

AUGUST

Well what can I say, here endeth the drought 85.5 mm of rain that's 53 mm more than last year for the same month, that's two and a quarter inches in old money. It was needed as it has finally got down into the soil, mind you this week I was sorting out the Dahlia's in the cutting garden and with their dense canopy of leaves the ground was actually very dry to the point that some of the plants were starting to get limp, so I had to turn on the drip irrigation. I have come across this many times in the past, if you have dense planting in your borders or veg plot be aware of this as it will effect the yield of your vegetables and could stop your flowers flowering at their best. Down here at Howbury Hall the borders suffered with the drought conditions as we didn't get the irrigation installed in time in the spring, but it is coming along quite well now. There's still time to sow Lettuce, Carrots, Beetroot and herbs such as Basil, Coriander and Chervil. Other salad leaves such as Rocket, Mustard Greens, Mizuna Greens and Spinach are still okay to sow. If you like Pak Choi or any of the other Oriental vegetable greens sow now either outside or in a cold frame, quite a few of these prefer the cooler temperature and will not run to seed. Certain varieties of Salad onion can be sown now this will provide you with fresh green onions throughout the winter and into spring. Mr Fothergill's supply a good range of over wintering vegetables.



Image 1: Rooted cuttings of Hydrangea rooted in three weeks and Box took a month

In the flower garden you can start to collect seeds from your early flowering herbaceous perennials, ie;- Astartia, Delphiniums, Alliums Digitalis, Geum and Lupin to name a few. Sow these either in pots outside or better still in a seedbed tucked away in a shaded spot, keep moist but not sodden and weed free, which isn't a problem with the swathed at the moment. Sow the seeds about 2.5mm [1"] apart just below the surface and next year free plants all being well. The secret to sowing seeds is the finer

the seed the nearer the surface of the soil. A lot of gardening is not rocket science its more like common sense in my opinion, keep dead heading your Roses, Dahlias etc apart from the ones you want to propagate from that is.



Image 2: Penstemon stem before

Speaking of propagation I am taking cuttings all the time, these are what is called softwood cuttings that is the fleshy none woody parts of none flowering stems mostly. this applies to shrub like Roses Buddleia, Fuchsias, Hydrangeas, Rosemary,



Image 3: Penstemon Stem

Lavender, Wiegela and Philadelphus to name a few most decent gardening books show you how to how. sub- shrubs like Penstemons and Salvias can also be included in this method of propagation.

I will let you into one of my own methods of propagation you will not find in any books and I guarantee is successful. You will have to spend a little cash to start up, you will need a small propagator [standard seed tray without holes in the bottom and a hard clear plastic lid with a vent on the top.] these can be bought from most gardening outlets and DIY stores for about £3-£4. along with this one bag of fine vermiculite, this you might have to search for but I do know Homebase sell it. Fill the tray to just below the top of the tray with the vermiculite and level off and add water until it is completely soaked it will stiffen up, tip up the tray to drain off excess water taking care not to empty out any vermiculite it should be just damp to the touch then level off again and firm it down. You are now ready to inset your cuttings, these should be about 5-6cm in length of stem with a maximum of two leaves on the top, with a knife or scissors cut the leaves across in half discarding the top of the leaves now with a thin cane or pencil make a hole in the vermiculite and insert the cutting and firming it in.



Image 4: Cuttings in Propagator

Once you have put all your cuttings in put the lid on making sure the vent on top is closed place in a well light bright but not direct sunlight place checking weekly discarding any failed ones after about 3 weeks you will see a difference some new growth will some times be put on get hold gently of the cutting and give a gentle tug if resistance is felt get your cane or pencil and place it under the cutting right in to the vermiculite and gently lift it out and pot it up into 3" pot. the roots will be completely different for each

type of plant from fibrous to thick white roots what ever they are be gentle with the and the plant will thrive. Good luck and have fun and experiment you will be surprised. Enjoy your garden. P.S. if rooting ericaceous plants water with rainwater as the water round here is hard water and will kill their roots.

Martin Roberts M.C.I.Hort.
Head Gardener Howbury Hall

