

Saturday afternoon last weekend the 13th October I was walking across the New Forest with my wife Sally. A balmy warm easterly breeze ruffled my shorts, the temperature was a very pleasant 22c.

The next morning rain lashed against the windows. The temperature had plummeted and our back lawn was covered with chestnut leaves, the first casualties of autumn.

Before the leaves came down we were treated to our yearly bonus of chestnuts. It pays to collect them on the day they fall or else the squirrels get there first and bury them all over the lawns and the flower beds.

I was told by Bob my allotment neighbour, that the chestnuts are also best eaten on the day they fall. Now seeing as Bob is a Bono Fido woodsman who am I to disagree.

Bob eats them raw but they are even more delicious when roasted.



The garden bounty. One advantage of living alongside a copse.



Blanch Leeks

At this time of year the blanch leeks come full circle. The seed heads are now sporting young leeks and some are ready to be potted up. It is also time to select a few choice leeks to provide us with the new stock for next year.



These are Pendle improved blanch Leeks. They are from my original stock but the seed leeks are now raised on clean ground on a neighbours plot on our allotment site. My thanks to John Pain and his lovely wife Janet for accommodating them.

The leeks are prepared in time honoured fashion. Cut off the bottom six inches, then trim the roots to half an inch long. Some of the outside flags are removed to bring it down to somewhere close to the diameter of the root plate. The surplus old outside flags will die back as the new growth appears.



With a few days of planting out the new foliage sprouts from the centres. The green leaves will continue to grow eventually forming a new leek. As the white outside flags die back they will need to be removed.



Potting up the grass

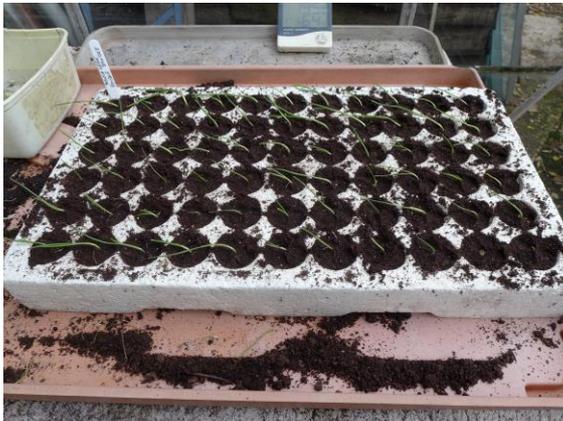
For a couple of weeks this seed head stood in a milk bottle full of water which had been changed every three days. Also the stem had been trimmed as it died back or become mushy.

This year I have cut a few heads off the stems earlier than I would have liked. All years are different. I still have several heads of grass in good condition which won't need potting up for another week or so.

This is how I do it. Once the head has been cut off the stem stand it in a saucer of water for three days. This will promote root growth of the mini leeks on the head. I then cut the head in half which makes it easy to peel off the grass. Of course this will sacrifice a few of the leeks but with probably a hundred grass on the head I don't worry too much about that.



The grass is then potted up in plugs using a good seed compost.



These are not from my best head of grass but they will grow on to be decent exhibition leeks given the right cultural environment and care. For the rest of October the leeks will be grown on in a cold greenhouse. Keep them in the best light and frost free.

When I have taken the best grass off the head I pop the under achievers into a pot and just leave them in a bunch to grow on. These are not molly coddled and get no extra heat. And it is surprising how well they end up doing. Eventually these will be planted out on the allotment for kitchen use.



Seed Potatoes

Some varieties of potato become hard to obtain. And in some cases they disappear off the shelf completely. When I lift my exhibition potatoes I select some to retain as seed for the next season. I give them a good wash and when completely dry they are hung up in a cool, airy place. These the variety **Amour** hanging from the roof in my garage.



Mildew

At this time of year it is hard to keep courgettes and cucumbers free of mildew.



There are very few fungicides available to the amateur gardener these days, so I have been trying out a few organic methods. Cinnamon is a well known natural fungicide. The trouble is getting the right concentration of Cinnamon to water. Here I have used one teaspoon to a jar of water and left it to steep for 24 hours before spraying.

Two days after applying the spray it seems to have had little affect on the courgette. But I also sprayed a couple of

cucumber plants where the mildew was not quite so advanced and those have responded well. So maybe if I applied the spray as a preventative it would do the job. Something to bear in mind for next year.

I know I have mentioned this one before but one organic method that really works is to spray the plants with full cream milk. 'Gold Top is best'. The enzymes in the milk destroy the mildew. It can stink a bit so rinse the milk residue off after three days.



Encouraging Children

On another of our country walks I came across an allotment site outside of Droxford in Hampshire. One of the plots was worked by children from the local Montessori school. The emphasis was not just on gardening but also attracting wildlife to the plot.



I particularly liked the bug house. Every type of insect is catered for with its own designer home.



Helping Each Other



One of the great things about being an NVS member is the willingness to help each other out.

Earlier this year I visited the garden of Nigel & Barbara Gould in North Baddesley near Southampton. Nigel was picking my brain as

he wanted a bit of cultural advice. Then I came upon his **Hative de Niort** shallots. Even though Nigel had not thinned them down they were all of a very good size and shape.

Now I am capable of growing a decent pickling shallot but I have rarely been in the cards with the exhibition ones. The best I did some 20 years ago was a 5th place. Now with Nigel gifting me some of his excellent stock things could be different next year.

My allotment neighbour Ann informs me that the roots are through the bottom of the pots on my elephant garlic. Time to plant them out. If you are doing yours don't forget the Potash. 4oz per sq yard.

Well that's just about it for this article.

Don't put off that digging before conditions force you off the plot.

Until next time John Trim