 edition of Garden Work magazine tells of a parcel which ended up in a ‘dead letter’ office because its labels had been lost. It contained 14 lb. of onions and at least seventy people applied for it before it was delivered to its rightful owner!

They were also so highly prized that in February 1941 a raffle of a pound and a half of onions raised £4.3s.3d, nearly a week’s wages. They were popular prizes at Warship Week raffles, dances and social events and would not have been looked at askance if given as a present for a house warming or even a wedding. Alternatives such as spring onions, shallots and leeks were also planted and sought after.

The growth of cucumbers in heated greenhouses was banned. They had a low nutritional value. Tomato growing was definitely encouraged and market gardeners were forced to turn most of their greenhouses over to their cultivation for half the year.

The famous Nottingham rose grower, Harry Wheatcroft, recalled how he had to get rid of his ‘luxury crops’:

"We put the plough through a field of some hundred thousand trees – a heart-breaking job. We tore from the greenhouses the bushes that were to give us blooms for the spring flower shows, and so made room for the more urgent bodily needs of the nation.

"Pigs now wander about where our Polyantha roses bloomed. There’s wheat and barley where acres of Hybrid Teas coloured the land – even the humble cabbage stands where our standard roses once held majestic sway. The odour of greenhouses has changed too. Half a million onion plants have taken the place of the roses. They in turn will be succeeded by tomato plants and fruit; then lettuce, while the light still holds, and afterwards the humble mustard and cress."

Kale was included in the Dig for Victory campaign as a vegetable that was easy to grow and provided important nutrients to supplement meagre diets during rationing. It contained a rich mixture of vitamins, minerals and anti-oxidants that made it a vital ingredient in keeping the nation healthy in troubled times. 'Kale was an important vegetable during
wartime and it was promoted because it was easy to grow and provided lots of nutrition,' said John McPherson, of the Imperial War Museum.

A relative of the cabbage, it faded from the meal table and recipe books after the war, not least because of its somewhat metallic taste and the fact that it turned into an unappealing green mush when boiled. Traditionally it was boiled, like cabbage, and served with the main meal of the day, perhaps with boiled bacon and potatoes.

Early sugar snap peas were grown; they are sweet, which was important since sugar was rationed. There was an early cropping variety of broad bean and a very reliable and prolific variety of French bean called ‘The Prince’. Runner beans, variety ‘Painted Lady’ were planted up hazel stick wigwams or along a trench supported by hedge cut poles. Globe beetroot were grown for salads and they are full of vitamins. Purple sprouting broccoli was another winner, because as it is cut it comes again. There was also nutritious spring cabbage, all of which could be used. Early cropping lettuce was planted and cold frames used for raising hardier varieties to help fill winter and spring salad bowls. Parsley was used to edge the borders.

In 1942 a ‘Sacrifices for Victory’ budget imposed by the government increased the price of twenty cigarettes from 1s 6d to 2s prompting some people to grow their own tobacco. At first gardeners had to obtain a licence to make their own tobacco, but in the later years of the war the need for a licence was dropped if you were growing for your own consumption. However, you had to tell the local excise officer what you were doing.

Fertilisers

In 1942 the Government introduced National Growmore Fertiliser (developed by George Monro & Sons) and made up specially to meet the needs of private gardeners and allotment holders who wanted a reliable fertiliser containing potash. National Growmore contained 7% each of nitrogen, potash and phosphates; each allotment holder was allowed 42 lb. a year. The Ministry estimated that 30 lb. of this was sufficient to dress a 10-rod allotment and the remaining 12 lb. could be used as extra dressing for potatoes, winter green cabbage and spring cabbage.

Potash could be obtained from other sources. Wood ash was one, provided that it was not allowed to get wet, which would wash the potash out. A bushel of bonfire ash contained 4 or 5 lb. of potash. Collected and stored in a dry shed it could be used liberally, especially on tomato crops. Ash from burnt, dry bracken was also a good source of potash and burnt ivy leaves yielded both potash and phosphates.

Gardeners were encouraged to retain the sweepings from their chimney, as soot contained up to 4% nitrogen and, mixed with wood ash, produced a well-balanced fertiliser.

Ladies’ hairdressers and barbers could save cut hair as a fertiliser, with 15.5 lbs. of hair producing about 2.25 lbs. of nitrogen. Runner beans could be planted in deep trenches lined with hair and old newspapers and back filled with soil.

Poultry, pig, goat and rabbit owners could gain manure from their livestock. This was not only in the form of droppings: feathers, if chopped and buried, provided humus and nitrogen, and rabbit waste and skins placed in a compost heap and covered with vegetable waste eventually yielded nitrogen and phosphates.
Gardeners were encouraged to make compost heaps, a practice that, although common today, was not usual at the time. Manure was preferred, particularly as horses and stables were quite common in city areas. Collecting manure in the street from the milkman’s horse was quite a common practice by gardeners, either for placing around the roses or spreading over the rhubarb. However, in June 1940 the Ministry stepped up its propaganda on compost heaps. Wireless (radio) announcements outlined the process of composting and gardeners were urged to read the new ‘Dig for Victory’ leaflet called ‘Manure from Garden Rubbish’.

