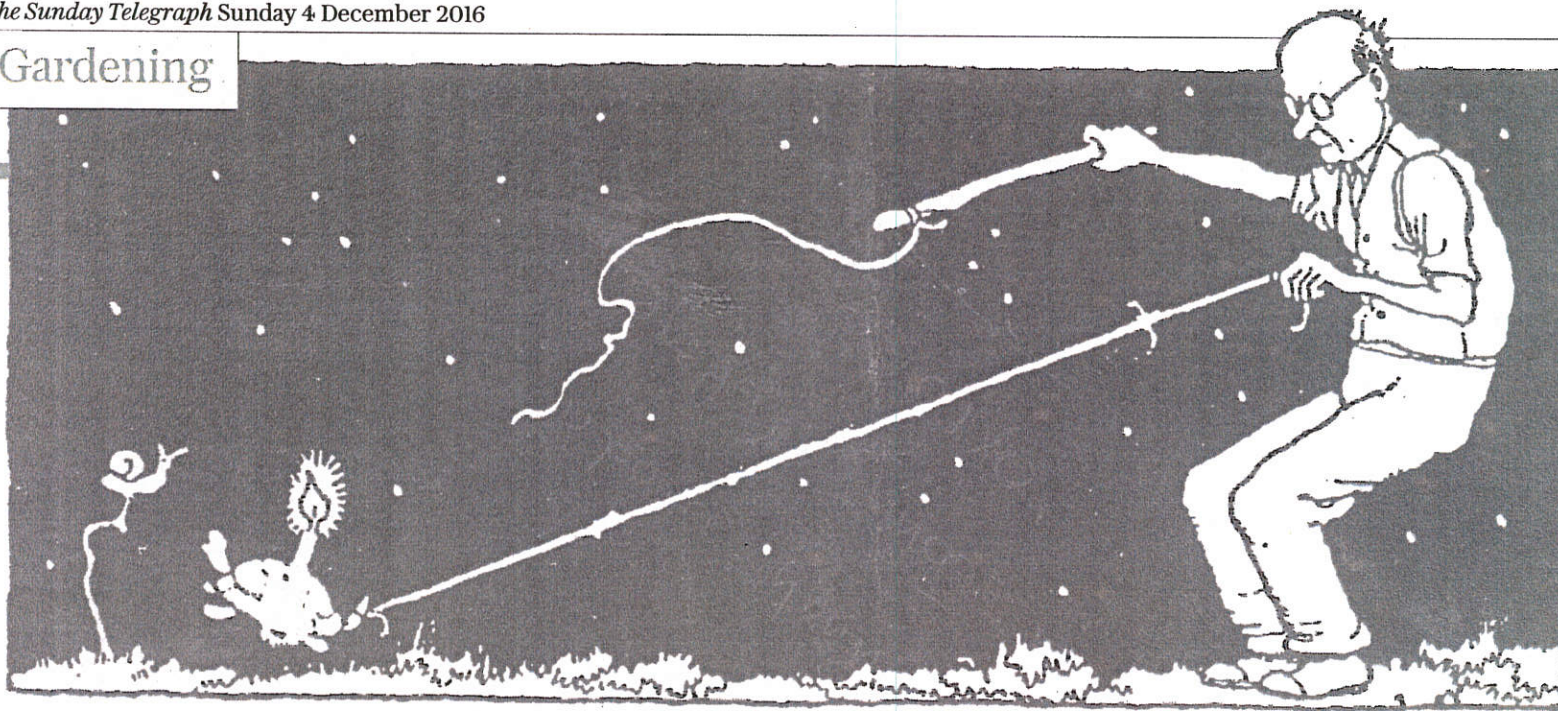


Gardening



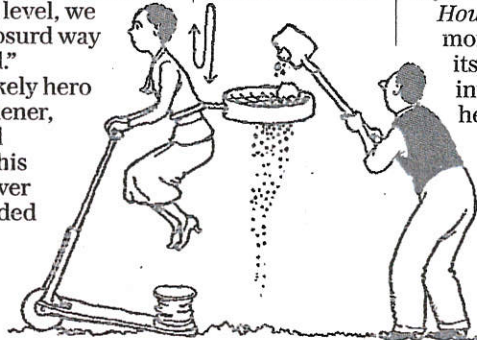
The Heath Robinson guide to gardening

A new book explores the horticultural notions of the inventor/cartoonist. *Boudicca Fox-Leonard reports*

