

## **March 2018**

Well, this is the month where everything kicks off; despite the weather of late there is quite a lot to be getting on with. First up is sowing seeds, if you are one of the lucky ones to have a greenhouse or better still a heated greenhouse you can get a head start.

**Heated greenhouse** you don't have to heat the whole of your greenhouse, but line all of the internal panes of the greenhouse with bubble insulation. If you have a bench or staging to one side use the bubble wrap to create a sort of curtain from the roof to the floor along the front of the benching. After doing this cover your benching with plastic sheeting making sure that all around the inside edge of the bench top you have a small lip, place a piece of capillary matting into this dip in the bench top. *[Plastic sheeting and capillary matting can be bought from D.I.Y. outlets cut to lengths so no wastage]*. Now, the heater is the most expensive item, these can range from about £20 upwards, get one with a thermostat so it will switch on and off as needed. Place the heater onto a raised surface under your bench, something non-flammable such as an upturned metal bucket or the likes. Hot air rises so you do not want to heat the space under the bench you want the air to warm up the under side of the benching the heat will transfer up through the bottom of the bench and up through your seed trays so getting the heat to where it is needed most. You can cover the seed trays with horticultural fleece to keep the warmth in. Keep checking daily as even a sunny day at this time of year can warm up this space quickly hence the thermostat on the heater, always water the matting not the seed trays this will stop rotting off of plants and encourage good roots systems.

On the opposite side of the greenhouse create a low bench using some upturned large pots or buckets and some flat surface i.e. planks of wood, this lifts the future pricked out seedlings off of the ground, cover these with the fleece as well. Open the greenhouse door on warmish days for a short while but remember to close it by mid-afternoon.

**Conservatory or window sill** if your conservatory is heated all well and good you can place seed trays on the sills, again cover the seed trays with fleece this defuses the sun light and stops drying out to an extent. Use the same method on your window sills but one useful tip is to cut some large pieces of cardboard as long as your trays and about a foot high allowing a further about 8 inches of card board to tuck under the tray the rest bent at a right angle this upright piece cover with kitchen foil shiny side facing out wards, this will bounce the light back and stop your seedlings getting as drawn and leggy, again check and water as needed little and often.

Now down to what to sow, Tomatoes, Peppers and if you like them Aubergines. If you like tomatoes buy several packets of differing sorts. There are salad, cherry, small plum, large plum, pear shaped, long ones, beefsteak and small pea sized ones, the colours range from the usual red then there's light pink, pink, dark red, reddish purple, reddish black, bright yellow, deep yellow, light orange, dark orange, orange plum yellow plum and cherry, white, and green when they are ripe I mean. So, you see the choice is endless. If you buy F1 seeds you will get from 6 to 10 seeds open pollinated ones you can get anywhere from 20 up to and above 75 seeds. Try and go for heritage varieties this is where the flavour is. Getting several different types will provide you with a choice and good-looking salads. Just sow 2 or 3 seeds from each packet and store the left over seeds in a sealed plastic bag in the fridge in one of the shelves on the door out of the way, they will last that way for several years so you don't have to buy fresh every year, this goes for most of your seeds be it veg or flowers, but make sure the bag is sealed properly. Sowing is easy the smaller the seed the nearer the surface of the compost is a good rule of thumb with the finest sown on the surface and gently pressed into it. There are lots of books that will show you the finer details. Buying good quality multipurpose compost is essential, if you are just sowing one or two small pots then place them into a clear plastic

bag and seal checking every other day make sure they don't over heat and cook in the sun. As with all seedlings prick out as soon as they are large enough to handle, do this in to compost that has warmed in the greenhouse for a few days first module trays are best and can be bought fairly cheaply now this gives them the space to spread a little better and less root disturbance later.

Also, ready to sow in the next few weeks are a host of bedding plants what ever takes you fancy but don't over load your greenhouse allow plants space.

Vegetables to sow early are broccoli, round head cabbage for the summer coleslaw, red cabbage, early peas, broad beans salad leaves i.e.; lettuce, rocket. Mizuna, chervil chard, kale for young leaves, leeks and radishes can all be sown under fleece outside in a sheltered area or in a coldframe, if needed water in the morning to give time to dry off before the cold evening. In the veg plot prepare the ground where possible for the sowing of early carrots, parsnips and beetroot, when sown cover with fleece and weight down.

In the flower borders mulch if possible weed out persistent weeds give a dressing of bone meal a fist full to the sq. metre is a good gauge, toward the end of the month (weather permitting) give another dressing this time of a compound fertilizer same dose. Keep an eye on your fruit trees if you have them, in bad weather you will find finches eating the new buds to deter them hang an old CD in the tree, so it can swivel this deters them to a degree.



Down hear at Howbury Hall things are going on at a pace, so far we have shifted and put down as pathways in excess of 120 tonnes of wood chippings still lots of new all-weather paths to be finished but looking good, the leaning Corsican pine tree just below the rose garden finally came down on Friday nobody saw it come down but it looks like it came down slowly as it has come to rest in an adjacent Oak tree with no damage to any surrounding tree, that's tomorrows job sorted.

For tomato seeds look up online plants of distinction they have one of the best Simpsons is another. Good luck with your sowing and remember keep checking them seedlings.



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