

For decades past, my Christmas job was to always sow the large exhibition onion seed on Boxing day. The thinking behind this was that the winter equinox was now past and from then on the day length would slowly draw out. Which means that by the time the onions germinated they would be enjoying slightly more light as each day went by. And as onions are very light dependent this is quite important. Of course with the rise in use of professional grow lights amongst the exhibitor classes, we can now sow earlier and hopefully turn out larger higher quality onions.

This year I sowed the first of my onions on 17th December. These were the large exhibition variety, a reselected **Kelsae** and **Vento F1** an onion for the 250g class on the show bench, a variety which I rate very highly.



The compost used is Levington F2s to which I add about 4oz of dolomite lime to a 2 gallon bucket. This is to sweeten the compost and raise the pH to a suitable level. For onions we are aiming for 6.5 as a minimum.



I like to use these half size seed trays. Don't forget to write out your labels before sowing the seed. It is very easy to get in a muddle if sowing several trays at once.

Each tray is filled to the top and lightly compressed. The trays are watered with warm water containing dilute copper fungicide as a preventative against the seed damping off.

The seed is broadcast over the surface of the compost and topped off with fine vermiculite.



Each tray is popped into a plastic bag and then into the airing cupboard for three days. 'Why waste money on a propagator'.



The trays are then stood on the kitchen windowsill after the plastic bags have been removed and a plastic lid is popped over the top. The seed will germinate in another 4 to 7 days. One tip if you are using coated seed. Don't bury them too deep, just cover the seed with a fine sprinkle of vermiculite and make sure the compost is kept warm with some bottom heat.

My other Christmas job also reserved for Boxing day was getting the exhibition shallots under way.



I start them off in 3" square plastic pots. They fit very snugly into the bottom carry tray. This is the variety 'Jermore'. The compost used is recycled exhibition potato compost. These will be planted out into the open ground in sometime in March. I shall also be growing some picklers using 'Hative de Niort'. The only difference is that the picklers will be grown in 5" pots right through until harvest. This is to restrict their size. The compost used will be a 50/50 mix of Levington M2 and sterilised top soil.

Once planted up they are removed to the unheated allotment greenhouse. They don't get any mollycoddling.

Last year's exhibition onions have now been planted up for seeding. With all the rain we have been having lately these will need to go under cover in the polytunnel.

You want to keep moisture out of the necks or rot could set in.



The blanch leeks are now enjoying the conditions under the T5 light in the growing cabinet.

The lights maintain a good temperature and I am quite pleased with the level of humidity. I don't like the atmosphere to be too dry.

The lights are running for 10 hours a day. From 8.00am till 6.00pm. A simple mechanical timing switch controls this.



I have almost finished cleaning the polytunnel. Apart from the green algae on the top.



Every couple of weeks I check over the stored apples. These are keeping well wrapped up in newspaper.

Unfortunately, I have lost a lot this year because it has not been cool enough in my garage to maintain the conditions that stored apples require. I actually left several trays out in the rain on top of the water butts and apart from a few losses to birds they have kept well.



These 'Autumn Bliss' raspberries will shortly be pruned down to soil level.



As a primocane this variety fruits on new wood produced in the New Year. Early summer fruiter, 'florocanes' are pruned as soon as they finish fruiting. They will then send up new canes that will be cropped in the following year. My new strawberries plants have been ordered from Blackmore nurseries. This time I choose the collection on offer to cover the cropping season. **Sweetheart, Florence and Lucy.**

All I need to do now is decide on the variety of asparagus for the new bed on the allotment.

While I cogitate on that, **Merry Christmas** and I will be back online in the New Year. John Trim