There are some tools no gardener can do without. For all others there is Heath Robinson. With his overly elaborate contraptions for performing simple tasks, Robinson's name remains a byword for the unnecessarily complex. During the 1930s, Robinson and his writing partner KRG Browne, collaborated on four tongue-in-cheek "How to..." books, including *How To Make a Garden Grow*, featuring machines to catch falling leaves, gnome ashtrays and pollen blowers. Samuel Fanous, the head of publishing at Bodleian, which has

republished the book, says: "Heath Robinson's very name is somehow an antidote to the absurd pace of modern life. People invariably smile when they pick up one of his books. At some level, we identify with his absurd way of seeing the world." Yet he is an unlikely hero of the modern gardener, inspiring Diarmuid Gavin's garden at this year's Chelsea Flower Show, which included a potting shed filled with Heath Robinson-esque gadgets. *How To Make a Garden Grow* is described

Get cracking: a novel way to deal with snails and, below, remove stones from lawn



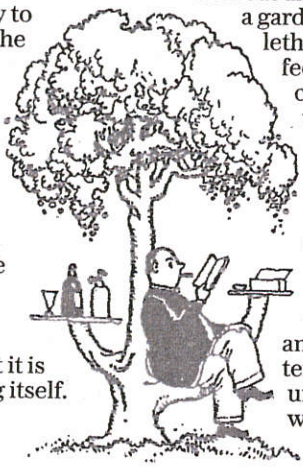
A Simple Method of Removing Stones Book extract: p27

as an invaluable guidebook by Alan Titchmarsh. It isn't so surprising given that Robinson himself was a keen gardener. "He loved gardening," says Peter Higginson, chairman of the William Heath Robinson Trust and the artist's great-nephew. "When he moved from Pinner to Cranleigh at the end of the First World War one of his main means of relaxation from his work was his gardening. My mother and aunt, his nieces, remember him talking to neighbours over the garden fence. He was very fond of it." In October this year The Heath Robinson Museum opened in Pinner, to house the family's collection of his work - Robinson, who passed away in 1944, was also a painter of landscapes. "He did so much more than just the cartoons he is known for," says Higginson. *How To Make a Garden Grow* is more than a simple mockery of its subject. It is an affectionate investigation of the pastime he himself loved. "If you know your subject then you're in a position to be more humorous about it," says Higginson. "You know the animal. And he certainly was a keen gardener."

Gardening

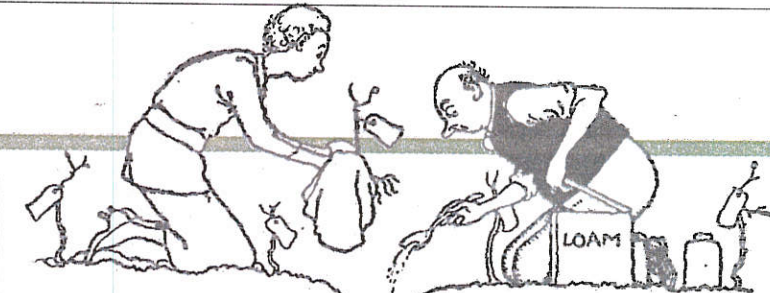
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From the novice horticulturist's point of view, there are only two kinds of garden. There is (a) the untilled patch of virgin soil, rich in sardine-tins and old boots, which is found at the back of brand-new houses; and there is (b) the already matured garden, developed by a previous tenant who has just left the neighbourhood, either to visit relatives in Khamschatka or to sojourn awhile in gaol. If the beginner's garden is of the latter sort, he will probably feel too shy to meddle with it until he has thoroughly digested his "Gardening Hints" series of cigarette-cards and taken a few digging lessons. Eventually, no doubt, he will decide to reorganise it somewhat; but for the time being he is content to know that it is more or less growing itself. This advice, therefore, is addressed chiefly to those whose garden