Pest Control

Carrots were the cylindrical early ones but, like onions, carrots are vulnerable to disease. No pesticides were available during the war, so gardeners had to improvise. Mothballs could be crushed up and sprinkled around the carrots. This masked the scent of the carrot, so that carrot flies weren’t attracted to it. Alternatively, a creosoted line could be fixed above the carrots. Put off by the smell of creosote, the carrot fly would bypass the crop.

Sulphur to combat mildew and Derris powder (from Derris root, an East Indian woody climbing plant) could be safely used for destroying caterpillars on cabbages or flea beetles on seedlings. An ecologically safe, if unsavoury, procedure was to collect some pests. Caterpillars could be picked off and dropped in a bucket of water and children were encouraged to collect cabbage white butterflies. A 1943 show schedule has a class for the “largest number of White Butterflies to be taken to school”.

Wireworm ate its way into potato tubers, tomato plants and carrots. Leatherjackets (the grubs of the daddy long legs or crane fly) damaged plant roots and ate into the underground stems of lettuce and spinach. One recommended method for destroying wireworm in newly dug grassland was to double-dig, then immediately sow a crop of mustard. When 1 ft. high the mustard was then dug in and, as well as acting as a green manure, it also apparently deterred wireworm. Leatherjackets, once their presence was evident by a wilted plant, could be killed by prodding a knife point in circles into the soil around the plant.

A special effort against garden pests was made on 28 June 1941, designated National Spraying Day.

A number of other recommendations for the control of garden pests are listed. Although they related to Victorian times, many of these methods were followed during the war and subsequently.

ANTS

1. Place an inverted garden pot over nest and ants will work it. Remove pot in a day or two by placing spade beneath it. Plunge contents of pot into boiling water. Alternatively, and preferably, find the ants a new home.
2. Stir up ants’ nest and sprinkle with guano (bird poo!)

APHIDS

1. Repeatedly syringe leaves and stem of plant with tobacco or lime water.
2. For greenhouse infestation, heat a plate of iron red-hot then place quantity of true Cayenne pepper on it. Close greenhouse door.
3. Encourage birds and ladybirds into the garden.

Nicotine was a lethal substance well used as a pest control during the war years, particularly against greenfly. It could be bought in powder form or as a proprietary preparation, but an alternative was simply to collect cigarette ends and soak them in a bucket of water with a bit of soft soap. The resultant liquid could then be sprayed on to plants.

Torn rhubarb leaves could be left soaking in a bucket, which produced a noxious substance that could be sprayed on cabbages. A galvanised metal bucket of water could be kept in the shed for the addition of any spare shavings of carbolic soap to be used as an anti-pest spray. It helped to stop whitefly and blackfly on the cabbages.

CATERPILLARS

1. To prevent on gooseberry bushes dust with hellebore powder or water with strong concoction of Digitalis or common foxglove. Both remedies deter sawfly laying eggs which lead to caterpillars.
2. If caterpillars already present, sprinkle new lime under bushes and fire a double-barrelled shotgun two or three times under bushes to shake caterpillars off into lime!
3. Remove top soil from under bushes and destroy grubs in it by mixing with salt or soot.
4. Sprinkle lime or soot either over caterpillars or plants.
5. Pick caterpillars off by hand.
6. Encourage birds into the garden.

Mint could be planted between the rows of cabbages and Brussels sprouts to discourage cabbage white butterflies from laying their eggs on the leaves, as they do not like the smell of mint.

SLUGS

1. Put fresh powdered lime into a coarse bag. After nightfall or at sunrise dust the ground where the slugs are.
2. Strew fresh cabbage leaves on ground in evening. Slugs hide under them during the night – collect slugs in the morning and find them a new home!
3. Alternatively, paint the underside of an old plank of wood with syrup or bits out of the bottom of a jam pot, then turn the plank over twice a week and squash the slugs attached to it.

WASPS

1. Hang bottles containing sugar and beer dregs in the tree.
2. Leave wasp-damaged fruits on tree. When wasps re-attack fruit cut them in two with scissors. Dangerous!

LITTLE BOYS

Smear garden wall top with red ochre and grease, which is an indelible mixture. Observe passing trouser seats. Take one willow cane to said trouser seats!
CATS

The 29 March 1941 edition of The Smallholder and Home Gardening magazine advised how to keep cats off allotments and gardens:

Like rabbits, they have runs. If you look carefully around, you will find tracks in the places at which they enter. Sprinkle these thickly with garden pepper and here and there on the plot bury, all but the neck, a few medicine bottles, putting about three teaspoonfuls of ammonia in each. Cats are nothing if not inquisitive. Seeing the bottle necks, they will take a sniff at them, and will naturally receive rather a shock when they smell strong ammonia fumes. They won’t come again for some time.

