

On the 15th December I harvested the last of the Hawkesbury Wonder French beans. I could have hung on to them and picked a few on Christmas day but I was desperate for space in the heated greenhouse.

Onion Sowing. Earlier this year I sowed 'Toughball' onions in individual plugs. They are ticking along nicely. Now is time to sow some reselected 'Kelsae' for the exhibition heavyweights and some 'Tasco' for the 250g exhibition onions.

I say for exhibition but the majority of the 250g ones will end up for kitchen use. 'Tasco' is also a wonderful keeping onion, well worth seeking out. I have two other varieties that I like to grow. 'Vento' and 'Takmark'. All of these are F1s and very reliable. But one important factor is to sow them the right way.



I like to use half size seed trays. The compost I use is Professional Levingtons F2s. To this I add 4oz of dolomite lime to a 2 gallon bucket. If you can't get Levingtons make sure the compost you buy is for seed sowing and that it is peat based. Also add some sharp sand to it.

The compost is lightly firmed and the seed broadcast over the surface.

Then the tray is then given a light covering of vermiculite. And if there is a secret to it, it is that it's important not to bury the seed too deeply. This is doubly important for coated seed.



The trays are then stood in warm water to moisten the compost and given a spray of copper fungicide as a precaution against damping off.

Then each tray is placed in a clear plastic bag and kept in a warm place. The kitchen is ideal for germination and you don't need to exclude the light. The seed should germinate in 7 to 10 days.

Upon germination remove the plastic bags and give another spray of copper fungicide. This is really a belt and braces method on my part. If everything you use is clean and the compost is new there should not be any contamination. But having been bitten once and lost a tray of young seedlings, I take no chances and always give a precautionary spray.

This is the shallot 'Jermore'. Any loose outer skins have been removed and the necks trimmed. The compost used is my old exhibition potato stuff with the addition of a little lime. I'm not too fussy about the compost at this stage, the small pots are just to get them going. If you planted them straight out into the veg patch the birds would have a field day pulling them out before they had established a decent root system.

A couple of weeks ago I planted up the variety 'Hative de Niort' into 1.5 litre pots. They will be grown on in those pots to maturity for picklers. Some of those will hopefully will make it to the show bench but most will end up as sweet pickled shallots in jars.

The shallots will be quite happy left in an unheated environment. When they sprout make sure they have plenty of light.



With the French beans gone from the green house, I was able to get on and remove the old compost from the tomato bed. I gave the glass a good wash down with Flash, inside and out and also the floor. The bed will now be filled with well rotted mushroom compost and topped off with a layer of sterilised top soil mixed with vermiculite. It won't be many weeks before the bed will be back in use growing the next crop of tomatoes.



On the allotment I have picked the last of the 'Cedrico' tomatoes to ripen up for Christmas.

Those of you that know the variety will question that these are the real thing. The top truss has gone plum shaped when they should be round - strange!

Whilst on the allotment I removed all the yellowing leaves from the 'Cascade' sprouts. I noticed that the whitefly are almost non existent after the few hard frosts we have had.

I also pulled a few 'Extremo' carrots for dinner and was amazed that some of them had carrot root fly damage. There was no indication that some of them had been attacked as all the



foliage is still green, not showing any yellowing, as one would expect.

Still one success is the 'Graffiti' cauliflowers. This one will certainly end up in the pot.



'Graffiti' is a cracking cauliflower. Don't let the purple colour put you off. They actually taste very good. And it certainly is something different on the plate. The flavour is delicate. Steam the florets for 10 minutes and they are done. Also you won't get a strong sulphurous smell with 'Graffiti', unlike some cauliflowers. Give them a try, you won't regret.

Have a good Christmas, and until the next article in the New Year.

John Trim