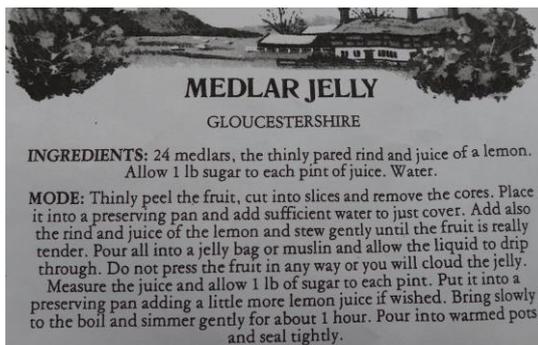


Woodgreen in the New Forest is an early July show, the first on my list of shows to judge. We often pop out to the excellent community run village shop as it sources many local food items. A few days ago we popped in for some of the local cheese. In a large basket by the door there were a mound of Medlars with a sign saying help yourself. Foraging does not come much easier than that.

This is quite an easy recipe to follow and worth the effort. My one bit of advice is not to squeeze the bag to get more juice out of the Medlars. Do as the recipe says.



Mind you I had little to do with actually producing the final product, my wife Sally is the dab hand at doing that. The jelly is quite sweet so as well as using it as a complement to meat dishes it can also be used as a jam.

Supplementary Lighting

Light is the essential element in the process of photosynthesis. Combined with warmth, water and carbon dioxide this enables the plant to produce glucose which is vital if you are to produce strong healthy specimens.



In mid November with the first potting on of the blanch leeks my light cabinet was brought back into use. The lighting unit I use is a T5 equipped with 8 fluorescent tubes in the blue spectrum. Those benefit the early growth cycle of young seedlings. What I aim to do is to supplement the natural daylight hours. On the shortest day of the year, 22nd December, the daylight length is down to 7.5 hours. What we need to do is to extend that to 12 hours of supplementary light. That will stimulate the plant to produce more leaves. The lighting period will be extended by an hour each month up to planting out time in April.

When growing plants under fluorescent tubes the leaves should be as close as possible to the light source without actually touching it.

The cabinet is lit from 8am until 8pm in the evening.

Back in the 1980s when I first started using lights the unit of choice was a Phillips SGR sodium lamp with a 400 watt son-t-agro bulb. During January and February that unit would be left on for 24 hours per day. At that time I was following what other top exhibitors were doing. Amateur growers are much more aware of the needs of plants these days and the knowledge of what those needs are with regard to lighting has much improved.

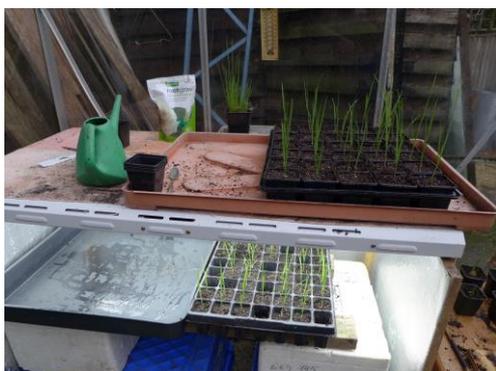


I still have my sodium lamp but these days it is used for the later stages of plant growth. 'The flowering period'. Although by using a son-t-agro bulb its also suitable to supplement early growth as the bulb partly spans the blue spectrum.

When I worked In a professional set up we had one metal halide lamp with a blue spectrum bulb for the early vegetative growth, to every three high pressure sodium lamps with an orange/red bulb for the flowering growth. By the longest day of the year 22nd June the lamps would be run for 18 hours a day, supplementing the normal daylight.

Blanch Leeks

The first potting of the blanch leeks from the plugs into 3" square pots. The compost used was Levington F2s. I filled a 2 gallon bucket with compost, then add 4oz Dolomite lime and a scoop of fine vermiculite. I make a hole in each pot the size of the plug, drop in a level teaspoon of Rootgrow and pop in the plug containing the leek. Each pot is given a drop of warm water and then the tray of leeks go under the lights.