MICE

1. To prevent mice eating newly sown peas and beans soak in salad oil and roll in powdered resin.
2. Place chopped gorse in drills where seeds are sown.
3. Sink a pickle jar up to its brim in the ground. Smear rim and inside of jar with grease and half fill with water. Place corn or cheese near jar. Mice come for bait, slip over the rim and drown in submerged pickle jar.
4. Sunken glazed pot with a pronged wheel rotating on a stick placed across pot. Bait fixed on pronged wheel which rotates as the `mouse tries to eat. Mouse slips into water in pot.

RATS

Rats and mice were probably the major contaminators and devourers of human food. For many years, and certainly since 1921, the country had held a National Rat Week. In November 1938 the Minister of Agriculture had been asked in Parliament if one week a year “represents sufficient effort to deal with this menace”. The Minister acknowledged that the food damage each year was serious, but the main objective of the week was to focus public attention “on the necessity for taking action for the destruction of rats” and consequently he considered that one week a year was sufficient. He added that the responsibility for enforcing the provisions of the Rats and Mice (Destruction) Act, 1919, rested with local authorities and it was his belief that they “realise that the suppression of the rat pest calls for continuous effort throughout the year”.

Following the outbreak of war the Ministry of Agriculture, on the 14 October 1939, issued the following statement:

In view of the serious depredations on food stocks by rats, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries considers that the annual Rat Week should be held this year notwithstanding the war. The Week will begin on 6th November and the Minister asks everyone to make a special effort during the week to destroy any rats on their own lands and premises and to take all possible steps towards securing concerted action against these vermin.

In November 1939 Nottingham’s Rat Week was hailed as being more important than ever before. Campaigners were busy, not only catching vermin but also telling housewives all about the increased importance of protecting food (assuming that they could find food to buy of course).

Because of the improvements in nearby housing and sewerage systems, rats may not be as much of a problem today as they were during World War II. However, as an allotment
pest the wood pigeon is now at the forefront of a gardener’s defensive arrangements. Although wood pigeons have been a pest in rural areas since the 18th century, they are now very common in town and city gardens. During the wartime wood pigeons may not have required much attention from a gardener, but today, with anything between 5 and 10 million birds nationally during the winter, experience at St Ann’s allotments has shown that many crops, particularly brassicas and peas, will require protection under nets, cages or lines of cotton.

Bird protection of fruit was regularly necessary during the war, particularly raspberries, strawberries and red-currants. The non-availability of suitable materials was a problem, but old net curtains could often provide some measure of protection.

**Education and Publications**

Woolton believed that the public should be educated and helped to grow vegetables - being shown how to make compost heaps, for example - not just instructed to get on with it. During the course of the war the Ministry did many things to promote the importance of growing your own. In addition to posters and leaflets, radio broadcasts were heard in the form of food flashes and new advertisements introduced Dr Carrot and Potato Pete anthems, which were even sung to encourage people to enjoy growing their own food.

Agriculture and food distribution were kept separate during the war, but they were united by a common interest: everyone had to dig for victory. Potatoes provided the biggest link, as they did between farmers and gardeners, and were considered both nutritious and easy to grow. Woolton, who introduced his own recipe for ‘Woolton Pie’, found the right slogans and jingles to proclaim their virtues, inspiring the lines:

*Those who have the will to win*
*Cook potatoes in their skin,*
*Knowing that the sight of peelings*
*Deeply hurts Lord Woolton’s feelings.*

In September 1939 householders received Growmore Bulletin No.1, produced as a collaboration leaflet between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Royal Horticultural Society to give amateur gardeners simple instructions on how to grow vegetables in their back gardens or allotments. Unfortunately it had been published in a hurry and was riddled with misprints and, in most people’s opinion, advocated giving far too much space to leafy green vegetables when it was potatoes that were needed for wartime fuel food. The winter of 1939-40 was so severe that most green vegetables turned black and were inedible anyway.

By 1940, the much more catchy, ‘Dig for Victory’ became the slogan and early in 1941 a second bulletin was published. By the end of the war 24 more leaflets had been distributed, giving advice on all sorts of suggestions for wartime horticulture such as digging up your lawn for a vegetable patch, and tearing asters and sweet peas out of your herbaceous border to substitute such good croppers as runner beans and turnips. If that wasn’t practical, a gardener could grow marrows, carrots, dwarf beans or tomatoes on the requisite 15 inches of soil on top of the Anderson shelter.

With everyone talking of the ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign the radio offered encouragement to amateur gardeners by broadcasting a play in 1940 called ‘Digging for Victory’. The leading character began by knowing nothing about gardening, but ending up giving talks to the local horticultural society. The play ended with an uplifting verse:
There’s an obvious moral in Christopher Grigg
If he can grow turnips, we also can dig
So back to the land – and if you are able
Contribute a sprout to the national table.

An additional attempt by the Government to encourage amateur gardeners to grow their own occurred on 3 August 1940, when it launched an award for home vegetable production. The award was a certificate of merit signed by the minister of agriculture. To win it gardeners had to prove they were using their land to produce food in winter as well as summer. Their gardens were inspected twice during the summer and the awards made at the end of the season.