A Well-Trained Tree

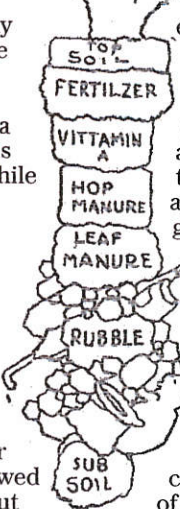
is just a naked piece of Mother Earth, flowerless as the Mohave Desert and clamouring to be given a start in life - or "laid out", as it is technically termed. In laying out a garden, the first point to decide is whether it shall be purely ornamental (i.e. flowers, etc), definitely useful (i.e. veg and the like), or a bit of each. In this matter the beginner must follow the dictates of his heart, always remembering that much depends on the space at his disposal, and even more on the opinions of his wife. In this day and age, when open-air exercise is so popular with all classes of Society, many householders regard a tennis court as an essential feature of a garden; others, of a more lethargic temperament, feel the same about a croquet lawn. In homes where the husband is a tennis fan and the wife a croquet addict, it is usually advisable to compromise and have a croquet lawn. It is impossible, however - or uncomfortable, anyway - to play either tennis or croquet on an uneven surface. In other words, the ground must be levelled before the local clergy are invited to pop on



their sandshoes and play on it, as there is no more embarrassing guest than a Vicar who has stubbed his toe against a mole-hill or sprained his ankle in a rabbit hole while attempting to put over a fast one. The best method of levelling lawns, of course, is to employ professional lawn-levellers; but quite good results can be obtained with the help of an upright piano, a couple of rather obese relatives, a borrowed motor car and some stout rope. The piano is laid on the ground and the relatives on the piano, which is then attached by the rope to the car and towed briskly back and forth. It should be borne in mind that few plants will sprout successfully on an unprepared foundation. It is useless, for example, to hurl sunflower bulbs at random into a meadow and expect them to bear fruit, while rose seeds dropped casually on a piece of

earth rarely produce anything worth looking at. If it is to give the best results, ground must be thoroughly vetted, manicured and otherwise got ready before anything is planted in it. Even then there is no certainty that anything will come up; but the gardener can at least feel that he has done his best and can reasonably blame the weather (or the political crisis in Peru, or the fact that the 5.15 from Basingstoke does not stop at Hull) for his failure to produce anything larger than a small forget-me-not. One of the first tasks, then, confronting the beginner is that of overhauling his soil, which he will find, in all probability, simply bristling with large stones, long-defunct cats, disused salmon-tins, worms, more large stones, Roman pottery, and similar bric-a-brac. The worms may be left to work out their own salvation; the ex-cats and salmon-tins can be thrown over the fence under cover of darkness; the Roman pottery will be welcomed by any local museum; and the stones can be assembled and removed (as shown on page

Careful Preparation of the Soil Before Planting a Rose Bed



25) with the help of an agile assistant, an ordinary sieve and a commodious shovel. Paths are more or less essential, too, a pathless garden being not only a contradiction in terms but highly inconvenient, as anybody will agree who has ever had to hop across a cabbage-patch in order to inspect a pedigree lobelia. Unlike the road to Hell, garden paths are normally surfaced with gravel, which can be obtained gratis from any convenient gravel-pit when nobody is looking. The foregoing, we trust, will help the hesitant beginner both to choose the type of garden best suited to his needs, and to get it vaguely organised for planting. If he is decided on these points, and has not suddenly resolved to give up gardening altogether and go in for art-needlework instead, we must ask him to turn this page, and get another earful. But, frankly, if he would rather go to the pictures, it is perfectly OK with us.

READER OFFER
 Extracted from *Heath Robinson: How To Make a Garden Grow* (Bodleian Library, £9.99). To order your copy call 0844 871 1514 or visit books.telegraph.co.uk