

## The tomatoes have been grafted.

On Wednesday the 25<sup>th</sup> March the 'Arnold' rootstock and the 'Meccano' scions were grafted together. It was then that I judged the stems were the right thickness to fit the grafting clips. This was approximately 3 weeks from sowing the seeds.

It is important that everything is scrupulously clean when doing this job. One should ideally wear some hand protection. Unfortunately, I find it hard to handle the plants when wearing plastic gloves. So instead I make sure my hands have a thorough wash before commencing grafting.



I remember when I was teaching apprentices, this was the one job when their hands would visibly shake when attempting the procedure for the first time. With practice the fear subsides, 'but only if you are successful'.



To begin with I use a clean scalpel blade. I cut off the root stock above the first true leaf at a sloping 45% angle. I then cut off the scion stock above the seed leaves at the same angle. Then it is a fairly easy job to pop a grafting clip over the rootstock until it is inserted half way up the tube. Then pop the scion into the top of the clip and ease it down until the two sloping sides of the graft make good contact. Then pop in the supporting cane.

Line a seed tray with something that will retain moisture. Give the tray, the inside of the lid and the plants a fine spray.

Check the grafts are all in position before putting the lid on. Cover with a tea towel leaving the front exposed. We don't want any direct light on the plants.

Put the plants somewhere warm. The kitchen is where I keep mine.



24 hours later and all the plants are looking perky. If yours look like this then you are likely to meet with success. If any of the plants is wilting, 'check that the grafts have not come apart'. This can happen if you spray too much water on them.



After 3 days remove the tea towel but still keep the plants away from direct sunlight. In 7 to 10 days the grafts will have taken. The grafting clips will fall off as the plants develop. We shall catch up with the grafted tomatoes in the later April article.

### Caught out by the frost.

A few days ago I was relaxing after a hard days gardening. I had my feet up watching TV when my wife Sally informed me that a frost was due that night. 'Did I need to bring the potatoes in.' I brought up the weather for our area. 'No frost mentioned'. I stayed in the comfortable armchair.

Next morning I was out in the garden watering my pot grown early potatoes in my slippers and dressing gown. An overnight frost glistened on the foliage.

Now this is quite a good tip, because if you also get caught out this way, sprinkle tepid water with a fine rose over the plants to dissipate the frost. Provided the frosting was not too severe the plants should survive. Fortunately for me the potatoes came through with the loss of only a couple of leaves.

### Cucumbers.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> March I sowed the first of the cucumbers. Don't be in too much of a rush sowing the seed if you are going to grow them in a cold greenhouse. Mine will be brought along in my heated greenhouse before planting out in an unheated greenhouse in early May.

I have sown two varieties this year, my standby 'F1 Carmen' and an organic seed variety called 'F1 Paska'. Paska is a new one for me and quite new to the market. It is not a long exhibition variety but the info I have read leads me to believe it could be a good culinary one. Anyway, we gardeners like an occasional novelty don't we?!

Three days on from sowing, most of them have germinated!

My usual way of sowing the seed is to half fill a small pot with a good seed compost.



The cucumber seed is then inserted on edge about half an inch deep into the compost. Stand the pots in warm water until moisture is seen on the surface. Drain the pots for a few minutes then pop them on a tray and into a plastic bag. Blow up the bag and seal with a tie to create a mini greenhouse. Pop this into the airing cupboard. On the morning of the third day the seed will germinate. If not by the morning, then later in the day. Remove to a position of good but not direct light. Top up the pots with compost as the stems grow. This will create a larger than normal root ball.



Three days on and the cucumbers have been moved to my growing cabinet. The pots have now been topped up with more compost. They will stay under the T5 lights for a couple of weeks. To the left of the cucumbers are 'Bonica' aubergines.

Digressing a moment. I have been considering my sowings for last year. Even though the 'Winnetou' dwarf kale was very productive and stood all winter regardless of the weather, we found it rather too strong to the taste. So that is one variety I shall drop and shall now look for a suitable replacement.

With the coming of April potato planting comes to the fore. Most of the potatoes for culinary use are planted directly in the ground.



For exhibition purposes we need to be a little more technical.

A fairly easy method of growing exhibition potatoes is to take out a trench 9" deep, sprinkle some potato compost along the bottom and hoe it in. Line the sides of the trench with a layer of newspaper and back fill with sphagnum moss peat. When the trench is half full sprinkle 4oz of calcified seaweed per yard run of trench. Incorporate into the peat then top up the trench with more peat. The chosen potatoes are then planted 12" apart and deep enough so they are covered by 4" of compost.



In this row I planted out the early maincrop variety 'Picasso'. Later in the season we shall see how they got on.

If you are really serious about growing for exhibition the excepted method as practiced by Sherie Plumb 'The Queen of the exhibition potato', is to grow in 17 litre polybags.

(The compost mix was described in my late March article )

### Lost Friends.

I do find it rather annoying when we get used to growing a certain variety of vegetable only to find that it has been withdrawn from sale. The latest one to disappear from my list is the lettuce 'Rosetta'. Fortunately I bought several packets of seed so I shall be growing them for several more years. One reason for

coveting 'Rosetta' is its ability to stand all winter without going bitter.

This photo was taken on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March. That's 5.5 months since the seed was sown.



The pot I am holding contains a small 'Morning Star' celery plant. I have just a dozen to grow on for the New Forest Show in late July. Every morning the plants get a fine



spray with tepid water. These were sown on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February. They actually came from a fellow NVS member - he did a swop for some of my onions. Celery is a bog plant so never let the pots go dry. When they get bigger I shall stand them on a tray and all the watering will be done from the bottom.

Space in the greenhouse is really at a premium at this time of the year. Priority is given to those plants that must remain frost protected.

The brassicas are slowly being moved out. Some go to my polytunnel whilst others have better protection in my conservatory. It all depends on the plant's development.

My early planting on the allotment of the 'Green Magic' calabrese is doing quite nicely under its covering of debris netting, even though we have had a few hard frosts since it was planted out.

Of course, vegetables like runner beans would soon succumb in the cold and windy days of April. This early mid March sowing of 'Stenner' runner beans might not have the best position in the greenhouse, but as long as they have light and are kept frost free they will do OK until I plant out in early May.



With improving weather we can now start to sow directly into the ground. For me this will be a row of 'Douce Provence' peas and one of my wife's favourites 'Meteor' broad beans.

Also with Easter approaching many of you will be planting out your early potatoes. Don't forget to use a decent potato fertiliser if you want to get the best out of your crop. And another tip, don't leave all the eyes on the tubers, thin them down to two or three stubby shoots, then you will get fewer but larger potatoes.

I will be back later in April.

John Trim