

Wally's Weekly News 9<sup>th</sup> January 2010  
Written by Wally Richards.

## A NEW YEAR

Welcome back to the New Year and the middle of the summer season.

The gardening year starts in June and finishes a year later in the following May so that puts us about halfway through.

I am writing this in advance, a couple of days before the first of January and the weather at this time is windy here in Palmerston North and still not great after a poor spring.

This break from my normal work has allowed me some time to get stuck into the mess my container plants and raised gardens had become.

I will not use any chemical herbicides to clear the weeds and grasses that grow up out of the gravel in my garden area. Outside of pulling up grasses and suitable weeds for my chickens, the area around the raised gardens and containers had become over grown and a real mess.

My answer to this was to clear the area by hand best as possible and then lay down heavy gauge black plastic sheets over the gravel. This should reduce my weed problem in future and over the plastic, to hold it in place, shingle has been laid.

I even got to put up a lean to glasshouse that I had in storage so I can grow a passion fruit vine and a few other tender plants.

The weather in Palmerston North years ago, used to be ok to grow passion fruit vines outside in a sunny sheltered area as long as you protected them in the winter. Now the lack of constant warm/hot weather in the summer means they often fail outside, after the first season.

I have had a number of gardeners from certain areas report failure in their early crops of potatoes for the season. The tops grew great with no indication of a problem but when lifted only marble sized potatoes were found. They were not aware of the new pest called the potato/tomato psyllid which releases a toxin while sucking on the stems and leaves of potatoes and tomatoes preventing the spuds or fruit to develop and you end up with small useless fruit or spuds.

The answer is to place **Neem Tree Granules** into the planting hole (about a tablespoon) at planting time of either crop. With tomatoes also sprinkle some on the soil in the root zone and repeat about 6-8 weeks later. Do the same with the potatoes after you have finished mounding up.

A spray every so often with **Neem Tree Oil** for total coverage of the plant will also assist. I have used this method at the beginning of spring when planting out the early potatoes and they have grown as they should where last season, one later crop was a complete failure.

It is also a good idea to plant a few more tomato plants at this time.

Some garden centres still have plants available but if you cannot find any then take a few laterals off your existing plants and strike them as cuttings in small pots.

To speed up the striking spray the laterals you are going to strike with **Vaporgard** a day before removing from the parent plant.

These later plants will grow to maturity and produce ripe tomatoes late in the season likely when your originals have finished and at a time when tomatoes become dear to buy.

Another important aspect is to keep feeding your existing plants. A number of gardeners neglect this once they start to pick ripe fruit and thus they do not get the mileage out of their plants as they should.

If birds attack the ripening fruit you can protect them with **Bird Ribbon** or alternatively pick the fruit as they start to change colour and ripen them off the plant indoors.

Dead head flower plants including your roses which mean simply cutting off the old withering flowers.

This promotes new flowers as the plants want to create seeds and if the old flowers are removed they will not form seed pods and so the plants keep trying.

If rust attack any plants then make up a mild solution of **potassium permanganate** (Condys Crystals) by placing a few grains into water to make a nice mid lilac/purple colour. Spray this over the effected plants.

For mildew take a couple of heaped tablespoons of baking soda to each litre of warm water, stir and add a mil of **Raingard** (per litre) and spray this for prevention and control. A number of gardeners have informed me that by sprinkling **Neem Tree Granules** on the soil under their roses has greatly assisted in the control of insect pests.

If you are growing brassicas such as cabbage etc then sprinkle the **granules** onto the soil in their root zone to control white butterfly caterpillars. It works a treat especially if started at planting time with a bit in the planting hole as well as on the soil. Repeat the soil application about every 6 to 8 weeks.

Likely we will be looking at drought situations in some areas soon, so it is a good time to mulch gardens to conserve moisture.

Hopefully we will also have some good weather and growing conditions over the next few months which means it is a great time to plant up crops for autumn harvest and also start planting vegetables for winter harvests.

I have just put in a swag of silverbeet for autumn and winter harvesting and planted a lot of corn seeds for autumn harvests.

One thing that really annoys me is nurseries that sell through retail outlets punnets of plants that will not transplant well and some which should never be transplanted.

I spotted carrot seedlings in punnets at one place prior to Xmas, which no knowledgeable gardener would ever buy. I saw a lady putting a punnet of carrot seedlings into her trolley so I went up and had a quiet word with her, saying that she is wasting her time and money. She said had thought that, but why were they selling them? What I said was, for money from people that did not know any better.

There are a whole range of vegetables best grown directly from seed into the spot where they will mature. This includes root crops such as carrots, parsnips, beetroot etc, then corn, beans and peas the same, direct sow the seeds.

Foliage crops such as brassicas, lettuce, silverbeet, celery, spinach, herbs are good to buy in punnets or pots. Fruiting crops are fine also such as tomatoes, cucumbers, etc but ideally are best if individually in pots rather than massed in an open punnet.

People that are learning about gardening are likely to buy carrot seedlings, plant them out and end up with stubby, small, funny shaped carrots at harvest which are not worth the effort of growing.

All plants will do best if grown from seed in the spot where they will reach maturity.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)