

Wally's Weekly News 30<sup>th</sup> January 2010  
Written by Wally Richards.

### GARDENING BITS AND PIECES

It is Saturday in Palmerston North, and while I am writing this, nice showers are wetting the soil and plants are growing in response.

It has been a poor spring and summer so far for gardening, but hopefully conditions will improve in February, if they don't then its going to be a bad season overall.

Poor seasons are accepted as part of the life of a seasoned gardener but for the newer gardeners it is a set back they don't need. In gardening you take the good with the bad and garden on, without losing heart.

Recently I watched the gardening program on the Prime channel which would be of assistance to newer gardeners. There was some good points raised and being the critic I am there were aspects that I did not agree with.

I had not seen any previous episodes but obviously this young family had converted some lawn area into a few raised gardens. The first thing that struck me was that the **raised gardens** were too wide, which meant that you had to walk on them to sow, plant and harvest. This is wrong as a raised garden should not be walked on, or suitable paths be placed through, so that you can tend plants without walking on the growing areas.

Tramping down your growing areas means you would need to dig and cultivate the compacted areas; a raised garden should be a no dig garden.

Walking across lawns and into the raised gardens would likely bring grass seeds in to become weed seeds and more work keeping the weeds under control. As the garden heights were not great, I prefer a raised garden to be about half a metre tall or more to prevent weed seeds blowing into the area.

Then another thing occurred to me, in the middle of a couple of the large raised gardens, climbing frames had been placed for beans and cucumbers.

Around these frames various vegetables were planted, many of which were too close anyway (good spacing had not been allowed) and I wonder how, when the plants reached maturity, one would be able to get to the frames to harvest without trampling other produce.

Carrot seedlings purchased were transplanted which normally is silly but in this case the carrots were called roly pollys or something similar and they only grow as a round ball. Not having the length of root normal carrots have, they are suitable for transplanting.

The problem solving part talked about the stress plants suffer when transplanted from open punnets.

The expert never gave a solution to this but said you should never water plants in full sun. I expect that the same person has never heard of sun showers.

Mind you rain on a sunny day is very much less likely to cause any burning of foliage when you compare it to chlorinated water from the tap.

How do you get around the problem of transplanting seedlings to reduce the stress of having their roots damaged?

Firstly you can spray the seedlings with **Vaporgard** a day or so before transplanting. This greatly reduces moisture loss through the foliage and takes the stress off their root system and foliage.

Secondly you plunge the whole punnet into a tub of water and watch it bubble away. This

ensures that the mix is soaking wet and roots will come away from the mix with far less damage.

Finally you never plant out while the sun is on the garden, wait till later in the day when it's cooler (and a better time to garden) then do you're transplanting.

As for watering during a sunny day, if you have a filter on your tap to remove the chlorine then you can water but to be on the safe side, hand water the soil not the plants which is easy to do with a wand type attachment. The wand should have a fine rose which puts out soft water spray.

On a hot day if your soil has dried and plants are in stress it is better to water the soil then than wait for further damage to the plants. Plants in stress are more prone to disease and insect attack than plants not in stress. It's the same with us, stress can cause health problems.

When a plant goes into stress though insufficient moisture it stops growing and you lose valuable sun hours.

Then there is a situation such as with tomatoes and some other crops that the soil can be moist but the foliage is transpiring so fast that the root system can't keep up with the moisture loss.

If this is the case you simply spray the foliage under and over with **Vaporgard** which can reduce the water needs by 30 to 40%.

The film of Vaporgard lasts on the foliage sprayed for about 3 months.

It will also reduce the possibility of disease or insect attack and your plants will gather more energy from the sun growing faster and better.

Talking about tomatoes it has been a bad season this year so far, with a lot of fungus attacks because of the weather patterns.

Fruit is not ripening as quickly as they should and often as they begin to ripen the birds attack.

I started picking the fruit as they changed colour to finish ripening indoors, placing them in a bowl with an apple to speed up the process. I also have strung a few lengths of **Bird Repeller Ribbon** from the stakes to deter the birds.

Between the two aspects I now have a nice supply of ripe tomatoes.

During a recent conversation with a fellow gardener I was told that you should never store carrots near apples as it makes the carrots bitter. Learn something new every day. Stem rot in tomatoes has also been another complaint from gardeners and yes I have lost a couple of plants to this disease also.

One plant that showed the signs of stem rot the other week, with its collapsing foliage, on examination I noticed that it had two branches about a foot long above the rot area and these branches had dimples which are the beginnings of aerial roots.

So I broke them off the dying plant and plunged them into the growing medium to the depth of about 4 inches. Both these are now standing up nicely as their roots are keeping the foliage in adequate moisture. I might have lost the main plant but now have two establishing plants to replace.

The same can be done with laterals to give you more tomato plants.

Weather permitting these cutting grown tomato plants will fruit well into autumn and early winter.

The water need for tomatoes on a daily bases varies dependant on temperature, soil type and time of the year. On a hot day the mature plant may use 1 to 3 litres of water. If there

is insufficient moisture at the time the fruit is setting then blossom end rot will occur.  
This happens more so in container grown plants than in open ground.  
With containers you may need to give them a drink twice a day or alternatively spray the foliage with **Vaporgard** to reduce moisture loss.  
Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)