

The seasons are certainly warming up. That means winter for us in the South is not snow but incessant rain. Fortunately the last week has been dry. Ideal for preparing the exhibition potato compost.

My old garden shredder has done sterling work for over 20 years. This year I am using a different peat company. Bord Mona. It is a very fine quality Irish peat. Along with the basic fertilisers VitaxQ4, Calcified Seaweed and vermiculite the whole lot go through the shredder to remove any lumps and to distribute the fertiliser evenly through the compost. I have cut down a lot this year. I used 800 litres of peat which made up 35 x 17 litre bags. Last year I grew 70 bags, the contents of which were mostly destroyed by the allotment rats.



To save new readers scanning my articles for the potato compost formula here it is once again.

To every 100 litres of fine Sphagnum moss peat, add 1lb of Vitax Q4, plus 1lb of Calcified Seaweed and I also like to add a 2 gallon bucket of Vermiculite. This will help to keep an open structure to the compost plus helping to retain moisture.

I should mention that the potato supreme champion Sherie Plumb does not use Vermiculite and she uses a little less calcified Seaweed as well. If my memory serves me right about 10ozs per 100 litres.

Once the bags are filled they are moved to the polytunnel and given a good watering. Each bag is sown with one tuber. Make sure it is covered with 4" of compost. Before sowing the eyes are thinned down to a couple of sprouts.

The reason for thinning out the sprouts is to get fewer but larger potatoes suitable for exhibition. The only variety I leave three sprouts on is **Winston**. That's because they tend to go oversize if thinned too much.



Ferline Tomatoes



On the 20th March I planted out the first of my tomatoes. These are in a deep bed in the allotment greenhouse. **Ferline** is my top choice for a tasty semi beefsteak.

And this is the small fruited variety **Cherry Kisses** just setting its first truss. I expect ripe tomatoes in early May.

Cauliflowers

Nessie The first of the polytunnel grown cauliflowers is forming a curd. I discovered a few snails amongst the leaves expecting to dine out. They were quickly removed and a few slug pellets scattered along the bed.



The **Pendle** blanch leeks are ready to move to the polytunnel to harden off before planting up. The 8" collars will then be moved up the blanch a couple of inches. In a couple of weeks the 12" collars will be fitted.



This weekend will be a big sowing campaign for me. I have already set away the first sowing of runner bean. This weekend it will be more tomatoes, courgettes, sweet corn, saladings and brassicas.

So all in all I am going to be kept rather busy.



Beetroot Boltardy

Early sowings are planted out in small plugs and then planted out when conditions are suitable. I wouldn't grow beetroot for exhibition this way but these are for kitchen use.



Sammy Millar x Cumbrians The pot leeks are starting to move. These will be potted on this weekend and given a bit more space between the pots. They need good light to stop being drawn up too much.

The compost mix will be 75% Levington M3. Plus 25% graded topsoil. Sweetened with 4oz of Dolomite lime per 2 gallon bucket of the compost.



I shall try and put another article together for next week when we shall have another look at how the celery and parsnips are coming along.

Until then, watch that back if you are doing some Spring digging.

John Trim