

The end of July saw me exhibiting in the National Vegetable Society Southern Branch Championships, held at New Park showground in the New Forest, Hampshire.

I promised that I would enter a large collection this year, I managed to do it and was awarded 3rd place. On top of that I had a prestigious win with my blanch leeks.



If you would like to see real quality vegetables, do try and visit one of our shows. The National Championships will be held at the Dorset County Show on 6th and 7th September this year.

I am amazed at how at how fast the vegetables have developed this year. I think two months of solid sunshine in our Southern region has really boosted things along.

I cut the first of our cauliflowers 12 weeks from sowing the seed. The variety was 'Barcelona'. This was billed as the one to replace that fantastic variety 'Beauty'. But in reality I have found it lacking in size, quality and flavour in the kitchen. Not a patch on 'Beauty'. The next cauliflower following on is the variety called 'Raleigh'. This one has proved reliable in the past. Though for next year I shall be growing 'Cornell'. This is a top variety often seen on the show bench. A heavy quality curd with bags of flavour.



I have now cleared out all my early beetroot into storage. This will enable me to make use of that deep bed for the overwintering carrots. All I need to do is give the bed a fork over after adding a little base fertiliser at 2oz per square yard. The variety of carrot will be 'Autumn King', cheap to buy and widely available. Another bonus of

sowing carrots this late in the season is that you should not be bothered with carrot root fly.

Runner beans. The last sowing of runner beans is made early this month. They will be grown on in the polytunnel. The best varieties for this if growing for the house are the white flowered or bi coloured types. These are self pollinators and tend to succeed better than the scarlet flowered ones which are not. I grow the variety 'Stenner' which is in the latter category. Hopefully there will still be a few pollinating insects about as we move into autumn. In 2006 we actually had fresh picked runner beans on Christmas Day, but that is a real rarity. Normally we pick until November.



Returning from the show with my prize leeks it was time to prepare a few of them to provide my stock for 2016. That might seem a long time ahead but for show we exhibitors grow leeks raised by a process called vegetative reproduction.

Use top quality leeks for your stock plants. This is the process. Cut off the bottom 6" of the leek. Trim the roots to half an inch long. Then remove the remaining leaf material until it is the size of the root plate. Effectively your leek will be reduced to half its size in circumference. Then pop into a bucket containing disinfectant for 20 minutes. Plant up into 20 litre pots using sterilised loam with a little added base fertiliser.



Bury the stem to half its depth in the compost. Within a week or so the leeks will start to regrow new foliage. Leave the leeks outside as long as the weather allows. Mine are moved into a cold greenhouse for the worst of the winter months. In May they will send up a seed spike. This will form a flower head. At the beginning of August all the seed is cut off. Leeks have an alternative method of reproduction, they send up mini

leeks which we call grass from the cut head. These will form the basis for our leeks in the following year.

It is the 2nd August and the leek seed heads are ready for trimming. You can already see some leek grass growing from the heads even before we have trimmed.

In a couple of weeks the grass will be growing back on the head. There will be an update later in August.



Back in the polytunnel the 'Pablo' beetroot are making steady progress. Even though these are supposed to be a mono germ variety they still throw more than one plant from a single seed. I have now thinned them down to singles approx 6" apart.

Other areas of the polytunnel have been planted up. On the left are a mixture of tomato plants taken from cuttings.

On the right of the polytunnel, where only a week ago there were cauliflowers, we now have cucumbers grown on a rather tall step over frame. These are growing in bottomless pots. The soil was given a boost with 4oz per square yard of Vitax Q4 base fertiliser.

This 'Carmen' F1 cucumber will be grown along the bamboo cane. More on this later in August.

The hot weather has made life difficult for some salad crops. The 'Little Gem' were not too happy, causing them to bolt or 'run to seed' prematurely. A couple of varieties that have stood well are the red leafed 'Rosedale' and the frilly leafed 'Mazur'. I was especially pleased with that one as it was a free packet of seed from DT Brown distributed by the NVS.



It looked a bit weedy as a seedling, but 'Mazur' is a fine long standing lettuce.



I shall shortly be making a first sowing of Spring Greens 'Greensleeves'. I will be sowing at monthly intervals until October. I raise a dozen plants each time in 3" pots. These are planted out 6" apart in the rows. This way we can pick the greens until May when we start on all the summer brassicas.

Don't forget to cover with netting or the pigeons will take the lot.

More from me later in August.

John Trim