

A happy New Year to all our readers. I hope the coming season in the fruit and vegetable garden will be a fruitful one for you.

Talking of fruit I have made a start on pruning our apple trees. The hard frosts lately had finally convinced the trees to go into hibernation. I was beginning to worry that the trees would not have a rest. If the mild weather had continued they would have been in bud before I had snipped off a single twig.



This is a sowing of the broad bean 'Aquadulche Claudia'. These were sown about 8 weeks ago, following on from our first sowing of the same variety made on 1<sup>st</sup> Oct. They are fully hardened off and ready for planting out. It's time to get the next lot going.

This will be the last sowing of 'Aquadulche', in 6 weeks time I shall be sowing the flavoursome 'Windsor' Varieties. You can't sow the 'Windsor's too soon, as they are not frost hardy.

I am also going to hold back on sowing the rootstock tomatoes. This is because those will be grown in an unheated greenhouse, so we don't want to get them going too early. I think the beginning of March will be ideal.

Talking of tomatoes, the packets illustrated, along with 'Cedrico' from cuttings are the varieties I shall be growing in 2015.

I did not grow 'Bambino' last year and I was the poorer for it. It is a tried and tested cherry tomato with a very good flavour, so I have gone back to it.

I have praised 'Ferline' in a previous article, I originally tried it as a tomato that could do well on the show bench. Even though it had really glossy skins and was of the right size it had slight ribbing which unfortunately made it unsuitable as a top line show winner. It is on my list once again because of its superb flavour.



The show tomato I am trying for the first time is 'Mecano'. I saw it at several shows last year, it look pretty good but not quite on a par with 'Cedrico' as a show tomato. 'We shall see'.

It would be churlish of me not to sow the free 'Nimbus' tomatoes' from D.T Brown. This is an early fruiting variety, so they have been set away.

Other vegetables that will benefit from an extra early start are the sweet peppers. I bought a couple of 'Torro Rosso' a type of long sweet pepper from a reputable supermarket today. We ate the peppers in a salad and saved the seed for sowing.



The seed was sown in my normal way, fill a pot with seed compost, lightly firm and broadcast the seed over the surface. Cover with a light layer of vermiculite. Stand the pot in warm water for 5 minutes, then drain and pop the

pot into a plastic bag. If you use a bag without holes you can blow it up and seal the end to form a mini green house. Germinate in an airing cupboard or propagator. The seed will be through in 7 to 10 days. Once germinated remove the plastic bag & stand the pot in a position that affords good light.

If you haven't sown your shallots yet, you can get them going this month. This is the chef's favourite, 'Jermore'. It is also a very handy variety on the show bench. These will be planted out in February. I like to start mine off in pots so they develop a good root system and then the birds find it difficult to pull them out of the soil. Which often happens with the unrooted ones. This method also ensures that all the shallots are viable, I hate having gaps in a row.



Many of you will have planted out the overwintering onion sets as I did back in October. Mine are ticking along nicely, they have no protection but as long as there are no hungry chickens or pigeons around they don't need it. If you have a problem with our feathered friends then I suggest you cover the crop with netting.



Just one thing. At this time of year it is worth while going along the rows to gently earth up with a little soil and push the onions back in the ground. After a hard frost or two they can lift partially out of the soil. It won't take you long, and the onions will thank you for it.

I haven't hoed through the row yet, that will be the next job.

The onion sets will give us an early crop but they won't be long keepers. So to maximise storage potential and to



give us a supply of onions throughout the next winter it is best to grow a good storing variety from seed. (onions from seed keep better than those from sets). The next month or so is ideal to be doing this. Here is the variety 'Toughball' that I sowed in Oct. A single seed was sown at each station in deep plugs. 6 weeks after sowing I started to feed with a high nitrogen fertiliser once a week. This will continue until planting out time. These plants will stay in the plugs until mid March when they will be planted out under enviromesh.

There is still plenty of time left for sowing onions from seed.

A greenhouse or polytunnel is ideal for growing crops through the winter. Here I have a row of 'Duncan' cabbage and 'Rosetta' lettuce just a few of the many vegetables spending the cool months under cover.

A polytunnel is also very useful for hardening off all those early sown onions, leeks and shallots prior to planting out in the open ground.

Now's the time to finish all those winter jobs. Here is my tomato bed. No skimpy grow bags here. This deep bed has been refilled with rich well rotted mushroom compost and topped off with sterilised top soil. I shall add a couple of handfuls of Vitax Q4 and a good sprinkle of Nutrimate before setting out the tomato plants. The compost has a pH of 7, so no need to add any lime.



Some vegetables benefit from an early start. This is what I have sown this month. Early aubergines- 'Moneymaker F1'. Tomato- 'Nimbus F1'. Calabrese- 'Green Magic'. Peppers- 'Bell Boy & Torro Rosso'.

I shall be back again later in January.

John Trim