

Before I start I must apologise for the lateness of this article. I'm afraid it was down to a glitch with my computer.

I must say it brings it home to me just how lucky we are with the weather in the South of England. Especially when I hear that in the North of Scotland they have already had to endure frosts and lashing gales.

Mind you I have my own set of problems to deal with. On my allotment some unsavoury animal had dug up one of my pot leeks.

It wasn't a monster but it was getting there. It actually measured 13" in girth and 4" to the tight button. That's where the outside flag meets to form a notch. 'Visible on the right side of the leek'.

I quickly erected some old netting to keep the culprit out. I suspected a fox had been digging for worms.



The following day the compost had once again been disturbed, could it be the birds I wondered!

With more ground becoming available it was time to start planting out the winter greens. First in was the dwarf kale. These were planted quite close together. We have discovered that the young leaves are not quite so bitter as the older ones, so we are not going to let these plants get too big.



I have also discovered that high temperatures can cause the plants to taste bitter, 'another downside of living in the sunny South'. There is apparently one variety of kale that is reputedly bitter free and very tasty. 'Lacinato'. That's one for me to seek out for next year.

The dwarf kale is grown under netting for protection against the birds. The plants were initially raised in 3" square pots. Each hole was dibbled about 6" deep and given a liberal sprinkle of Dolomite lime as a deterrent against club root disease.

The plants were then dropped into the hole and earthed up to the first pair of true leaves. So it doesn't matter too much if your plants grew a little too leggy in their pots. Kale is very hardy and

a frost is said to improve the flavour. A good standby for those winter months.

The end of August is the time when I normally trim all the seed off the leek heads to encourage the growth of mini leeks. What we exhibitors call 'grass'. Mind you I shall wait for the bumble bee to buzz off before I get the scissors out.



This 'Pendle Improved', leek did not wait to be trimmed in order to throw up a head of grass. 'Some of them do that without any intervention from us gardeners'. It is important that the heads stay in good condition. I like to keep them growing as long as possible on the stem. Keep an eye on the head for any sign of the grass wilting. If that happens it usually means that the stem is rotting through. If that's the case, cut the stem with the head attached and place in a milk bottle full of water. Remember to change the water every three days. It will also be necessary to trim a little off the bottom of the stem every week or so, because the bottom can go a little mushy. That's another reason for the head to wilt. More on leek heads later in September.

### In the kitchen garden

Growing good cauliflowers takes a bit of skill and attention to detail. Here in the kitchen garden I am growing a row of 'Cornel' under netting to keep off the butterflies. These were original sown for exhibition at the NVS National Championships in Wales this year.



I gave them 14 weeks and 4 days from sowing to showing. Unfortunately they came a week early so they went into the Dorset County Show. Caulis are gross feeders, so never plant them closer that 2' 6" apart. Even though a gave each planting station a good dollop of Dolomite lime I notice that I had club root upon lifting them. That also contributed to the heads

being smaller than I would have liked and also a bit lightweight. A cauli should feel heavy when handled.

That made my mind up to treat the soil before planting out any more winter brassicas. On the allotment, club root is rife. So I decided to get myself a large bag of Perlka.

This stuff is supposed to be the bees knees when it comes to getting rid of club root. Read the instructions carefully and make sure you wear gloves and a mask when adding it to the soil. It will need a couple of weeks between application and planting out. It is quite potent stuff and will burn the roots or even kill young plants if used incorrectly. More on this in the September article.

**Torro Rosso** yellow peppers.

We are harvesting these on a daily basis and most are now being frozen for storage. All the seed came from a supermarket pepper. I did the same with the red ones and the Bell Boys. No need to bother buying from a seed company, as they all come true to type.



**Cedrico** tomatoes, all grown from cuttings. I have had good success on the show bench with these this year.



I won at the NVS Southern Branch Championships and repeated that success at Dorset County Show on 3/4<sup>th</sup> September. Many NVS members are growing **Montello** for the

Malvern show in late September. The main reason being that this could win one of us a first prize of £250.00, donated by Marshalls seed company.



I just hope that I can do better than a third.

**Aubergines.** This one is Black Beauty. I made a bit of a mistake this year by growing them in a small green house at the top of the allotment. The main problem was the shade cast from a large oak tree. Consequently I have had to wait much longer than usual to start picking. Aubergines need all round sunshine.



### Runner beans for seed



Another late August job. Harvesting the 'Stenner' runner beans grown for seed. The husks should be perfectly dry on the bines before picking. If any are slightly green they are spread out on newspaper to finish drying off. A little tip. Don't allow one bean to overlap another. This could lead to furry rot before they dry out.

After drying, the beans are opened and the seed sorted. I store them in strong paper bags in the crisper section of our fridge.

### 250g onions for show

With this dish of **Takmark** onions I won best in show. Mind you I used a little trick to get them looking this good.



After a season of showing the onion skins may be starting to show their age.

Some varieties are able to be stripped of an outer skin to reveal a perfect onion. Do this a few days before the show and the skin will dry to a natural hue.

This procedure will not work with every onion you strip back. Some will be left with an unripe portion.

This onion would never win a prize in this condition.



Sometimes this will happen.



It is a shame that **Takmark** is no longer available. Thankfully we still have Vento and Tasco, two of my favourite onions. And both of those strip back very well.

But more often than not you will get a perfect onion. The dish of **Takmark** that won best in show for me at the Dorset County Show were stripped back a few days before the show.



Well that's about it for this late August article. A September one will follow shortly.

This weekend I shall be sowing true spinach to over winter in the polytunnel. And there is still time to sow calabrese and spring cabbage.

John Trim