

I find this is a most enjoyable time of the year. We have been harvesting the delicious new potatoes 'Casablanca' that were sown in 10 litre pots back in February. And now that all danger of frost has past the pots have been moved out of the polytunnel. We are also just about to start picking the first French beans from the tunnel, 'Hawkesbury Wonder'. And following on from those will be the pencil podded variety 'Aquilon'. On Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> May I started off another batch of 'Hawkesbury Wonder'. Those will be grown on for show, hopefully I shall stage a decent dish at the National. I like to sow the beans approximately 10 weeks from the show. That normally guarantees that the beans will then be in full production.



A few days ago I thinned the 'Hative de Niort' shallots down to a maximum of four. This year I have some decent stock kindly given to me by fellow NVS member Nigel Gould. I was very impressed when I visited his garden last year and saw them growing. I could see they were quality and indeed they did go on to win quite a few prizes at the shows. The best I have ever done with exhibition shallots was a 5<sup>th</sup> prize at Dundee many years ago.

Peter Whiting looks on as Nigel shows off his thinnings. A bargain at only 50p a bunch.

Earlier this month we had a frost warning. I quickly covered my exhibition potatoes with netting. It was a bit of a rush job so that where the netting had touched the foliage the leaves got a bit nipped. But fortunately no serious damage was done.



Not all the plot owners were so lucky. On one allotment The frost polished off their early potatoes.



My exhibition potatoes were sown on 14<sup>th</sup> March. Some are starting to flower indicating that young tubers will soon be forming. To help things along they will now get a weekly foliar feed with Maxicrop.

### Celery

Over the plants are 8" long cardboard inserts. In a week these will be replaced by 12" long corrugated cardboard.



With the frosts hopefully behind us the first of the cauliflower sowings were planted out. These 'Raleigh' are destined 'hopefully' for the National. A trench was dug out and a generous helping of well rotted manure was incorporated. The top soil was raked back and treated with

'Perlka' to ward off club root plus 4oz of Vitax Q4 fertiliser per yard run of the trench. The caulis were spaced out 2' 6" apart and generously watered in. I finished off with an application of slug pellets and then covered them with a fine mesh net making sure there were no holes for the cabbage white butterflies to enter.

Some of the second sowing have been planted in my polytunnel. And the rest will be grown on in larger pots before being planted out. It's all about hedging ones bets. It takes a lot to produce three near perfect caulis worthy of contesting a National. In fact it is quite an achievement just to get a dish of three onto the show bench.



There are one or two tricks of the trade that I can employ as we get close to show date, especially if some of the caulis come early. A big fridge and a roll of cling film is an asset. More of that later.

### Show Perfection Peas

Last year I gave a talk to Hants D.A called 'Peas to Perfection'.

The final picture was meant to culminate with me producing a lovely dish of peas at the NVS Southern Branch Show. Well as we know now that went a little pear shaped. The peas came two weeks early and to show what a difficult time it was we only had two entries on the bench.

Normally for exhibition we would sow the peas 11 weeks from the show date. Last year the peas were fully mature at 9 weeks. So this year I am boxing clever and have only just sowed my peas. Allowing 9 weeks and 4 days. If the summer turns out to be a cold wet one I am stymied.

The peas are soaked overnight then sown individually into 3" square pots.

At home in the greenhouse the tomatoes have set their first truss. To aid ventilation around the plants and to assist with ripening, remove all the foliage below the truss.



In the garden I have just two barrels of parsnip. These are the variety "Victor".

Don't be tempted to scrape away the compost from around the shoulders. You want to avoid damaging the crown of the parsnip. To do so might allow canker to get a hold. If rain threatens the parsnips will be covered. The rain is known to wash canker spores down onto them.

Well that's it for me this week. I'm off to pick a few French beans for dinner this evening.

John Trim

