

Although I am now retired I still get regular requests to do tree pruning. Recently I had a call from a chap who wanted to get his trees sorted out. It was really getting rather late in the year to do such work on top fruit, but he was desperate so I relented.

I had three trees to do, one a lovely 40 year old **Howgate Wonder**. A pear, variety **Gorham** grown along the fence as a single espalier. 'You can just see it to the left of the picture'. And round the back of the shed was a very out of shape **Discovery** apple. I took my wife Sally along and she got to grips with the pear and as a bonus she pruned the customer's roses. **Gorham** is an interesting if somewhat underrated pear. It was first raised in America in New York State in 1910. It didn't find favour over there but it certainly took off with British growers. All stocks of **Gorham** are now raised in Britain. The pear is a cross with **Williams** and **Josephine de Malines**. Its known to have very good resistance to mildew.



The Gorham Pear

The **Howgate Wonder** – neatly pruned. This pear is one of the best keepers. The apples can last as long as May if stored correctly.



Parsnips

These were sown on 25th February. This picture was taken on 4th March. Some of those shoots are a little overlong and could be easily damaged when sowing in the barrels. I actually prefer the ones that have just broken germination. Fortunately there were plenty in the box to choose from. To germinate I use a clear plastic box with a lid and a sheet of damp kitchen roll in the bottom. These were started off in full light on the window sill. The variety is **Victor** available from Select Seeds.



The Parsnip Compost Mix

The following mix is the one I like to use.

- 60 litres of Levington F2s compost.
 - 20 litres of fine vermiculite
 - 20 litres of silver sand
 - 1 lb of calcified seaweed
 - And 60mls of Nutrimate.
- Mix well together.

I bore holes in the barrels 5 foot deep with a crowbar. 4" wide at the top. As you fill the boreholes with compost

tamp it down lightly to exclude any air pockets.

Sow three germinated seeds per station and cover with a little compost. Place a sheet of glass over each barrel and don't forget to add a few slug pellets.

A Gift Horse

One of the benefits of our society is the camaraderie between members.

I grow 'Cherie' potatoes and have done for the last five years or so by reselecting from my own stock. I was contacted by NVS member Richard Hodge who offered me some brand new stock. They were purchased from Pennard Potatoes who import them from France. I wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth so I greatly accepted. They arrived with each potato cosily wrapped in kitchen towel neatly packed in an egg box. An excellent way to send them through the post. In the true spirit of the NVS Richard refused any payment for the potatoes or the postage. So a big thank you to a generous NVS member.



Garden Power Tool Maintenance

A simple service will often set you back £50.00 or more, so I do all the servicing myself on all our petrol powered tools. Giving our Honda Mantis a pre season check recently I found that I had a problem with it starting. So it was the usual checks. First of all was the ignition switched to on.

Then it was just a matter of fault finding. Out came the plug, check the gap and gave it a good clean with a wire brush. Checked the plug was sparking okay by laying it on the metal guard plate and giving the cord a pull. No problem there it was sparking fine. (when you do this don't hold the plug in your hand or you will certainly be in for a shock) Plug replaced back in but still no go. I did notice that the plug was very dry so maybe it was a fuel problem. Out with the plug again and popped a few drops of petrol down the plug hole. Replaced plug, gave a pull on the starter cord and hey presto the Mantis burst into life. I eventually tracked the problem down to the fuel pipe in the tank. It had perished. A cheap replacement part and its now running fine once again.

The Honda Mantis. A great little machine but make sure you look after the servicing. That perished pipe certainly caught me out.



Celery



Morning Star. Sown on 1st February

At this stage in their development progress can be quite slow. I waited until the young celery plants had set their first pair of true leaves before pricking out into these small pots. Compost used was 75% Levingtons M2 and 25% John Innes no2.

Don't overpot the celery, these large plugs measure 2x2 inches. Again I must reiterate don't under any circumstances let the pots dry out. At the present time I water at least once a day.

Tomatoes

This small fruited variety is called **Cherrie Kisses**. It is a nice compact little plant unlike **Sweet Aperitif** which is a bit leggy in growth. I have had to put those under lights. It is very much a juggling act in the greenhouse at the moment.

In fact the **Sweet Aperitif** got so leggy that I cut the tops off and used them as cuttings. These will root within ten days when they will be potted up and hopefully make nice stocky plants.

Mid March is the time when seed sowing gets going apace. This weekend I shall be sowing the first of the runner beans. I shall use a dozen plants to provide the seed for next year's seed. I obtained some new Stenner beans from Sherie Plumb so I shall grow those in our kitchen garden at home. No one around us has a vegetable plot so they won't be cross pollinated by another variety, so they should come true to type.



The rest of the mid March sowing will be grown on the allotment. Jumping ahead my last sowing of runners in early August will be the white flowered variety **Moonlight**. Those will cope much better when insects become scarce as they have the ability to self pollinate.



On the Allotment

I have made my selection of exhibition potatoes. All of these can now be grown on for home use by some lucky allotment owner.

The **Elephant garlic** is growing well. But I do wonder how well the bulbs are swelling as we have not had a proper period of vernalisation this year. We really needed a month of sub 10c.



This is a bed of **Hative de Niort** shallots. I planted them out at the beginning of March. I am hoping that this year I can grow some worthy of exhibition at the New Forest Show. The best I have ever done with exhibition shallots in the past at an NVS National Show was fifth at Dundee about 20 years ago.

Early Sown Casablanca Potatoes

I think it's time for some of the **Casablanca** potatoes to be rehomed in the polytunnel. I will keep them in the middle of the tunnel as far from the sides as possible in case of a hard frost.



Another job for this weekend will be moving the blanch leeks from the heated greenhouse to the polytunnel. The heated green house is bulging at the seams. Also this weekend I shall be sowing many varieties of tomato, plus sprouts and French marigolds.

A week ago I sowed a whole bed of **Sweet Candle** carrots. Though make sure your soil temperature is up to 8c before sowing direct in the soil. My carrots were sown in bore holes as I would like to use some for exhibition.

There is so much going on at the moment that I shall try and get another article together for next week.

John Trim