

A few years ago I grew pot leeks with the idea of entering the NVS National Championships at Dundee. Unfortunately circumstances conspired against me and I never managed the trip. This year the 2019 NVS Nationals are being held right on my doorstep at the end of July in conjunction with the New Forest Show. What better chance would I ever get I ordered a couple of dozen leeks from that top leek producer John Soulsby.

The strain of leek I wanted was the Cumbrian/Sammy Cross. I had grown Cumbrians in the past with some success. They are not the biggest growing leek but they have quality and they are one of those leeks that will reliably go the distance without bursting or throwing up unwanted problems. The leeks from John arrived in perfect condition and all boasting a good set of roots. I popped them into water for a few hours to recover from the journey before potting up.

Potting Up

The compost I used was a mix of three parts Levingtons M2 with one part John Innes No 2. 'By volume'. I like a compost with a bit of loam in it as I believe it develops stronger roots on the plant and also conditions them for the move to the pot leek trench in a few months time.



I filled the pots $\frac{3}{4}$ full with compost and sprinkled a teaspoon of Rootgrow over the surface. They I spread out the roots of the young leeks so that they came into direct contact with the Rootgrow. Topped up with more compost to support the plant. The compost is just moist at this stage.

The leeks were then removed to my warm greenhouse and placed on a heated bench. The temperature in the greenhouse never falls below 50f/10c. The following day the leeks were bottom watered. 'They are stood in a leak proof tray'. After an hour or so I

drain off any excess water not taken up by the plants.

The leeks are never watered overhead. The only time moisture ever touches the leaves is when they receive a spray of fungicide or insecticide. Though this year I shall attempt to keep spraying to a minimum. I am going down the organic route as far as possible.

I have already introduced these mites to combat any thrip that might be about. Bear in mind that to be active the mites will need a temperature in excess of 65f for a few hours each day. The humidity must also be above 75%. Don't buy too large a container as the mites will not keep for more than a few days. Also the mites will need replacing at regular intervals during the growing season to be effective.

Another problem pest of leeks is the leek moth. I am pleased to see that a pheromone leek moth trap has now been developed by 'Agralan'. That



should go some way to reducing the damage caused by those pests.



Pendle Improved Leeks

Whilst the plants are small the mixture containing the mites can be sprinkled around the base of the plants. The mites will find the thrips.

Pickling Shallots

Most of my shallots have been potted up. I am preparing the last few for potting by nipping off the excess dried foliage. They will go into the 3" square pots that are in the tray on my left.



The shallots will then go to join their mates in my unheated polytunnel. Around mid March they will be planted out.



Tasty Veg

It really is rewarding to be able to pop out to the polytunnel at this time of year to lift some tasty veg for dinner.



The 'Jazzy' potatoes in the picture were sown in August for Christmas. Well we had plenty for that occasion but of course there were also plenty left over to provide us with delicious new potatoes for well into the New Year.

Later this month my seed potato order from JBS potatoes should be arriving. I like to order fresh seed especially for the exhibition varieties that I intend to grow.

Mind you I do retain some seed from my own stock that have become unobtainable. One of those is the lovely red potato 'Cherie'. Of course with a

name like that it has to be a French variety. One of its parents was **Roseval** crossed with an unnamed seedling. Details can be found on the European Cultivated Potato Database. It turned up on the shelves of Waitrose supermarket over ten years ago. 'Though I have never seen it for sale as a seed potato in Britain'. A friend of mine bought some and was so impressed with the salad taste that he kept some for seed. About 5 years ago he passed some of the seed onto me. Normally I am dead against people sowing supermarket potatoes as you never know what disease you might be introducing to your soil. Seeing as my friend had been growing them on his allotment for several years with no ill effects I deigned to try some.

It is a brilliant potato. It has not succumbed to any virus and it is still a good producer.

It has even won prizes on the show bench for me. It was part of my three dish collection in the South of England Potato Championship when I was runner up to Sherie Plumb in the NVS Southern Branch Championships in 2015.

Contrary to what it says on the database, 'Cherie' is in fact a very good keeper. The sample in the picture was grown as a Christmas potato. I only lifted it to show just how versatile a potato it is.



More Tasty Veg

We do love our calabrese/broccoli. In a few days I shall start to harvest this crop. I have another sowing coming along in the allotment greenhouse. Seeing these remind me that it is time to get another sowing underway.

Early sowing leads to early crops and an extended growing season. But of course to raise tender plants this early on only applies if you have the facilities. At the very least this means a south facing windowsill where it might be possible to bring on a few pepper plants. A step up from this would be a small heated lean to green house suitable for raising a few early tomato plants.



Bedtime reading for a vegaholic

John Trim

So my job for this weekend will be getting the Peppers and Tomatoes under way. Plus a few more 'Marathon' calabrese.

