

The snow held up work on the new allotment fence. But not for long, a day later the snow had virtually gone.

Snow sprouts

'photo courtesy of Yvonne Newman'



In The Greenhouse

In the last article I talked about sowing the Paska cucumbers. Well true to form they all germinated on the third morning from sowing.



The pots were topped up with compost and 10 days later this was the result. In another week these will be moved on into larger pots with a stronger compost. Cucumbers grown in ideal conditions will begin cropping 12 weeks from sowing.



The 'Ferline' tomatoes are coming along nicely. These are in the T5 light cabinet. Lights are on for 12 hours during the day, supplementing natural daylight.



'Gogorez' sweet peppers. Also in the light cabinet. All these plants, tomatoes and

peppers are having a weekly high nitrogen feed to stimulate leaf growth.



This is the broad bean "De Monica". I conducted a little experiment and planted one tray with the seed scar down, that's the tray on the left and the tray on the right was planted scar up, just to see which performed best. The scar down tray did the best.

On the Allotment.

The cabbage have been moved to the cold allotment greenhouse to finish hardening off. Another week and those will be planted out under netted hoops.



These 'Pendle Improved' leeks were the runts of the litter. When I took the best leeks off the head for exhibition, I planted what was left of the head into a small flower pot and left them to grow on. After a month I pricked out the surviving small leeks into a seed tray. At the end of March these will be planted out on the allotment and will give us a harvestable crop from June on.



This is how the head looked after removing the leeks for exhibition. These were planted up in a 4" pot.

First Early Potatoes

Now I know 'Charlotte' is a 2nd early but we gardeners can bend plants to our will. And as 'Charlotte' has a really good flavour I force it indoors and treat it as a first early. On 7th March I planted out a row into the polytunnel. They would not do well outside at this time of year, even in my Southerly neck of the woods.



'They must have some frost protection'. The soil they went into was very peat rich. I added some Vitax organic potato fertiliser and planted them out one foot apart in the row, covered 4" deep with soil.

I don't bother removing any of the sprouts when growing for the table. I only do that for the potatoes destined for exhibition. That's something I shall be covering in the next article. In fact that's not strictly true, I do remove some sprouts from potatoes when I want to produce decent size bakers. 'Picasso' being one of my favourites but 'NVS Amour' runs it close.

Runner Beans

Because of various setbacks I am rather late getting the first runner bean trench dug out. This was back filled with garden compost from some of my bins. This was to create a water retentive structure. The soil was then drawn back and will be given a sprinkle of bonemeal a couple of weeks before planting out. If your soil is alkaline, pH7 or above, don't bother with the bonemeal as it will only be locked up and will never become available to the plants.



My first sowing will be mid March in the warmth of the greenhouse. Those will be grown on and planted out in late April/May.

In Victorian times 'if my memory serves me right' runner beans were known as the seven year plant. At the end of the season the top foliage from the plants was cut down and the roots left in the soil and covered with a thick layer of straw to overwinter. Sometimes the roots were lifted and treated as dahlias. They were potted up in a loam compost in the Spring. Leaving the roots in the ground for them to regrow is only possible in the milder parts of the country. I have an overwintered row alongside my polytunnel. Hopefully they have survived as they have had no protection. When, and if I see some shoots poking through, I shall cover them until all danger of frost has passed.

Seed Sowing

I think mid March is the most hectic time for me when it comes to seed sowing. And it gets even more hectic when an allotment neighbour gives you a load of packets to grow on.



Ann is a delightful lady but she is a glutton for work. She found all these packets in the reduced bin of the local garden centre. 'Only 50p each' she said. Ann is now growing on some for herself and I have sown the rest. I just hope we get plenty of customers for sweet peppers and tomatoes come the Hants D.A plant sale at West Wellow this year.

John Trim. Back in a week or so.