

By the third week of November, my part of the country 'Hampshire', was enveloped by the first hard frosts of the year. It was time for the electric heater to be brought out of the shed and pressed back into service. I still have not got around to ordering a new gas heater, that will be the next thing on my to do list.

Mind you I have been busy. The new growing cabinet has now been constructed.

A large 8x4 sheet of MDF was just right for the back and side panels. And also the thickness of the material will help to retain the heat.



The reflective Diamond Mylar material was stuck on with spray adhesive.



The T5 light was given a dust down and placed in position.



Above the light it gets quite cosy. I spread an old towel over the surface and then it is perfect for providing plants with gentle bottom heat. The front of the cabinet is enclosed by another sheet of Mylar coated MDF. The first plants in will be my Pendle blanch leeks. On the 1st December the light will be turned on. Initially this will be for 10 hours a day, from 8.00am until 6.00pm. Each month the time will be extended by an hour.

The T5 provides light in the orange red spectrum, which is perfect for the early vegetative stages of plant growth. In a couple of months the plants will be moved under my Phillips Son-T-Agro light, which is predominantly in the blue spectrum range, better for the later stages of a plants development.



Hardwood cuttings

December is a good time to be taking hardwood cuttings. This is the herb Rosemary. I cut a bunch of stems about 6" long.



Only use good clean plant material.



The cuttings are moved to a cold greenhouse for the winter. By summer next year the cuttings should be rooted. Check the bottom of the pots for roots showing through. If they are, knock out the plants and pot the plants up individually.



The bottom two thirds of the stem is stripped of leaves. The cuttings are then dibbered into clay pots. As I plant each one I push the compost hard against the stem to exclude any air pockets. The bottom third of the pot is filled with sharp sand and then topped up with John Innes No 1 compost.



The Garlic is planted out

With a good strong root system the elephant garlic is planted out 9" apart. As I mentioned in the last article hoe in Potash at 4oz per square yard before planting. Hopefully we shall get a good cool month with the soil temperature consistently below 50f/10c. That is what is called the vernalisation period which will initiate clove set.



Make sure the garlic is planted two inches below soil level.



The 'Provence Wight' garlic shows more top growth. I need a few more to finish off the row.

Exhibition Onions

This season I did not pay enough attention to my onions that were put back to seed.



Like the ones in the photo they were grown under glass to avoid cross pollination from a rogue onion. Unfortunately I was not very diligent when it came to hand pollinating the heads. This should be done for three days in a row when the heads are in flower by use of a small brush, or even giving the heads a good shake.

Failing to do that and with pollinating insects excluded from the greenhouse seed set was poor this year. Fortunately I do have some old seed left from 2014. They should be ok but first I need to do a germination check.



In a small pot I sow 10 seeds. If the seed is still viable I should get a good amount to germinate. In a few days time I will know the result. The plastic bag was pulled back over the pot after the photograph was taken.

The recent frosts have finished off the courgette plants. I was very pleased with them this year and I will certainly be growing 'Black Forest' once again.

In the polytunnel I have been clearing out the old French bean plants and a few tatty looking leeks. I still have the row of beetroot, some carrots and parsnips growing in there. Those can stay in the ground until next year. Now it is time for me to take a soil sample and send it off for analysis. Apart from that I shall be ordering some new strawberry and asparagus plants for next year. In the late December article I shall be sowing onion seed and getting the leeks under the lights.

Until then

John Trim