

Now we have passed the Vernal equinox we can say that Spring has officially arrived.

For us gardeners, March is one of the busiest for seed sowing. Mind you, I don't sow my seeds into any old rubbish. I have in the past bought sacks of compost from the garden centre, which on the label it claimed to be the bees knees for everything from seed sowing to final potting. 'Which of course is a load of old nonsense'. That's the type of compost that often contains stones and lumps of wood. The compost doesn't exist that does all jobs well.

That's why I buy professional composts that really fit the bill. And for my seed sowing that means Levington F2s.



### Seed Sowing

I have a series of photos to illustrate the way I prepare a seed tray and sow the seeds.



The first job after selecting which seeds are being sown is to write out the labels. Most important, especially if you are sowing several varieties in a single tray.

Fill the tray with compost and firm lightly.

If I am sowing larger seed like tomatoes, I dibber shallow holes one inch apart and drop a seed in. Smaller seeds like lettuce are sown in a 'V' shaped furrow, which is made with the stick.

I find the half size tray is the most useful for my purpose.

After sowing the seed stand the tray in a bowl of warm water until you can see moisture appearing on the surface of the compost. Take the seed tray out of the



bowl and place to one side, allowing the excess water to drain off.

The seed tray is then placed on a layer of folded newspaper.

Select a strong clear plastic bag 'without holes' and pop the tray inside.



Inflate the bag and seal with a plastic tie or piece of string. Your seed now has the ideal conditions in which to germinate.

All they need now is a warm place. You could use a propagator but I put mine in the airing cupboard. 'Saves on electricity', In this ideal situation germination will be fast, around 5/6 days for things like tomatoes and brassicas.

So don't forget to check on your seeds every morning and evening.



Some seeds are pelleted with a coating to provide a regular shape, mainly to facilitate commercial sowing. They can also contain additives like a fungicide. Because of this coating they can be

difficult to germinate and need to be treated a little differently. Once the seed tray has been filled with compost and lightly compressed, sprinkle the seed over the surface. Cover with a shallow application of fine vermiculite.

It is important that the tray is then stood in warm water and that the seed is then germinated in a propagator at a minimum temperature of 20c. The airing cupboard method also fits the bill. Using the plastic bag method the seed will germinate in about 7/8 days.

I like to see all the onions come through with their little seed sacks attached. Then you know they have not had to force their way out of the compost.

The big downside to pelleted side for us gardeners is that the seed deteriorates very quickly. Consequently it will only remain viable for a few weeks once the packet has been opened. And to try and keep the seed for the following year is bound to end in disappointment.

As I have the advantage of a growing cabinet I can get my first tomatoes under way in January. The cabinet is lit with a T5 light containing 8 fluorescent tubes. The two early sown varieties are my favourites for flavour, 'Ferule' and 'Sakura' a cherry variety.



9<sup>th</sup> March. The 'Ferline' are almost ready for planting up by the ring culture method.

I am fortunate to have a decent sized polytunnel as well as a couple of greenhouses in my kitchen garden. Couple that with our mild climate in South Hampshire and that means I can often get away with early sowings.

In mid February I made a sowing of early potatoes using a deep bed in the polytunnel. When the first shoots emerged I shall kept handy an enviromesh cover to give extra frost protection if needed. This is a departure from last year, I normally start off my extra early potatoes in late February using 10 litre pots.



The very first early potatoes are through. This year I am growing [Purple Eyed Seedling](#). Mainly because they were so well chitted in February they were just right for sowing.

Also another bonus this year, it has been so mild I have not needed to use the environmesh to give them extra protection against frost. That has the benefit of allowing maximum light to the plants.

From now on they will be kept well watered and fed with a Maxicrop foliar feed every two weeks.

By mid March I had completed mixing up my exhibition potato compost.



This year I am doing just 50 bags for exhibition which will contain five different varieties. [Kestrel](#), [Blue Belle](#), [Bonnie](#), [Amour](#) and [Bute](#). Though I may squeeze in a few [Picasso](#) and [Cherie](#) as well.

The bags were then removed to the polytunnel waiting to be planted up. That will be on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.

[The Ferline tomatoes go into their final pots.](#)

I grow mainly by the ring culture method. Bottomless pots filled with Levington M3 compost are stood on good size grow bags. I sink a flower pot between two tomatoes and the bags are watered through that. All the feed goes into the black pots.



At the moment the toms are having a weekly feed of high nitrogen Chempak No 2.

I find all the gardening jobs are now flooding in on me. The first of the runner beans need to be sown. I have some French beans under way but I noticed this morning that a couple had been almost raised to the ground. Just a couple of stalks were left. I looked for a slug under all the pots, not one to be found so that means it was a murdering snail.

If you want early Brussels sprout for Christmas, now's the time to get them going. This year I am back to growing my old favourite 'F1 Cascade'.

It's also time to get a few cucumbers under way. Started off now I can plant out into my cold greenhouse in bottomless pots in early May. That means by mid June we should be enjoying the first of the fruits. The cucumbers must be kept indoors until that time, as any amount of frost will kill them off.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> March it was the Southern Branch AGM, this year held at RHS Wisley. After the official proceedings the hall was thrown open to visitors to come and enjoy the excellent talks by David Thornton and Barry Newman. Various NVS members organised a raffle and plant sales.

Ted Perren and myself from Hants D.A put up a table of veg entitled, 'What you could be harvesting from your garden at this time of year'. There was far more than you can see from the picture (thanks to Ali Clarke for taking the photo). As well as Caulies, Onions and Beetroot, we also had Perpetual Spinach, Potatoes, Rhubarb, Calabrese, Blanch Leeks and Carrots.

My busy life continues. Last week I gave a talk on potatoes to Salisbury Allotment Society. They took me out for a pint afterwards so I imagine I did ok. Unless someone pops up asking me to fill in a cancellation, my next talk will be in Canterbury for Kent D.A. in May, its called 'Alliums, they are enough to make you cry'.



In a day or two I shall be sowing some garden peas, I shall talk about those in the next article.

John Trim