A further and unintentional incentive to amateur gardeners was the Government announcement in November 1940 that British summertime would continue right through the winter months. This meant an extra hour on the allotment on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. In addition ‘double summertime’ started in May 1941, which meant even longer daylight hours, but for people trying to hold down a normal day job the working day became so long that they had to rely on family members to assist in their garden.

On the 23 January 1941 an MP asked the Ministry of Agriculture what demand there had been from local authorities, allotment societies and other organisations for publicity material in connection with the ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign. There were 7,600 demands. The publicity material comprised:

- 102,000 copies of the Minister of Agriculture’s Mansion House and broadcast speeches on 10 September 1940, when the campaign was launched.
- 1,340,000 copies of a Propaganda Leaflet embodying a form of application for an allotment.
- 265,000 ‘Dig for Victory’ posters of various sizes.
- 3,000,000 ‘Dig for Victory’ stickers for use on local authority and other correspondence.
- 20,000 copies of a memorandum ‘Some Suggestions for Local Publicity’ for the guidance of local authorities.
- 4,700 copies of ‘Some Notes for Sermons’ in case local authorities might ask local clergymen to mention ‘Dig for Victory’ from the pulpit.

Local councils set up horticultural committees to advise gardeners, and often the local park superintendent was the key mover, organising practical demonstrations and discussions that were well attended since ‘people soon found out that if they didn’t grow it themselves they didn’t get it.’ The Ministry of Agriculture also helped out with lantern-slide shows; the Royal Horticultural Society sent out experts to talk to groups up and down the country; and ‘brains trusts’ were arranged in village halls – all to interest and encourage optimum food production.

On 4 October 1940 the Minister of Agriculture was confident that ‘half a million more allotments properly worked will provide potatoes and vegetables that will feed another million adults and one and a half million children for eight months of the year’. A Cultivation of Lands (Allotment) Order in 1939 empowered councils to take over unoccupied lands for allotments and in 1940 the Minister appealed for ‘half a million more allotments’.

At a Christmas Potato Fair in 1942 each visitor signed a pledge:
“I promise as my Christmas gift to the sailors who have to bring our bread that I will do all I can to eat home-grown potatoes.”

Also in 1942 the BBC outside broadcast staff adopted an allotment, like today’s ‘Blue Peter Garden’. It was a 10-ro Rod allotment located in a West End square and was initially tended by well known broadcasters in their spare time. Subsequently a programme called Radio Allotment began and the plot was used for a series of topical programmes.

Mr C.H.Middleton's broadcasts on the BBC Home Service began in 1934 with a series of talks entitled In Your Garden and on the outbreak of war the Ministry of Agriculture was keen to use Mr Middleton’s broadcasts as a central part of the government's ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign. His popularity was such that three and a half million listeners tuned in to him every Sunday afternoon. Here are some of his seeds of wisdom on luxury vegetable-growing:

"In happier days we talked of rock gardens, herbaceous borders, verdant lawns; but with the advent of war these rapidly receded into the background to make way for the all-important food crops. In these critical times the wise gardener is concentrating his energies on the utility vegetables – potatoes, carrots, onions, parsnips, swedes, artichokes and winter greens, but some of the so-called luxury vegetables can be produced without interfering with the general Dig for Victory plants.

"Take mushrooms; we can't all afford to pay seven shillings a pound for them, so why not have a shot at growing a few? The same for peas – which you can grow in eggshells – and cucumbers, which are likely to be scarce and expensive this year and are grown in much the same way as marrows. Apparently, a good many of my listeners have been thinking along these lines, for I have had a lot of letters lately about such things as mushrooms, melons and pumpkins: to say nothing of asparagus, peaches and strawberries.

"One thing I like about wartime gardening is that I have less mowing to do; there isn't much left to mow and hoeing between the vegetable rows is a much more useful occupation.

"These are critical times, but we shall get through them, and the harder we dig for victory the sooner will the roses be with us again."

A lot of the advice to housewives was very patronising, particularly for women who had been cooking on tight budgets for generations. Home Intelligence reported in 1943 that while ‘working-class housewives are…more receptive to the Government’s appeals than are women of other classes….some of the economies that have been suggested are regarded as “piffling” by working-class women, on whom such forms of thrift have long been imposed by necessity”.

Housewives were advised “not to ‘assassinate’ vegetables by over-boiling”, but the advisory time was half an hour! Although the majority of housewives claimed to eat green vegetables ‘regularly’, that turned out to mean at least once a fortnight in season. No data exists on how many cabbages, cauliflowers and Brussel sprouts continued to be ‘assassinated’ in British kitchens!

Dig for Victory! posters are still well-known today. The picture of a booted foot pushing a spade down into the soil, with the slogan above, is probably the best-known, but many others were also printed and displayed in prominent places such as billboards, railway stations, shops and offices.
Despite a paper shortage a large number of advice books were published, including a number by newspaper gardening correspondents. Others included:

‘News Chronicle’ Vegetable Gardening, by Albert Gurie
Middleton’s All The Year Round Gardening Guide
A Garden Goes to War, by Stephen Cheveley
The Vegetable Garden Displayed, by the RHS
How to Grow and Produce Your Own Food, published by the Odhams Press

A series of five short colour films were made, also entitled ‘A Garden Goes to War’. They were silent films made by Plant Protection Ltd. working with the Ministry of Agriculture, showing a gardener carrying out garden techniques throughout the seasons, starting with digging and ending with storing his crops. Showings were free and, according to the Gardeners’ Chronicle of January 1941, a typical audience was ‘one thousand two hundred people in an Ilford air-raid shelter at Christmas’.

