

I think March is probably one of the busiest months in the garden calendar. It certainly is for me. Apart from sowing hundreds of seed for the coming season I am also trying to catch up on the jobs delayed by the winter rains.

One of those jobs was preparing the compost for the exhibition potatoes. Normally this would have been done in late February or at the latest early March. Unfortunately I need a period of dry weather as my preparation is done on the back lawn.

Also even though I ordered my peat last year to stand over winter and hopefully be dry enough to go through my shredder the winter was so wet that even though I had the bales covered in plastic they still absorbed a lot of moisture.



This also makes them very heavy to lug about. Goodness knows how my back has survived the abuse I have heaped upon it over the years.

So the week leading up to Easter was an absolute boon. Warm dry weather and ideal for compost making.

So at the risk of repeating myself this is the exhibition potato mix that I use.

To every 100 litres of sphagnum moss peat I add 1lb of Vitax Q4, 1lb of calcified seaweed and 1 by 2 gallon bucket of vermiculite.

All this is put through my garden shredder to remove any lumps that may be in the compost.

This is then decanted into 17 litre plastic bags into which a single potato tuber is planted 4" below the surface.



Two sprouts are left on each tuber, the rest are remove. This will result in fewer but larger potatoes. We don't want tiddlers for exhibition.

Really gouge the excess eyes out, don't worry the potato will be all right. I use a teaspoon.

I need to get the potatoes going as my first big show is the N.V.S Southern Branch Championships at the New Forest Show at the end of July.

One important constituent of the fertilisers that I use is Calcified Seaweed. It is most beneficial and important as an organic fertiliser.

Bacteria in the soil feeds off the reservoirs of calcium, nitrogen and phosphorus in the seaweed, which in turn enriches the soil. Also the fertiliser is capable of transferring nutrients direct to the roots of plants.



Calcified seaweed does not interfere with the structure of the soil in the same way that other fertiliser do. There is no build up. Also it does not lock up other potentially beneficial fertilisers in the soil. In fact it is an all round good egg.

The first row of potatoes sown were **Charlotte**, they are under the mesh to the right of the picture. I don't know why Easter is always the traditional date for the planting of the first potatoes but it has always been the case in Southern England. I imagine in Scotland they are more circumspect.

The gully I am excavating is for the 2nd early variety **Catriona**. This wonderful potato was introduced by the Scotsman Archibald Finlay in 1920. It was to be his swansong and is one of the best potatoes for roasting. 'I use no other'.



Even the potatoes grown for home consumption are given 4oz of Vitax and 4oz of calcified seaweed per meter run of the trench. Or you could use Vitax Organic Potato Feed.



With a dibber I make a hole 9" deep. This is half filled with peat and the seed potato pushed into it. This is to eliminate an air pocket below the tuber. The soil is then raked over the top to bury the potato 4" deep.

The **Cedrico** tomatoes have now been planted out in the deep bed. I have the first flower truss on each plant. More importantly these plants will also provide cuttings for the rest of the season.



With **Cedrico** now withdrawn from sale **Zenith** could well take over its mantle as the premier show tomato.

I normally get my sprouts sown by mid March. I was a little later this year but only by a week.

In fact the Brodie F1 sprouts germinated within 4 days and the Nelson a day later. I choose both these because of their sweet flavour and earliness.

They will follow the first early potatoes. These will be pricked out into 4" square pots using Levingtons M2 compost.



On the exhibition front

I am really pleased with the blanch leeks this year.

These are the **Pendle Improved** strain. A couple of early flags on each leek showed a bit of virus. Since then they have grown out and the rest are a healthy dark green. Each weekend I keep up my regime of spraying with SB plant invigorator. I have only used an insecticide once when some flea beetles turned up. In a couple of weeks this lot will be planted out in the polytunnel.



Broad Beans

On Easter Friday the De Monica beans were planted out. These should romp away. I have not bothered with cloches as the soil

temperature was a balmy 11c and all we have weather wise for the next few days is warm rain.



Plantings made Easter weekend. French beans **Prince**. Runner beans **Stenner**.

Plants in plugs awaiting potting up. Aubergines, **Beauty**, masses of peppers and **Ferline** tomatoes. Plus brassicas **tender stem broccoli** and cabbage.

So if you are in a favourable part of the country, it's time to get those beans sown for planting out in May. And if

perchance you don't have the facilities to raise your own, then look out for the NVS plant sale days on the web site.

Until April, good sowing.

John Trim