

Wally's Weekly News 12th December 2009
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BIG TOMATOES AND BOLTING

The weather has certainly not been great for gardening this spring and here we are into the first month of summer and still receiving weather as if we were in the first days of spring.

Plants suffer just as we do when temperatures plummet, cold winds and rains wrecking havoc making for a hard time in and out of the garden.

Normally in the spring you can plant out vegetable crops and be fairly well assured that they will grow on nicely and reach maturity.

Spring soils warm and seeds germinate fairly well and then grow on to produce good crops.

This season I found that my early sowings of seeds in raised gardens either failed completely or only resulted in a very poor strike.

Further sowings of seeds in the raised gardens, in the last couple of weeks have resulted in better strikes, which is great, but now there will be little in the way of the early harvests which the first sowings should have produced.

A little more alarming is seedlings purchased a couple of months ago of vegetables such as silverbeet, grew well and were looking good but now are starting to bolt or in other words go to seed.

This crop of silverbeet should have kept on producing till next spring if conditions had been more favourable.

Why do non-fruiting plants such as silverbeet, brassicas and root crops like carrots bolt? The answer is that they have had their lives threatened in some way and the next thing they want to do is reproduce by going to seed.

This is caused by any checks they have had in their growth such as too dry, too wet, up and down temperature fluctuations etc.

For instance there maybe a couple of days when it is sunny and warm giving good growth, then cold rains along with chilling winds halt the growth. Repeat this pattern two or three times and our vegetables say this is not good so we better reproduce.

Fruiting and flowering plants are already in reproductive mode no matter what the weather is like but can be destroyed by rots and cold related diseases.

Once plants bolt they are of no use unless you wish to keep one or two for gathering of seeds for future plantings. Pull them out and start again hoping for better growing conditions.

One aspect is that a lot of insect pests are greatly affected by these weather patterns and that keeps their populations at a lower level for much longer.

Some regions have had better weather and I have received a number of reports of white fly on citrus trees and the seasonal run of aphids and spittle bugs along with grass grub beetles.

White fly can be controlled with sprays of **Neem Tree Oil with Key Pyrethrum** added, used late in the day just before dusk when the adults have settled for the night.

Sprays have to cover the whole of the target plant, under and over the foliage to be successful.

This can be enhanced by sprinkling **Neem tree Granules** onto the soil in the root zone.

Repeat the above spray every few days and spray the granules on the soil at the same time.

To prevent re-infesting you need to also treat any other plants in the area that maybe hosting the pests also. The more you can kill now the lessor will be the problems later in the season when the weather hopefully comes right.

Now onto a brighter subject and that is growing tomato plants that can produce really big tomatoes that can weigh 1 to 3 kilos when harvested ripe. These monster tomatoes can be achieved from some varieties of tomato plants which are normally referred to as beefsteak or super beefsteak types.

Searching seed catalogs you will find the types that have the ability to produce tomatoes weighing up to a kilo or more, some of these will be the older varieties called Heirlooms. (Not all Heirlooms have this potential)

When you find a variety that can produce super sized tomatoes then you need to do a few things to gain the maximum sized fruit.

The plant requires lots of food, ample moisture and good warm temperatures.

Root room is important so the plant should be grown in open ground or in a 100 litre container.

In open ground the soil should be friable to a good depth and mixed with animal manures and compost.

If in a container use compost, animal manures and a little soil.

A tall stake needs to be driven securely into the soil and stand at least six feet above the soil.

A deep planting hole is made near the stake and a couple of big handfuls of chicken manure placed in the bottom of the hole and covered over with mix with a tablespoon of **Rok Solid and a tablespoon of Neem Tree Granules** added. The young plant which should be about a foot or more tall is placed into the hole to a depth that will cover the trunk up to about the first set of leaves.

The plant will root up in this covered area thus giving a much larger root system.

Protect the plant by placing some smaller bamboo stakes at the four cardinal points then a run plastic film wrap around the stakes so the plant is enclosed in the centre.

As soon as laterals or side shoots appear these are nipped out with your fingers and the spot sprayed with Liquid Copper to protect the wound.

Do not remove any leaves that are green as they are proving energy from the sun. You can increase the sun energy gained by spraying the leaves with **Vaporgard** and repeat on new growth.

When the first truss sets fruit remove all the fruit except for the largest most perfect one.

The same is repeated on the second truss. You can do the same on the third truss or remove the truss completely as you will do with every other truss of flowers as they appear.

You are looking to produce two or three super sized tomatoes on the lowest 2 or 3 trusses.

You need to apply a top quality tomato food that has plenty of potash such as my own **Wally's Secret Tomato Food with Neem Granules**. Repeat applications of this about every four weeks.

Occasional sprays of **Neem Tree Oil** should be applied to the foliage every so often to protect against insect pests.

When the 2 or 3 tomatoes start to reach a good size their weight will need to be supported and an old bra is ideal for this, stapled to the main stake and adjusted so the weight is not going to damage the plant.

The plant should be supported with soft ties to the main stake as it grows upwards.

Now with any luck you should end up with a super large tomato or two which then creates a new problem that they do not make bread big enough to place one slice on.