As in all difficult times humour was important in retaining the ‘official’ message. One wartime author, Peter Ender, bought out a spoof advice book called Up the Garden Path. It was dedicated to ‘the Government’s Dig-for-Dear-Life Campaign’ and contained cartoons and little snippets of advice, such as ‘Devote a space in your garden to horseradish which, folded in half, makes an excellent stopper to gin bottles’ and ‘Never water peas in really hot weather. Fan them and unbutton their pods’.
Cropping Plan for a 90’ x 30’ Plot (Approx. 10 sq. rods, poles or perches)
Allotment or Garden layout and schedule of crop rotation
### Cropping Plan for a 90' x 30' Plot (Approx. 10 sq. rods, poles or perches)

**Table of Planting and Period of Use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CROP</th>
<th>TIME OF SOWING</th>
<th>DISTANCE APART</th>
<th>PERIOD OF USE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEANS (Broad)</td>
<td>Feb.-March</td>
<td>1 double row</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEANS (Dwarf)</td>
<td>Late April-May</td>
<td>9 in.</td>
<td>July-Aug.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEANS (Runner)</td>
<td>Mid-May</td>
<td>12 ft.</td>
<td>July-Oct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEET</td>
<td>(1) April</td>
<td>15 in.</td>
<td>July-April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BROCCOLI (Sprouting)</td>
<td>(2) June</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Feb.-May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRUSSELS SPROUTS</td>
<td>Mid-May</td>
<td>2 ft.</td>
<td>Nov.-Mar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CABBAGE (Spring)</td>
<td>Plant Mid-July</td>
<td>2 ft.</td>
<td>Apr.-Jun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CABBAGE (Cold)</td>
<td>Plant Sept.-Early Oct.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARROTS (Early)</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>June-Sept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARROTS (Maincrop)</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Oct-May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LETTUCE (Summer)</td>
<td>Mar.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>May-Oct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARROW</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Sep-Oct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONIONS</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Sep-Oct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARSNIPS</td>
<td>Mid-Feb.-Mid.-Mar.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Mar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEAS (Early)</td>
<td>Mar.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Mar.-July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEAS (Other)</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Feb.-Jul.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POTATOES (Early)</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Mar.-July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POTATOES (Others)</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Feb.-Jul.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RADISHES</td>
<td>Mar.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Mar.-July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAVOY</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Feb.-Jul.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHALLOTS</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Jun-July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPINACH (Summer)</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Jul-Aug.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEA KALE BEET</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Mar. Jan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWEDISH</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Mar. Jan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOMATOS</td>
<td>End June</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Dec-Mar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TURNIP (Early)</td>
<td>Plant-end May</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Aug-Oct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TURNIP (Tepa)</td>
<td>End Aug.</td>
<td>1 ft.</td>
<td>Mar. Jan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This and other leaflets issued by the Ministry of Agriculture can be found at:

www.earthlypursuits.com/AllotGuide/DigforVictory1/DigForVictory1_1-4.htm

The site includes monthly gardening advice leaflets for the whole of 1945. Other leaflets include advice on:

- Onions and Related Crops
- Peas and Beans
- How to Make a Compost Heap
- Seed Potatoes
- How to Sow Seeds
- Pests and Diseases in the Vegetable Garden
- Preserves from the Garden
The Ministry also distributed a monthly *Allotment and Garden Guide* in the latter part of the war, full of handy tips such as:

*If the weather be fine in February, we shall be anxious to get onto the vegetable plot. Never work the soil when it is too wet and sticky...seeds sown in cold, wet soil will rot instead of germinating. Remember when ordering your seeds that half a pint of runner beans will sow a row 50ft long.*

Dig for Victory anthems were played on radio broadcasts, to encourage people to grow their own.

*Dig! Dig! Dig! And your muscles will grow big*
*Keep on pushing the spade*
*Don't mind the worms*
*Just ignore their squirms*
*And when your back aches laugh with glee*
*And keep on diggin'*
*Till we give our foes a Wiggin'*
*Dig! Dig! Dig! to Victory*

**Tools**

Tools were difficult to come by, and manuals recommended a smaller list than their pre-war predecessors. The *Daily Mail’s Food from the Garden in Wartime* recommended the following tools:

- Steel spade with riveted strap
- Steel fork with riveted strap
- Dutch or push hoe
- Draw hoe
- Ten or twelve toothed rake
- Trowel
- Dibber (could be made from an old spade or fork handle)
- Hand fork, with two or three tines
- Garden line
- 2 gallon watering can with interchangeable roses
- Galvanised or wooden wheelbarrow

Tools were difficult to replace so great emphasis was placed on conserving them, such as having oil and a cloth to wipe down the metal parts regularly to stop rust. An occasional oiling was recommended for wooden handles too, to stop them from becoming splintery.

