The longest day has been and gone. Not far from where I live is Stonehenge. The summer solstice was celebrated with gusto by the Druids and many other visitors, even though it cost £15.00 to park the car. As a young lad I once cycled there from my home in Southampton. In those days we were able to walk around and touch the stones and it didn’t cost us a penny. Now you can only do that on this one day of the year.

I believe that the Druids were very much in favour of planting at certain phases of the moon. Prince Charles is a keen advocate of the system as are a few of our members. I’m afraid that I plant up a spare piece of ground as soon as it becomes vacant. My philosophy is ‘time and tide wait for no man’.

**Shallots**

One crop that is traditionally lifted on the longest day of the year is the shallot. In fact they can be left to grow on if still producing new growth from the centre. Very often they stop producing new growth earlier in June, so you need to watch them carefully at this time of year to judge when to lift. If you leave them to grow on they could end up as a double shallot, what we in the exhibitors world call going pregnant. For show we need shapely shallots not ones with an extra bump.

Once lifted the shallots are spread out to dry. This is best done out of doors on a wire rack if conditions allow. But don’t get them wet once lifted.

These are ‘Jermore’ pickling shallots after reselection.

They must all pass through a 30mm ring to qualify. The object is to get your shallot as close as possible to the maximum allowed size.

Plus they must be shapely. Those at the rear of the photo are the best.
This chap didn't make it. As you can see it is too large. You need to be careful when lifting pickling shallots as they will continue to grow, even after lifted from the ground.

Those that don't make the show grade end up as sweet pickled shallots. And they are delicious.

Courgettes ‘Venus’

Now a little tip. Remove the flowers from the courgettes that set close to the ground. Very often the lower ones get botrytis because the flowers trap moisture causing the fruits to rot.

Now you won't have any trouble. ‘fingers crossed’.

Last week we started eating the De Monica broad beans. I must confess that I am very impressed with the quality of these beans and the flavour.

A little tip for some of you show judges. To open a bean press on the seam opposite the stalk. Once the seam splits it is an easy job to run a thumb nail down the seam.
This exposes the beans for judging without making an awful mess of the husk.

The sprouts are now in their final position. This ground was previously occupied by the overwintering broad beans. The sprouts are spaced 2’ 6” apart and are secured to canes to avoid wind rock which would break their feeder roots.

The ground alongside the beans grew a row of first early potatoes. The last of those have now been lifted and stored in moist peat. That will keep their skins soft. They can be stored like that for about 6 weeks and keep in perfect condition.

Waiting to take up residence in the ground vacated by the potatoes, are the Cornel variety cauliflowers. But first of all the plot will be given a 4oz dose of Dolomite lime plus 4oz of Vitax Q4 fertiliser, per square yard.

Don’t allow the root to grow out of the pot like this. Knock them out and pop them back in the pot. That should contain the roots for another week or so. I would like a bit more top growth before these are planted out onto the allotment.
In the polytunnel the show leeks ‘Pendle’ are bombing along. They are certainly on target for the NVS Southern Branch Championships at the New Forest Show in July this year.

Measured on 22nd June. All I pray for is that they do not succumb to anything untoward. Last year was a disaster when all the polytunnel leeks ran to seed.

The leeks are blanched in these pipe lagging collars. The collar is 16” tall and a further two inches of leek is buried in the soil. This helps to avoid the leek developing a bulbous bottom. The collar will be moved up to eventually give a total blanch of 20”.

The collar also serves another purpose by keeping the barrel of the leek straight.
The large ‘Kelsae’ exhibition onions are coming along. Again this measurement was taken on 22nd June.

The same onion cleaned up after measurement. We need quite a few more inches on some of these before they will be of show standard in the large exhibition class. And where onions are concerned size really is important. These will need to exceed 20” in circumference to qualify for the 5 points awarded for size in this class.

These are the onions destined for the 250gm class. They are slowly getting there. On the left are the Vento variety and to the right are the Takmark, sown several weeks later. Will they make the New Forest Show, only time will tell.
Also in the Polly tunnel the first of the tomatoes are ready to pick. This is my favourite for flavour Ferline.

Now don’t neglect the sowings. These brassicas are all destined for Autumn cropping.

This month I shall also be sowing more carrots and beetroot in the polytunnel. The beetroot need about 13 weeks to attain a reasonable size. Grown in the polytunnel, it is an easy job to pop out and lift a few as required.

This is my first set of Stenner runner beans. Some of these will find their way to the dinner table but all those that show promise will be retained for seed. All the beans sown in this row came from pods containing 9 beans. They were deliberately sown early to be in flower before any other runner beans in my area. Runners can be pollinated by other beans up to a mile away.

There is a good crop of apples on the Blenheim Orange this year. Now’s the time to thin them out, after the June drop. In a cluster like this remove the two centre apples.

This is what we want. Don’t allow one apple to touch another or sure as eggs are eggs the earwigs will cause a problem.

The centre apple will be the king, that’s the one on the right of the picture with the stumpy stalk. Always remove the king apple. Only show apples with slender stalks.
June is also the time to begin the monthly spray of calcium nitrate against bitter pit. It is organic and well worth doing.

I will be back in July. When we start to lift the exhibition potatoes.

John Trim