

The 1st sowing of celery for the early shows is done at the beginning of February for the late July shows. We would sow in the middle of March for the September shows. This year we are using all “Morning Star”, as we feel that we can get bigger celery using this variety. We have also tried “Red Star” and “Evening Star” in the past, but we have now decided to just use “Morning Star”.



We sow the seeds in half trays using John Innes seed compost, with very fine vermiculite on top. We then put the seed tray into a tray of water and let it soak right the way up. Lastly, we put it in a propagator and wait for germination - this normally takes 1 to 2 weeks.

Once the plants are big enough to handle, we pot them into 2” square pots, using 50:50 John Innes No.1 and John Innes No.3. When the roots are coming out of the bottom of the pot, we then pot them up into 4” pots using 50:50 John Innes No.1 and No.3. It usually takes about 2 to 3 weeks for this to happen.

When the plants are big enough, we put them into their final pot which is 5”- 6”, depending how well the plant has grown, using John Innes No.3.

If by this time the plants are big enough, we use 2 of the Jiffy canes and the green plant ties to keep the plant up straight. We always stand the pots in trays so we can water from the bottom, although we might water around the top if necessary. They stay like this until they are ready to go in the garden which is around the beginning of May.



As soon as they go out we would put 11” collars on, loosely fitted, and the plants should be approx. 14” tall at this stage. We always use slug pellets as the slugs love the damp conditions which celery needs to grow in.



We check the plants every 2 weeks or so, and if they are big enough we change them to the next collars which are 15” high.

If we feel that the plants want a feed, we would use high Nitrogen, such as Chempak No.2. We change to Chempak No.8 about 3 weeks before the show. We only feed as and when we feel the plants need it.

We are always checking for split sticks and side shoots which we take off. At this stage we would give them a feed of Calcium to try and prevent heart rot. We water this around the base of the plant, never over the top, as we like to keep the heart as dry as possible. We carry on changing the cardboard until we get to 18" collars.



We use four 5 foot canes around the celery, with a wire square fixed to the top. We would then use ladies tights around the canes to stop the celery sticks from blowing about too much and breaking, and we pull the collars in tighter about 3 weeks before the show to get the blanch on them. By this time we have at least two layers of cardboard, sometimes using insulation foil, if the weather is not too hot.

Preparation of the bed

We prepare the bed by digging out a foot of top soil. We put old manure in a tin bath, put water on top and make it into a slurry. Then we put this into the trench with 6" of soil on top, and we spread some Blood, Fish and Bone on the top of the soil and rake it in 2 weeks before planting out.



As we live in the South of England, this is our recipe which seems to work quite well for us.



Getting ready for the show



Two weeks before the show, we would select the ones we want to take by writing on the outside of the cardboard. The day before the show we lift the plants from the ground, wash the soil from the roots with a hose pipe and then take it down the garden to the table where we start preparing the root. We take off the bulk of the roots, leaving a small amount for when we get to the show.

We then take the cardboard off and check for any split sticks, side shoots we may have missed and any bugs

inside. We stand the celery in the bath, and wash it with a soft sponge and fairy liquid. You must make sure you wash all the fairy liquid out with a hosepipe.

We then lay it on the table, tie string around the top of the blanch making sure that the string is the same height on both celery (3 in case of the national).

We then wrap around the blanch of the celery with a damp tea towel, then put damp course or foil paper on top to keep the light out while travelling. We then stand them in buckets of water just covering the root and they are ready to go.

At the show, we just unwrap the celery and finish preparing the roots and then put on the bench. We cover the blanch with the damp tea towels, put your name and variety card out and then it is up to the judge.



Bob Brown and Christopher Hewlett