**Dr Carrot and Potato Pete**

Cartoon characters were used to appeal to children, as they still are in food ads today. One popular chap was Potato Pete, born in 1941, a rustic potato, with a piece of straw in his mouth, a green hat and gaiters. Doctor Carrot pointed out the healthy side of that particular root, especially for seeing in the blackout, but he was replaced by Walt Disney’s creation Clara Carrot. Perhaps in his wing collar and top hat, Doctor Carrot was just too old fashioned!

Carrots were one vegetable in plentiful supply and as a result were widely-utilised as a substitute for more scarce foodstuffs. To improve its blandness people were encouraged to enjoy the healthy carrot in different ways by the introduction of Dr Carrot in a series of
magazine articles and posters. The slogan *Carrots keep you healthy and help you see in the blackout* was used. Culinary delights such as curried carrot, carrot jam and a homemade drink called *Carrolade* (a combination of carrot and swede juice) were suggested by the Ministry.

Potatoes were promoted heavily as a good source of protein and energy. *Potato Pete* had his own song sung by Betty Driver, a well known singer of the day but known to modern audiences for her role in *Coronation Street* and the inventor of Betty’s Hotpot. The song’s recording was a great success in amplifying the message that potatoes are good for you.

*Potato Pete, Potato Pete,*  
*See him coming down the street,*  
*Shouting his good things to eat,*  
*‘Get your hot potatoes from Potato Pete’.*

_Now hear him sing as he goes by,*  
*All the kiddies are his pride,*  
*Love to hear him shout, ‘Hi! Hi!’*  
*Here’s the hot potatoes coming by and by._

*Have them in a packet,*  
*Take them home to Ma.*  
*Have them in a jacket,*  
*Or eat them where you are._

*Potato Pete* recipe books were written to give home cooks suggestions and advice on how best to serve potatoes. For example, scrubbing instead of peeling potatoes was recommended, to cut down on waste. Traditional nursery rhymes were adapted to give a *Potato Pete* theme. For example:

_There was an old woman who lived in a shoe._  
_She had so many children she didn’t know what to do._  
_She gave them potatoes instead of some bread,_  
_And the children were happy and very well fed._

**Fruit and Preserves**

Fruit and vegetables were on sale in the markets of Nottingham throughout the nineteenth century but they were seasonal, and fruits such as bush fruits were restricted because of their shelf life. The area around Nottingham had always produced vegetables such as turnips, potatoes, peas and beans for the town’s consumption. Summer fruits could be a source of illness because of their early putrefaction. A change in attitude towards their consumption could be witnessed by the end of the nineteenth century, influenced from Europe. With the abolition of the sugar tax in 1874 the growth of the jam market saw an outlet for gluts of soft fruit. As the twentieth century progressed more varieties of fruit and vegetables became available and more popular with the working class.

Under wartime conditions, having successfully grown the fruit or vegetables, it was most important that no produce should be wasted. With this in mind there were several publications such as Dig for Victory leaflet No.3, ‘Storing vegetables for winter use’ and No.10, ‘Jam and jelly making’. Growmore bulletin No.3, was about ‘Preserves from the garden’ and included sections on jam and jelly making, fruit syrups, fruit cheeses and pickles. Preserves were made from everything, from onions to rosehips. No method was
ignored. Housewives were advised how to dry apples (the non-keeping varieties), plums, onions, mushrooms and herbs; how to salt string beans; how to make pickles and chutneys; and how to bottle.

The Ministry of Food had decided that fruit was not a necessary food, so importation ceased. Commercial growers were not allowed to plant extra fruit trees or bushes, because they took too long to become productive. Vegetables were therefore relied upon to provide the minerals and vitamins previously obtained from imported fruit. Private gardeners endured no restrictions on fruit growing, but as the war progressed it became increasingly difficult to buy young fruit trees or bushes as nurseries had to cut back their stocks to 10% of what they had been pre-war.

In the circumstances anyone with fruit trees possessed a valuable asset. With potash fertiliser being difficult to obtain, gardeners had to rely on pruning and spraying to obtain a fruit yield. Owners of good fruit trees were advised to wrap grease bands around the tree trunks during September in order to prevent insect pests climbing up to lay eggs in the fruit buds.

To promote the use of foods that people were less used to harvesting and preparing, recipes for the free food found in the countryside were published, such as crow pie, braised sorrel and squirrel-tail soup. Housewives were advised to make jams, chutneys and pickles to ensure that there were good-tasting foods in the home through the winter.

As the war progressed every potential source of food was utilised. Nettles were widely used; young leaves could be used like spinach, topped with a knob of margarine and a sprinkle of nutmeg. Food Facts for the Kitchen Front suggested nettles be mixed with potatoes in a variation of Champ (mashed potato and vegetables). Blackberries and various types of wild mushrooms were collected, and dandelion leaves could be made into a salad. Rose and primrose flowers were utilised, and rose hips could be made into jam or syrup.

