

Wally's Weekly News 23rd MAY 2009
Written by Wally Richards.

WHAT TO PLANT AT THIS TIME

A number of new gardeners have asked me the question "What can we plant at this time?"

There is a very limited range of vegetables that you can plant and have success with at this time of the year as we head quickly into winter.

It is not so much the colder conditions that bring this about, rather than the shortening daylight hours.

We have about 4 weeks to go to reach the shortest day of the year and thereafter things will slowly improve.

Seeds are more difficult to germinate in cold wet soils. Seedling planted out of a number of plants will make little growth over the next couple of months or so and when they do; they are likely to go to seed because of the check they have experienced.

The worst thing that can happen to new gardeners is to have too many failures and to loose heart.

Experienced gardeners know the best time to plant for their locality and along with a few tricks to help get early starts and better results.

If you have a glasshouse you can grow a number of vegetables which would not fare so well outdoors.

If you extend the daylight hours by using artificial light on a timer you will increase the success rate.

When using artificial light you are looking to obtain about 12 hours of light which means a couple of hours before sunrise and a couple more after sunset. A combination of fluorescent (Cool 33 white) and ordinary light bulbs works well, without the more expensive Growlux type lights.

Heat pads for germination seeds is also well worth using for faster germination.

Many will not have glasshouses so then other means need to be employed.

There are two vegetables that can be grown at this time from seeds, outdoors in open ground and they are peas and broad beans. (This also includes sweet peas and sugar snap peas)

With the broad beans you may find that the plants grow well and flower but do not set much in the way of beans until bumble bees and other pollinators get cracking a bit later in spring.

Getting a good strike (germination) in cold wet soil maybe a problem but this can be overcome to a degree by doing a couple of things.

Firstly soak the seeds in some warm water with a little **Magic Botanic Liquid** added, overnight only, ideally in a hot water cupboard if you have one, or in a dish in a room that is heated for part of the evening. This swells up the seed and gets them on the way.

In the meantime make a trench about 100mm deep where you want to sow the seeds.

Mow your lawn and take the fresh clippings and place them into this trench filling it to about 20mm from the top. Cover the clippings with a layer of soil about 10mm thick.

Over this sprinkle **Rapid Lime** or a soft garden lime and other food such as sheep manure pellets and blood & bone.

Lightly cover this with a little more soil and then place your seeds at the correct spacing

down the trench. Cover with soil and water in with **Magic Botanic Liquid**.

The heat from the decomposing grass will warm the soil above and speed up germination no end.

With peas there is another very useful method to use them if you have some bare ground in your vegetable plot. Instead of planting in a row dig out an area 100mm deep and repeat as above.

When you sow the pea seeds just scatter them over the area after the final step (grass etc). This will create a block of peas which will tend to support each other to a degree.

Make blocks of a size so that you can harvest the pods when they reach maturity.

Later in the spring when you are ready to start your spring garden, you simply cut off the peas at ground level leaving the foliage laying on the soil where they fall and then cover with compost.

You can then plant your new vegetables and seeds into this area having the advantage of all the goodness and nitrogen from the pea crop.

Peas may contract powdery mildew as they are growing and this can be controlled with a solution of Baking Soda. Dissolve one or two table spoons of baking soda into a litre of warm water and add one mil of **Raingard**. Spray foliage for complete coverage and repeat as needed.

I am told that certified seed potatoes have become available already in some garden centres.

It really is too early for them unless you live in a warmer area or if you intend to grow them in buckets which can be moved for frost protection.

The newer potato pest, potato psyllid, should not be much of a problem this time of the year but some prevention just in case would be a good idea.

Growing potatoes in buckets is a good way to obtain an early crop. Firstly take your seed potatoes indoors into a warm room to get them to break dormancy and sprout.

Once the first sprouts appear place the potatoes outside in a sunny, sheltered from frost situation, to 'green up' the sprouts and harden the sprouts up.

Plastic buckets are cheap these days so obtain enough to plant one spud in each bucket.

Dark coloured buckets or black buckets are best as they attract more heat.

Carefully drill 3 or 4 holes in the base of each bucket. It is better to place the bucket on a old board wide enough to cover the base and drill the holes from the inside out. This will reduce any splitting of the cheap plastic. Place about 40mm of compost over the bottom of the bucket and then a small handful of sheep manure pellets, a tablespoon of gypsum, a level teaspoon of **BioPhos**, and a couple of teaspoons of **Neem tree granules**. Sprinkle more compost over this to cover and then place one sprouted potato on top with most of the shoots pointing upwards. Cover to half fill the bucket with friable compost. Place in a full winter sun spot. At this time there is no need to worry about frosts as no foliage is showing.

When the first foliage pokes through, lightly cover with a little more compost. Keep on repeating this till the bucket is full to within about 20mm of the top.

Once the foliage breaks through this top layer sprinkle a little potash and some more **Neem Tree Granules**. You will now need to move the buckets to a sunny spot where they are sheltered from frosts such as under an overhang on a porch etc. If you have a tunnel house or glasshouse you can put them in there.

Watering should be minimal, just sufficient to wet down the mix without getting it too

wet.

Dependant on the variety chosen you will harvest new potatoes in about 2 to 4 months from sowing.

Hopefully you will have just about a bucket full of new potatoes.

Strawberry plants are also available now and we will look at them another time.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)