

Wally's Weekly News 23<sup>rd</sup> AUGUST 2008  
Written by Wally Richards.

### EARLY START ON VEGETABLES

Many families are having to make sure their dollar stretches as far as it can these days and one of the most important items on your budget will be food. Here some great savings can be made by growing as much as possible of your family's vegetable needs. You are going to have to invest some money to get started but it is a far saver investment than what we have seen with finance companies and the best return you will ever get from your dollar. Initially you may have to purchase a few items but many of these will last for a season or several years. The advantages are numerous; fresh, nutritious vegetables straight from the garden to the table, better health, some exercise, good savings, an interesting hobby the whole family can share more self sufficient and personal pride in your achievements.

If you do not have a vegetable garden currently then dig up some lawn in an open sunny area and make one. If you have no suitable areas then grow in containers such as polystyrene boxes available from wholesale fish outlets or supermarkets. (A combination of both open ground and containers is great)

For those gardeners just starting out there are four vegetables that are very easy to grow and mature fairly quickly for use. Lettuce (especially non hearting types), spinach, silverbeet and radishes.

All of these can be grown in polystyrene boxes with a few holes in the bottom for drainage using a mix of 80% purchased compost with 20% top soil worked through the compost. Incorporate any animal manures including sheep manure pellets, blood & bone and some garden lime.

For more nutritional value spray the plants every two weeks with **Magic Botanic Liquid (MBL)**

Once planted up (using seedlings from your garden centre) then all you have to do is water them every time the mix starts to dry out. Use non-chlorinated water. If your tap water contains chlorine then simply fill a few buckets with this water and stand them in the sun for a day to remove the chlorine then pour the water into a watering can and water the vegetables. The **MBL** can be added to this water every couple of weeks. Later you will be able to save yourself more money by buying seeds instead of plants and germinate and grow your own seedlings. Start with purchased plants first so you get a taste of what it's all about. Now for the more advanced gardeners here are a few things to do for those early crops.

Leeks are a good winter crop and now is the time to start them off from seed.

Your goal, if growing leeks, is to produce strong young plants about as thick as a ball point pen for planting out in December/ January/ February periods. Leek seedlings grown in punnets are thin and a waste of time and money. Open ground plants are best but if you have not grown them yourself you could introduce club root disease into your garden.

To grow from seed you need a nursery bed in your vegetable garden. This is a small area which you germinate and care for seedlings till they are ready to transplant out.

The nursery area (size) for leeks will depend on how many leeks you want in winter.

Mark out an area a metre long and either a metre or half a metre wide. (depends on your needs)

Dig out the soil to about a spade depth (180mm) putting the removed soil into a wheel barrow or onto a tarp.

Find a local poultry farm that sells chook manure and mix half soil and manure to half fill the bed (90mm).

Spacing of seeds which are small is always a problem so here we solve it by cutting some strips of newspaper a metre long and 50mm wide. Obtain a packet of wallpaper paste and paste one side of a strip. Now place the leek seeds 30mm apart down the centre of the strip. When completed paste another strip and place this over the first, now seeded strip and leave to dry. Once you have prepared sufficient strips for your needs then we go to the next stage which is mowing the lawn.

You are going to layer a fresh lawn clippings into nursery bed (about 70mm) along with a bit more chook manure.

Over this sprinkle some garden lime. Next sieve some of the removed soil over the bed to a depth of about 20mm. Now we lay our strips of leek seeds onto this sieved soil and water down lightly with **MBL**. Sieve a little more soil to just cover the strips and then lightly water again.

The heat from the decomposing lawn clippings will greatly aid germination; all you need to do is keep the bed moist with non chlorinated water. You can further improve your nursery bed by obtaining some lengths of fencing wood 150mm wide. Cut the wood to make a frame of sufficient size to surround the nursery bed. Before screwing the wood lengths together to make the frame, paint all surfaces of the wood with a couple of coats of acrylic paint to seal in the chemicals. Screw the frame together and place over the bed. Now obtain a length of metre wide horticulture plastic film and fix this to one of the long sides of the frame with a slat of wood and small nails. Stretch the film over the frame and down the other side to the ground. Using another slat of wood a metre long roll the film around it till it is just over half way up the side of the frame and then staple the slat and plastic film.

This then allows you to cover the frame and nursery bed to retain heat and moisture but allows you to fold back the film on nice sunny days to let the bed breathe.

The young leeks can grow happily in their special environment till you are ready to lift them and transplant out in December and again later. Once they are up and growing nicely you remove the frame and can use it for starting off other crops or germinating seeds in cell trays.

Use the newspaper strips for seeds of carrots and parsnips but instead of placing one seed 30mm apart place two seeds at each 30mm point so if one fails the other will grow. If both germinate then you simply cut out the smaller of the two. Also use the grass clipping trick down the row but don't use the chook manure as it could cause forking of the roots. Instead use sheep manure pellets and blood & bone. For early sowing of the seeds when the ground is still cold, make a frame of no 8 wire hoops with horticultural film.

Using this method of wire hoops and grass clippings you can start off a row of dwarf beans.

Now is also the time to start off some kumara for sprouting. Use a polystyrene box with holes for drainage and with a mix of untreated sawdust and potting mix combined, you fill the tray to half full, lay the kumara tubers on the mix and cover with further mix till they are just covered. Place a sheet of glass over the tray to retain heat and moisture. Lift occasionally to air and water as needed to keep the mix moist. You should have nice

strong shoots for cutting off and planting about Labour Weekend.

Now is also the time to start germinating seeds of tomatoes, capsicum and egg plants which can be done in small containers such as cell packs in a glasshouse or by placing them inside a polystyrene box with a sheet of glass over the box. Place outside in a sheltered, sunny spot. Use either potting mix or a friable compost in the cell packs.

In another month do the same with cucumbers, zucchini, pumpkins etc.

It's all very simple once you know how.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)

Email [wallyjr@gardenews.co.nz](mailto:wallyjr@gardenews.co.nz)