Rosehip syrup was an important source of vitamin C for children during World War II, the vitamin content being ten times more than that of oranges. The further north they grew, the higher the vitamin C content of rosehips. The collection of rosehips was mainly left as a local activity, but some children were paid 3d per lb for rosehips harvested in the autumn to be made into rosehip syrup by the company Delrosa in Wallsend (near Newcastle). In 1941 200 tons were collected by volunteers. The local collecting points were usually run by the WVS or Women’s Institutes. The syrup was bottled for children over the age of five years and invalids and was also used for flavouring milk puddings, ice-cream or almost any sweet. It was also diluted as a drink.

A great many of those collected, however, became unusable because of poor harvesting or storage, so magazines ran articles giving ‘Tip for Hip Pickers’:

Snap the berries off, don’t pull them… Look for varieties with large hips – quicker work and better vitamin content….Wear thick gloves, old clothes and no stockings. If you have no gloves, make a fingerless shield like a hedging glove for the left hand from thick fabric. It’s a lovely job for a bright, crisp, autumn day, but if you do get bored with it – think of the delicate children whose health depends on vitamin C.

Other plants were widely used for medicinal purposes and allotment holders were asked to grow them, including the following, although probably only gardeners with large areas of land would be able to respond to the request:
Foxgloves  (Cardiac stimulant)
Belladonna   (Narcotic, diuretic and sedative)
Dandelion roots (Tonic and diuretic)
Stinging nettles  (Anti-asthmatic)
Sphagnum moss  (Absorbent dressing)
Male fern rhizome  (Kills intestinal worms)

With the shortage of onions, housewives were also looking for herb flavourings. Mint was a common staple in most gardens, along with sage, parsley, thyme and chives, all of which could be dried for out of season use.

The Anderson Shelter

The Government introduced a small air-raid shelter for family use. It was officially a ‘sectional steel shelter’, but universally called ‘the Anderson’. They were supplied free of charge to the poorer inhabitants of danger areas, and for a fee to anyone else; from £6 14s to £10 18s depending on size. They accommodated four people, six at a pinch. Delivery of the Andersons began in February 1939 and by mid-1940 over 2.25 million Andersons had been supplied. Later, a larger version was designed that could take up to twelve persons.

The Anderson was delivered in sections made of corrugated iron and had to be put up by the householder. First, a large hole had to be dug, at least 3 feet deep. The shelter had to be erected inside the hole, and the earth taken from the hole spread over the completed shelter to a depth of at least 15 inches so, in effect, the shelter was buried underground.

In some cases the top of the Anderson shelter was cultivated. When built, it was covered with the requisite 15 inches of soil and so marrows and rhubarb could have been grown. Rhubarb and mushrooms could be grown inside the shelter, as they both flourish in the dark and damp.

Being partially underground, Andersons often became filled with water and were, at best, damp, draughty and cramped. As a consequence the Ministry of Home Security issued advice in 1941 on minimising these problems. The damp could be cured by constructing runnels to draw away surface water. Failing this, the earth covering could be removed, the joints between the iron sheets sealed with strips of tarred rag or Hessian, and the earth replaced in layers of 4 or 5 inches, well rammed down. Should the joints still leak they could be caulked from the inside with rope or old rags soaked in heavy oil or tar. Condensation could be lessened by painting the inside walls with paint or shellac varnish, and throwing dry sawdust on the paint while it was wet. Alternatively the inside could be lined with lino, plasterboard, felt or even wallpaper.

Although not the perfect solution, and certainly not capable of withstanding a direct hit, Andersons did provide good protection from a near miss or bomb splinters that would wreck many houses. If a long period of time was required in the shelter then householders could erect bunk beds. Shelters could only be lit with electricity because naked lights used up air, and could cause fires, especially in such a small space, although people were advised to keep candles or lamps for emergency lighting. Heating posed a similar problem; the main forms of coal, gas and oil fires could not be used, so alternatives were suggested.
Hot drinks were one solution, contained in Thermos flasks or ‘hay bottles’ – woollen bags packed with newspaper or straw with a bottle inside. Warm clothing would help, as would sleeping bags which could be made from two blankets. A hot brick, heated for two hours and then wrapped in a woollen cloth or old vest, made a bed warmer. One of the most original ideas was the ‘flower pot heater’. This was made by fixing a candle at the bottom of a flower pot by the drain hole (without blocking up the hole), and then placing a second flower pot upside down on top of the first. After a while this arrangement gave off ‘considerable warmth’. 
It is quite likely that some plots on the St Ann’s and Hungerhill allotments contained Anderson shelters during the War. After the War many of these shelters were converted to tool sheds. The example photographs shown below were taken from the web-site www.fortiesexperience.co.uk.

