**A few words of advice from The Fruit and Vegetable Judge 2023**

Preparations for having entries for the village show start early. For some vegetables like garlic, planting needs to be done in the previous autumn, normally November, for the cloves to establish roots during the cold to grow and develop into good bulbs. A temperature range of between 0-10°C is required but is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve in the garden. The late autumn had above average temperatures recorded with a particularly cold snap in the second week of December 2022 then mild again into January 2023. It was therefore a joy to see so many almost identical garlic bulbs to judge. Other plants such as Alisa Craig onions are raised annually from seed sown December or January to give seedlings to be transplanted into their final growing positions be they in the garden or, for the more dedicated grower, in pots. Other vegetables are raised later as they are quick to grow and harvest.

Fruit is almost always picked from established plants and not raised annually from seed so forward planning is required to get your plants ready and to get conditions right to achieve a harvest. It was therefore good to see such a range of fruit exhibited including rhubarb. For some sections it’s easy to award prizes but for others such as the three sticks of rhubarb, it was quite difficult.

When presented with such high standards it is often difficult to distinguish between entries. When I have difficulties, I recall my tutors saying to me, when all things appear to be equal, remember the entry is ultimately something to be eaten or to flavour. The tray of vegetables for example, all things being equal, are therefore considered as how good they are as ingredients for a family meal with children. The herbs too, all things being equal, are also judged on their usefulness to flavour a dish so key qualities are freshness, aroma, and flavour.

Getting a prize is well earnt and adds to the competition but consideration is also given to encourage growers to exhibit. It was therefore a delight to see some carrots entered that, although they did not get a prize, need to be mentioned. Hopefully that unknown exhibitor will be encouraged to enter again next year to get a prize. Also, remember to follow the show schedule as no entry should be excluded as being too big, too small, or too numerous!

Wishing you a good harvest.