

## 5<sup>th</sup> January 2014

Happy New Year!!! Well not a lot has been happening over the last week or so. Not due to Xmas and New Year but due to flu and then a sore back. This means I can't get on with work at the plot that really needs to be done. This time of year is when all my parsnip and carrot barrels are completely emptied and then refilled with the original sand. I also need to give the tunnel covers a good clean to get rid of the green algae which seems to be getting worse every year.



This is one of the hardest jobs to be done in exhibiting any vegetables. However you have to do it – don't and you end up with compacted sand and not so good long roots. I usually do about half a dozen a day – completely emptying them and the bed of sand they sit on. The whole lot is soaked in Armillatox and then refilled. I am also adding another 10 barrels for parsnips. To get the right conditions for growing you have to have the barrels raised up on a bed of sand. Mines are on a bed of

about 20 inches with a further 2ft underneath so that plus the barrel is giving me around 6ft in length. I aim to get them all done before the end of the month to then let them settle as the first parsnips will be sown on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February. Speaking to Alistair Gray the other day he was saying he is tempted to start boring his barrels this week!!

I have also been slightly busy in the greenhouse this week. 250g onions have been sown (Toughball and Centro) I did say I would be using Vento this year as well but as Tasco is back on the market it and Toughball are bankers so I am giving Centro a go as well. They are started off in seed trays of Mother Earth multipurpose compost, with the seed being evenly spaced and then a light covering of compost and then a layer of Perlite. The Perlite in my view gives you a straighter onion seedling and also gives you a greater number of onions with the seed case attached – I don't know why but these seedlings definitely make better onions. I prefer to use seed trays – however it is a personal preference as I have tried them in modules and for me it didn't quite work. They are on a heated bench that is around 50 -55f with the air temperature around 50.



I have also been potting up shallots. I haven't grown them since 2009 when I won the Scottish as the next year I lost in the region of 400 – so had a break. However I managed to acquire 50 from a good friend so will have another go. I have started them off in 4" square pots of the same Mother Earth multipurpose that has had BioChar added. I am using this after speaking to Mick Poultney and Gareth Cameron who have used it last year with

good results. with each bulb root plate being slightly trimmed and then dipped in Rovral to try and stop them rotting later on. They are in a cool greenhouse and even after a week the roots have taken hold.



The long carrots and long beetroot for seed are also growing away well with new foliage starting to appear. As you can see the compost is kept on the dry side with water only given at this stage when required – and sparingly!!



So regardless of medical feelings it`s off to the plot tomorrow and the dreaded barrels!!!