

I am very pleased that this year in the South we have been treated to quite a few heavy frosts. Hopefully that will polish off some of the less desirable insects and convince the garlic it is time to form into cloves.

Last year on Boxing Day I set away a couple of varieties of shallot. **Hative De Niort** and **Jermore**.

By the 18th Feb they had made a good root system and were ready to plant out. They are quite hardy so I won't worry if a frost threatens, they will cope just fine. Ann, my allotment neighbour helps set the plants out 6" apart.



One thing that confuses some growers of shallots is when to lift them. Now the old adage was to sow on the shortest day of the year and lift the crop on the longest day.

I must admit that I still sow most of my shallots on Boxing Day and then pop them into a cold greenhouse and wait to see what happens. In fact little happens until the shallots decide it is time to get going, which is usually a month or so on from potting up. So don't worry if yours seem a little slow in throwing up a shoot.



A little while ago I had a call from a lady in Dorset, she asked, 'when do you lift your shallots'.

Well the straight answer for the **large exhibition** ones, is when the shallots stop sending up a new central shoot. After the optimum date of 22nd June the shallots will naturally want to divide. They will throw a side shoot if left in the ground for too long. This shoot will come from between two lower leaves and not alongside the last visible centre shoot. Which means that

your shallot will become a double, or going pregnant as most of us exhibitors say. So it is a matter of judgement. If there is no sign of another central shoot showing at this critical time, I would get the shallots up ASAP.

When growing **pickling shallots** for show this is not so likely to happen as one tends to lift each shallot as it comes up to size, usually before it is fully mature. Here one has to be very careful as one tends to want to leave them growing until they make the maximum girth of 30mm. What happens is that the shallot will continue to swell after it has been lifted. The shallot in the picture will not pass through the ring. Though when first lifted it popped through without touching the sides. With pickling shallots it is best to cut off the leaves as soon as they are lifted. The idea is to try and stop the moisture in the leaves going back into the bulbs.

Polytunnel Cleaning

Last year I washed the plastic covering down on my tunnel with hot soapy water. This year I am going to try this product. It is the one recommended by a well know polytunnel manufacturer. Apparently you just spray it on and in a couple of weeks the dirt just falls off. No hard scrubbing or rinsing off. Hopefully it will work. 'It did on YouTube'.



Cucumbers

It's time to get a few cucumbers under way. This is the variety **Paska**. It is a Petite type so only grows around 8" long.

Mind you it is very productive. If you want the perfect cucumber to enter in your local show, or one that is a tasty eater, then this could be the one for you. It turns out perfect little cucumbers every time. If you are growing in a cold greenhouse I would delay sowing until Mid March and then plant out in May.

My usual method for sowing cucumbers is, half fill a pot with good seed compost, then make a shallow slit in the compost. 'A seed label is ideal for this job'. Drop a single seed into the slit. 'What you want is to have the seed on its side in the hole, not lying flat'. This allows any excess moisture to drain away from the seed. If



lying flat the moisture could sit on the seed and it could possibly rot. It's just a small point but if someone gets a bit heavy handed with the watering can, 'well I have know it to happen'.



Tomatoes

On 3rd February I got my first tomato sowings under way. Top of the list was **Ferline** for its outstanding flavour. And a cherry variety, 'or as we are encouraged to say these days', small fruited tomatoes. The one I am growing is **Sweet Aperitif**.

Ferline tomatoes in the T5 light cabinet. I use the lights for 12 hours, on from 7.00am until 7.00pm. During daylight hours.

This is the last five of my **Cedrico** Seed. A good show winner that has done me proud in the past. The seed was withdraw a few years ago, so next year I shall be looking for a new strain of medium size tomato for the show bench.



Like the cucumbers these will now go into a plastic bag and into the airing cupboard to germinate. Check the Cues and Toms after three days as that's when they shall be popping up. The Cues will be first.

Charlotte, second early potatoes

Under the bed the **Charlotte** have sprouted.

Some times before the potatoes sprout eyes it can be a little difficult to see which way up they should be. This is the stem end of the tuber, the eyes will sprout from the other end.



These are purpose made bottomless tomato pots. They were quite expensive to buy but they are still in perfect condition after 15 years use. I am just giving them a wash out as they will be back in use next month.

I dare say quite a few NVS members will be growing **Gogorez** peppers this year. There is good prize money up for grabs donated by Marshalls Seeds. The heaviest pepper wins. As our regional championships are held at the New Forest Show at the end of July I had to get them going very early. They will take a few months before they start producing fruits.



On the Allotment.

The bunny fence enclosing my allotment had seen better days and it was time for a replacement.



While the ground is soggy, 'or should I say waterlogged' looking at the state of the path, it was an easy job to bang the poles in. The new fence will be 3' tall which means I am going to put in a gate or two. The old bunny fence was low enough for me to step over. Not a good idea when you are getting on a bit.

Hopefully the job will be finished in a week or so. Until next time.

John Trim