Keep an eye on the watering as the compost will dry out very quickly under lights. Also try to avoid watering overhead if you can. The black tray on the left in the cabinet provides bottom watering. I fill it with an inch or two of tepid water, pop in the tray of leeks and allow the pots to draw the moisture up through the compost. I know when the leeks need another watering by feeling the weight of the pot in my hand. I empty the excess water out of the tray after an hour or so.

The temperature in the greenhouse is set to a minimum of 50f or 10c in new money. Keep an eye out for aphids as they love tasty young plants to feed upon. That also means eliminating any ants you see. They are the culprits that enable the aphids to colonise the plants by carrying them up the stems.

Runner Beans for Seed

I normally do an early sowing of runner beans for seed production. This year the early beans were very poor, certainly not good enough to save seed from. In mid August I sowed another row knowing that when they flowered there would not be any other beans in flower near me. The pods are full of bean but have been slow to ripen. With all the rain we have had lately they were in danger of going mouldy on the bines. So I have taken all the best ones off the plants to ripen in the warm greenhouse. For exhibition use I save the pods with seven beans and above. I occasionally get a nine podder. In the past I have sown a whole row of nine podders expecting something a bit special, but quite honestly they didn't produce any better beans than the seven or eight podders.

The beans must be dried off before shucking out. If you shucked the beans whilst still green you would find that the beans would shrivel away to virtually nothing.

Onion Sowing

Last year was not a good onion growing year for me. The exhibition **Kelsae** virtually cooked in the polytunnel. And of course shading the bed didn't help as onions are so light dependent when it comes to growth. I also found a problem with the onions destined for the 250g class. They were slow to make the optimum size and even worse they took ages to



ripen, which resulted in no entry for the NVS Southern Branch Show at the end of July.

That meant a change for the 2019 season. I have gone for an early sowing. On 26th November I sowed the exhibition onions and a tray of **Vento F1**.

Compost used was Levington F2s. The seed was broadcast over the compost. The seed tray is stood in a bowl of tepid water. Once I see moisture appear at the surface of the compost I give a sprinkle of fine vermiculite over the top of the seed and pop the tray into a plastic bag. Then place it somewhere warm to germinate.

Vento is now my first choice for the 250g onion class. I know nothing about the D.T. Brown onion. I am hoping it will make at least a decent 3 pounder. 'Time will tell'.



'I always used to say **pop the tray into the airing cupboard**'. Then it was pointed out to me that most people have condensing boilers these days, so airing cupboards are no longer quite so common. Though being old fashioned we still have one.



My seed is uncoated so germination will take six to seven days. Coated seed will take a few days longer. Also if using coated seed only cover very lightly with vermiculite. They will need a minimum temperature of 70f or 20c for effective germination. When sowing I use quite warm water to make sure that the seed compost is up to the required temperature. Coated seed will not last long, so once the packet is open use them all up in the first year.

Potatoes

I have been sorting out all my potatoes. There were still a lot of exhibition quality ones stored in dry peat. Because of a few health problems this year I was unable to do as many shows as I would have liked. Now all the potatoes have all been taken out of the peat and put into strong paper sacks for kitchen use.

Some of the harder to source varieties like these **Amour** have been saved for seed.

The rest of the potatoes in the garage have been emptied out of their sacks and checked over for any rotten ones. There are usually one or two and to leave them could affect the other potatoes in the bag. '**Better to be safe than sorry**'. I do like the odd idiom.

Next Time

The Christmas potatoes have been taken into the polytunnel. I shall check on those. I shall also be checking up on the progress of the brassicas. And its also time to order those seed potatoes for next season. And there is a new Pot Leek bed.



Now with the rain falling its time for me to do the rounds of the water butts once again. Most of which is being used to flush the deep beds in the polytunnel.

John Trim