

I suppose I should not complain, this is winter after all. Though on the allotment site, gardeners are conspicuous by their absence. A load of manure arrived from the local stables last week. This is free of charge and available to first come first served. A very helpful service to us allotmenters.



I wasted no time trucking up and spreading the muck over one of my deep beds. This will be dug in come the Spring.

Ferline F1 was the best flavoured tomato I grew last year. In order to have tomatoes in early June requires an early sowing. I have no hesitation in recommending this one once again. But unless you have heating and a horticultural grow light, delay sowing until mid March.



The 'Ferline' germinated within a week of sowing. In a few days I shall pot them on using Levington M2 compost.

[A sowing disaster.](#)

Last month I sowed the leek 'Porbella'. Unfortunately the germination was very patchy. The cause of this may be because the seed was coated with a fungicide. This can sometimes affect germination. To overcome this, the seed must be sown in warm compost and germinated at a fairly high temperature. Around 20c plus should do it. Also don't sow the seed too deep. My advice with coated seed is to scatter it on the surface of the compost and apply a very thin layer of fine vermiculite.

As a follow up to this, the 'Porbella' leeks did continue to germinate, so in fact there was nothing wrong with the seed. But of course the coating can cause erratic germination. Something to consider when sowing this type of seed.

[The Scottish seed potatoes have arrived.](#)

Unfortunately the only way to get the exact variety of potatoes that I wanted and from the right source,



necessitated ordering them direct from the producer. This involves extra expense and the fact that you have not hand picked your tubers means not all in the bag will be up to your expectations. So it is a matter of giving them a good wash and picking out the best to grow on for exhibition. The others are destined for the allotment.



Potatoes set up in my conservatory, frost free and in good light.

Still talking about potatoes the Charlotte sown in pots last month have germinated after just two weeks.



Do you remember me telling you about saladings to grow through the winter. Well here is my last tub of 'Amazon' spinach. Sown on the 9th Sept last year and still giving us plenty of young leaves. No heat just protection in the polytunnel.



It's now the time of year to think about sowing some perpetual spinach. Sow the seed directly into deep plugs. The plants will grow on quite happily until planting out time in May. You won't need a lot as the eventual planting will be one foot apart in the row.

Perpetual spinach 'although not a true spinach' is one of those vegetables that will deliver all year round. It is milder than true spinach so may suit those who

find the true varieties a little strong on taste. Another benefit of the perpetual is that it is very slow to bolt, in fact one sowing often keeps going for twelve months or more.

It's one of my top veg. 'Popeye thrived on it.'

Sourcing Seed

I never stay with just one seed company. I go with whoever can supply the seed varieties I require. As you are probably aware varieties get dropped from a catalogue and it means you have to go searching elsewhere for your favourite veg.

This happened to me with 'Takmark' onion seed. Thankfully the ultra reliable Moles Seeds came up



trumps. Moles are always good value and they come in these damp proof gold packets. Hermetically sealed they protect the seed until ready for sowing.

If you are left with any surplus seed, fold over the top of the packet, secure with a peg or paper clip and store in the crisper section of your fridge.

Polytunnels are so useful. On Friday 13th of Feb I planted out a row of 'Toughball' onions that I had raised in deep plugs.



They were sown direct into the plugs in mid Oct. Since then they have been growing in a heated greenhouse. They were then hardened then off in my unheated conservatory for a week. Then for another week in the cooler conditions of the poly tunnel before planting out.

Set them out 6" apart in the row.

Some of these may well make it to a show or two. But mainly they will be used in the kitchen. 'Toughball' is a very useful addition to the vegetable gardener's armament.

The first rhubarb shoots have appeared. Now don't neglect these early arrivals. Give them a mulch with good muck. And they like nothing better than a good dollop of mushroom compost.



month I shall be planting out. 9" apart in all directions will do the job. Always remember to leave enough room to hoe between the plants.

My 'Jermore' shallots have come along very well. If we get some decent weather later this



Other vegetables that we can now consider for sowing. I shall get some early beetroot under way once again by sowing into deep plugs. The variety will be 'Boltardy', still considered the best for early sowings. If you can keep them frost free and in good light they will do ok.



Also on the agenda is the first sowing of carrot 'Amsterdam Forcing'. These will be sown in an allotment deep bed. Lettuce 'Little Gem' and the frilly leaved 'Mazur' that did so well for me last year will be set away this weekend 21/22 February.

And I may consider getting an early row of peas under way. These will be 'Douce Provence'. I think these will be grown at home in our kitchen garden. Mice are too much of a problem on the allotment, they would devour the lot.

One last thing, I shall be lazy this weekend and buy in a few herbs to grow outside of the kitchen.

If you bring them along in a cool greenhouse they will establish very quickly. Sometimes I have bought those plants that they sell at supermarkets in those little tubs when greatly reduced in price. Then I separate the plants and grow them on in small pots. Quite a good way to get cheap herbs.



On the 1st of March I shall be sowing the tomato rootstock 'Arnold'. Five days later I shall start off the tomatoes that will be used for the grafts. Mine will be 'Meccano'.

Until March.

John Trim