There are other educational items on www.emsource.org.uk an East Midlands resource for teachers and learners.
The End of the War

The British government realised, even before the war ended, that people would still need to grow their own well beyond the cessation of hostilities. In a well-publicised speech in late 1944, Lord Woolton said:

*We can justly congratulate ourselves in what we have achieved. But we must on no account relax our efforts. The war is not yet won. Moreover, even it were to end in Europe sooner than we expect, the food situation, far from becoming easier, may well become more difficult owing to the urgent necessity of feeding the starving people of Europe. Indeed in many ways it would be true to say that our real tasks will only then begin. Carry on therefore with your good work. Do not rest on your spades, except for those brief periods which are every gardener's privilege.*

He was right. Inevitably, however, the first flush of enthusiasm for digging for victory began to fade after a while and a new campaign – Dig On for Victory – was needed. By 1945, the slogan had become ‘Dig for Victory Still’, although another source quotes ‘Dig for Victory over Want’.

Nevertheless, the campaign continued and people relied upon their home grown food for years after the war. Rationing did not finally come to an end until 1954, when meat was the last foodstuff to come off the ration list.

Myths about Allotments

The myth is that they are largely populated by the survivors of the war who are too old to work their plots with the vigour of youth, and spend most of their time smoking pipes and telling tales of the great pumpkin harvest of 1968.

*Where are the young plot-holders to replace this fading breed? As more and more of the older generation move on to the great dahlia bed in the sky or become too ill to turn the brown, crumbly loam, their patches are becoming infested with a tangle of brambles and bindweed, not to mention the proliferation of old mattresses and rusty bike frames that appear in any vacant plot.*

A Lesson for Today?

In the 1930’s, when the average Englishman could expect to live to 59, many of the inner city areas of the country were very unhealthy. Children living in private-sector slums were prey to lice, rickets, TB, bronchitis and pneumonia. A lack of sunlight, in and out of homes, aggravated vitamin D deficiency fostered by poor diet. A fragmented and costly system of health care did little to alleviate this chronic condition.

Dig for Victory was a hugely successful campaign exceeding all expectations and, allied to an improved focus on diet and nutrition, improved the general health of the population. Rickets, called the 'English Disease' because it was so widespread, together with other deficiency diseases, largely disappeared from our lives. Although other factors helped, most important was the higher resistance of children to disease that followed from better nutrition.

Looking back, some people believe that wartime rations made for a healthy diet, but others admit that although they did not starve, the lack of protein made them feel constantly hungry. The Ministry of Food's Wartime Food Survey did indicate that the nation had an adequate diet, with plenty of bread, potatoes, green vegetables and carrots, all providing good nutritional value. It was also a healthy time, because you could not consume excess
calories if there were none available! However, with the end of rationing people were in a rush to secure more sugar and fat, completely forgetting the healthy wartime messages. The message did eventually get through, for in 1990 a paper written by the National Food Survey (replacement of the Wartime Food Survey) concluded that changes in the modern diet had brought fat and sugar intakes back to their wartime levels.

Thanks in part to the Dig for Victory campaign, between 1939 and 1945 imports of food were halved and the acreage of British land used for food production increased by 80%. It was estimated that over 1.4 million people had allotments by 1945.

In today’s global culture of cheap, abundant and ready-prepared food, it is hard to imagine a situation when the whole nation faced such severe food shortages, when even the least experienced people ended up keeping pigs, or digging up their lawns for potatoes and cabbages, in order to survive. It is now realised that the home population never ate so well as during and after the war, and were considerably healthier and fitter than their modern-day counterparts. This was thanks to a more physical lifestyle, the amount of fresh vegetables that people ate and the strict rationing or unavailability of fatty and sugary foods.

Today’s interest in organically grown food is not a modern phenomenon. The term “organic farming” was first coined in 1940 in the book Look to the Land by Lord Northbourne. Also in 1940, British botanist Sir Albert Howard published An Agricultural Testament. As an agricultural adviser in India, Sir Albert devised - partly out of necessity - a system of growing plants and raising animals without using synthetic chemicals. In 1943, Lady Eve Balfour published The Living Soil and in 1945 she founded the Soil Association, which focused on the relationships of the health of the soil to the health of plants, animals, and people. Lady Eve is credited as founding the modern organic movement in Britain.

The war did leave some legacies for the garden. The continuing radio programme Gardeners’ Question Time started in 1947 as successor to ‘Dig for Victory’ Brains Trusts and Growmore continues to hold its reputation as a good all-round fertiliser. What was once ‘salvage’ is now ‘recycled’, whether it be sorting bottles, paper, cardboard or plastic waste or green waste for the compost heap.

However the main message for the 21st Century’s increasingly obese and under-exercised populations is, take up vegetable gardening, keep chickens and give up the car!

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In those days Nottingham was surrounded by allotments, not in their hundreds but in their tens of thousands, and the great Dean Hole...estimated that in his day, about a hundred years ago, there were some 20,000 of them scattered around what was then an important town but not yet a city, and the home of under 200,000 people - an allotment for about every third family. Most of them, I imagine, were like our family a few decades later, growing virtually all their own vegetables and thereby making themselves independent of everyone else for at least a large portion of the daily diet.

The amount of allotments today is dwarfed by the figures then. Nottingham was representative of most towns.

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