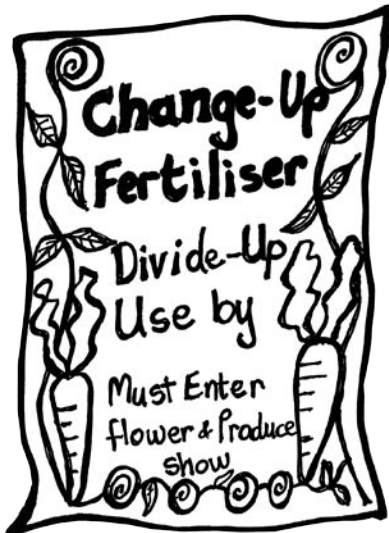


The Allotments

There was once a field of allotments, each tended by a different gardener. As you'd expect, some of them grew their vegetables in neat, ordered rows while others employed a more chaotic approach, still managing to garner a good crop, although never being quite sure what was going to turn up from one year to the next. Some patches were covered in weeds and one in black plastic, with the aim of killing off everything living underneath it. Although most people grew staples like potatoes and carrots, some of the gardeners were more adventurous, branching out into exotic vegetables and beautiful flowers.



One thing most of the gardeners had in common was their resourcefulness; they were creative about making the most of what they had, recycling and conserving wherever possible. The allotments were scattered with compost heaps and water butts; some gardeners shared sheds to keep their tools in and others took cuttings from each other to spread the different varieties. They managed their allotments on very scant resources and there was a feeling that if they just had a little bit more help, their vegetables and flowers might win prizes at the local produce show. One day, the gardeners turned up to find

an enormous load of fertiliser had been dumped in the middle of the allotments. There was a piece of paper attached to it, explaining the complicated way that the fertiliser was to be divided up between them and making it clear that it had to be used by a certain date, otherwise it would not be effective. Also that all produce grown with the fertilizer should be entered into the end of year Flower and Produce show.

At first, the gardeners were puzzled, but as they read the information about the fertiliser and began to realise what it might do, they got excited – was this what they'd been hoping for all along? It also dawned on them, that although this might ultimately help the allotments flourish, right now it was going to need a lot of extra work and more water to irrigate the fertiliser-driven growth adequately.

Some of the gardeners felt ready to take their share of fertiliser and use it at once, since they'd already done all the necessary groundwork. But as their plants grew in profusion, they realised that they would now need more fertiliser next year to keep this growth going and it wasn't clear whether or not they were going to get any.

Other gardeners found it all a bit overwhelming. They thought they'd better test it out carefully first and find out what kind of soil and which kind of plants it worked best on. Some of the more delicate plants simply couldn't cope with the rich fertiliser and wilted away. The testing process took time. The gardeners were worried by the fertiliser company's increasingly forceful letters, reminding them of the use-by date. They were sure they would get round to using it, but only when they had worked out how this was best done.

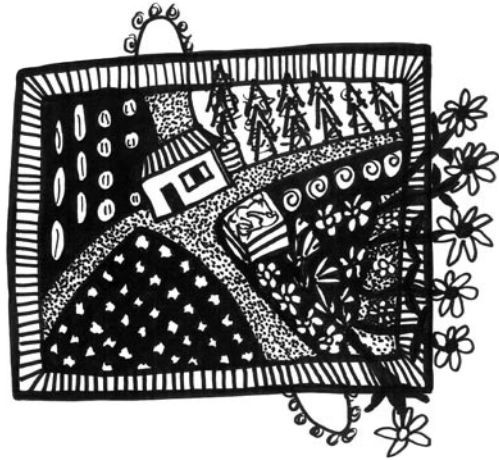
The Allotments

There was also the issue of their old organic compost that had always served them well. They didn't want to lose its effects, but it took time to get the fertiliser-compost-water balance right.

With the help of the fertiliser, everyone was entering produce in the local show that year, but for the first time, the gardeners began to take sneaky looks at each others patches: were they growing the right kind of things? Was theirs going to be good enough?

The show organisers tried to reassure them that they wanted a range of produce, not everyone's looking the same, but the gardeners were only half-convinced. The

rules of the show and the criteria for judging seemed a bit vague. No-one could



even tell them who the judges would be and what form the prizes would take.

ALTERNATIVE ENDINGS

○ Ending 1

As the date of the local show approached, the gardeners worked harder than ever, often into the twilight hours. One evening, in the dusk, they heard a low humming overhead, they looked up and to their amazement, hovering overhead was a strange spacecraft and they could dimly see some weird hubcap-like objects circling around. What on earth was this? What did it mean? Was the future of the allotments about to change forever?

○ Ending 2

The local show came and went. Everyone was told they'd done well, but no prizes were awarded, which left everyone feeling rather unsatisfied. They went back to their allotments, but now the fertiliser had run out and there wasn't any immediate prospect of further supplies. A few of the gardeners gave up in disgust, sold their allotments and moved away, but most just shrugged their shoulders and went back to the old ways, the ways they knew best, making the most of the little they had.

○ Ending 3

The local show was a great success: a real celebration of everything they'd achieved. Everyone had prizes and a chance to admire and learn from what the others had grown. The fertiliser company reps were there at the show; they announced that they'd been taken over by a multi-national, but they'd been assured that the local reps would keep their jobs and the relationships they'd built up with the gardeners wouldn't be lost. Their new owners had a clear vision for a fertiliser-rich future, but were also keen to listen to their customers and understand how it could best be deployed in the years to come, in conjunction with the best of the old, organic methods. Everyone went home, feeling hopeful about the future of the allotments.

***Which ending do you prefer?
Which ending do you think is most likely? Or do you have an alternative?***