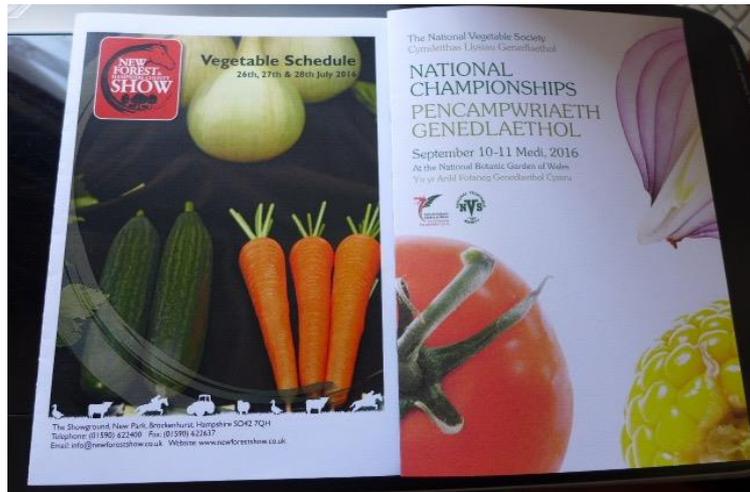


Two major shows in my calendar for this year are the NVS Southern Branch Championships being held within the New Forest Showground at Brockenhurst and The NVS National Championships held this year in South Wales.

One of my favourite vegetables for show is the potato.

36 of the 54 bags on my allotment are primarily timed for the New Forest Show. I am probably growing too many varieties as I have mostly just 6 bags of each.

You improve your chances of a near perfect dish if you have more to choose from.



My top vegetable and one that has treated me very well in the past is the blanch leeks. The first week of April was ideal for planting out in the polytunnel.



The bamboo rods support the flags keeping them off the soil. It is important to keep the leeks growing upright. Notice the 8" tall pipe lagging has now been changed for builders damp course material, drawing the blanch up to 12". An easy way of securing these collars is with green Velcro tapes.



Would you believe that this is the same strain of leek 'Pendle' as in the previous photo. The only difference is that it grew on a side shoot of the main stem, so these leeks did not come up to exhibition standard. They will be pricked out into a seed tray and grown on for a couple of weeks before planting out on the allotment.

On the 22nd of March I sow the sprouts. I am trying two varieties new to me this year, Nelson and Brodie. I choose them for their earliness and sweetness.



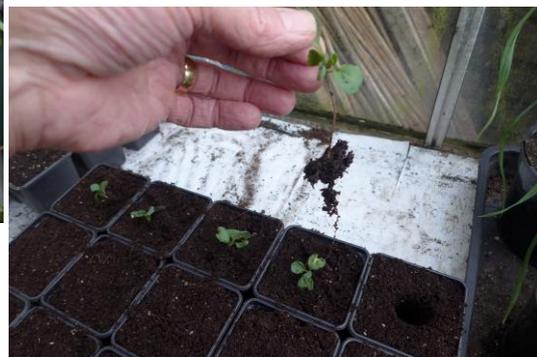
Sprouts are brilliant croppers. We pick from September right through to March from just eight plants.



Pricking out the young plants into 3" square pots. In new money they are actually 7x7cm. Notice I hold the plant by the seed leaves, not the stem. Plant the seedlings right up to the first pair of leaves.



Two weeks after potting on the sprouts have been moved out of the heated greenhouse into the cool polytunnel to start the hardening off process. Most of these are destined for the Hants D.A plant sale at West Wellow village hall on 7th May 2016.



The warmer weather has also allowed me to plant out the **Ferline** tomatoes. These are in bottomless pots so will root down into the very fertile soil. Notice the dwarf marigolds already in place as a whitefly deterrent. One tip, do not remove the dead blooms as those contain the most pungent scent.



And here we have the first of the tomatoes grown from cuttings. These rooted in water 10 days after cutting.



One of the big attributes of cuttings as they set their first truss of tomatoes very close to the bottom of the plant.



Peppers galore. These are **Bell Boy**, cultivated by my usual method. Buy a pepper from the supermarket, take out and sow the seed and eat the pepper. Cheap and productive. I do the same with the other variety I am growing which is **Torro Rosso** in various colours.



The first runner beans sown are those that will provide the seed for next year. I don't want other beans in flower at the same time as cross pollination could occur. For that reason my seed beans are grown at home and the rest for shows and eating will be planted out on the allotment. With my first show coming up at the end of July I shall be sowing those beans in a week's time, around the 22nd of April. They will need 12 to 13 weeks to maturity.

Remember, runner beans are not at all hardy, so even in my southerly position I will not be planting out until the first week of May has past.



I don't have a great deal of room to grow cauliflowers so I tend to make just one sowing. For me that is 14 weeks and 4 days to cutting. That way I can usually get well formed caulis and if they are a week early, then they are cut, wrapped in several layers of cling film and stored in a cool fridge until the show.

Top strains for show are **Cornell**, **Boris**, **Raleigh** and **Memphis**.

This is **Carmen** currently the top show cucumber. I shall be sowing mine in a week's time that will give me 13 weeks to the first show.

Using a square 4" pot half filled with a decent moist seed compost, sow a single seed on edge into the compost. Pop the pots into a plastic bag and then into a propagator or in my case the airing cupboard. The seed will germinate in three days. Bring the pots out into the light, 'a warm windowsill will do' and top the pot up with compost as the stem grows.



Any prize at a national show is a worthy achievement. French beans is a class that any ordinary gardener could enter as demonstrated by my friend Roger who by no stretch of the imagination would describe himself as a vegetable champion.

He got placed with an entry at his first national show.

Prince and **Hawkesbury Wonder** are the two top show strains. Sow the seed 9 to 10 weeks before the show to be sure of an entry.

French beans are very expensive in the shops but very easy to grow. And they are self fertile so you could grow them under cover for even earlier beans.

Until next time

John Trim