

GARDENING UNDER LOCKDOWN IN BURWASH!

One of the positives of the current crisis for those of us lucky enough to have gardens is to make the most of them with all the time we have on our hands.

Most importantly as Monty Don says "Enjoy your garden and do not become a slave to it!"

Here are a few hints and tips that I have picked up over the years. All the plant varieties I have mentioned grow well in our Burwash soil.

PLAN AHEAD

Gardening is therapeutic, lots of fun and can be extremely rewarding. Even cold winter evenings can be spent planning for spring and with the help of a few good catalogues, you can order your seeds and plants for the next season.

Planning ahead for the year is vital, starting with sowing your sweet peas (Eagle Sweet Peas, Chelsea Collection) singly in tubes in a cold greenhouse in October, sowing your broad beans (Aquadulce Claudia) directly into the ground to avoid blackfly in November, along with your over-wintering peas (Meteor).

A useful tip when sowing peas is to use a length of plastic guttering. Fill it with compost, sow the peas in it and once they have germinated and are up, just slide out the length of peas into your planting trench. Beware of mice who love pea seeds and sweet pea seeds! Also plant your autumn onions in November.

SPRING

In early March I start to prune all my roses, shrubs and fruit trees. Do not be afraid to be aggressive if you want lots of new growth and masses of summer blooms.

Turning first to the vegetable garden, the aim of the exercise is to become as self-sufficient as you can for all your vegetables and salad crops, particularly important this year.

Prepare the ground well by digging in lots of last year's compost. Put up your bean poles and in my case, sweet pea poles and plan your space. Remember how much space potatoes take up!

Successional sowing is sensible to avoid wasteful gluts. This applies to lettuce (Little Gem and Lakeland), beetroot (Bolthardy and Baby Beet Action), French beans (Castandel), carrots (Resistaflly and Sweet Candle), leeks (Musselburgh) and radishes (Sparkler and French Breakfast).

Start your seeds germinating early; I use heated seed trays and windowsills as I do not have heating in my greenhouse.

I always grow a lot of plants from seed as it's much more rewarding and cheaper than buying plants. Normally I sell the surplus for the Burwash Horticultural Society at their plant sale in May. This year I have given them away.

Tomatoes are fun and easy to grow from seed, I grow about six varieties (Gardeners Delight, Shirley, Moneymaker, Golden Cherry, Alicante, and beef tomato Country Taste). They need potting on twice into pots big enough to be planted out, some into grow bags in the greenhouse and the outdoor varieties into large pots and keep them tied to stakes as they grow.

Sow lots of runner bean seeds (Polestar) as they don't normally all germinate, summer peas (Early Onward and Kelvedon Wonder), cabbage (Duncan and Primo), brussels sprouts (Clodius), broccoli (Claret), cauliflower (Clapton), cucumber (Euphya and Mini Munch) and courgettes (Defender) - this variety climbs up poles so don't take up too much ground space.

Get your potatoes chitting in good time. I grow an early salad variety (Charlotte) which melts in the mouth and two main crop varieties (King Edward and Kestel).

Two years ago, I invested in a walk-in butterfly netted cage which has been a godsend for all my brassicas, no longer having them all eaten by caterpillars from Cabbage White butterflies and pigeons.

Remember to keep all your vegetables well-watered through the summer and keep on top of the weeds!

FLOWERS

Turning to the flower garden, I try and plan for colour throughout the year. I start sowing my flower seeds in March, and I allow daffodils and tulips, once they have flowered, to naturalise in beds under our roses.

Moving on to camellias, azaleas, rhododendrons, irises, and early flowering climbing roses followed by summer flowering hybrid tea roses. If needs be, tend to and replace your perennials. There are so many to choose from and get your bedding plants in nice and early. I use Miracle Gro to promote growth. Do not forget to regularly spray your roses in the evening once the heat of the sun is over, to avoid blackspot, aphids and mildew.

Dahlias make wonderful displays and if you lift yours as I do to overwinter, get them growing in early March, hardening them off in the cold frame before planting out in the beds in May; they make great space fillers. However, beware of late frosts as they can come anytime in May so have lots of fleece ready to cover up and protect all your hard work, as they are deadly to dahlias and potatoes!

KEEP ON TOP OF THINGS

Gardens need constant attention and I spend at least two hours a day keeping on top of mine. However, this year my wife Lynda has been promoted to Head Gardener as I currently have my right foot and leg in a long term plaster cast so I am assisting on crutches and getting round

the garden on my small ride on mower. She is doing an amazing job!

I am no gardening expert and was taught most of what I know from Brian Morris, who sadly passed away a few years ago. He gardened for our family for over 30 years and insisted you should always clear up as you go. If you kneel down, use the back of your spade to avoid a damp and dirty knee and most important of all talk to your plants. I often heard him muttering away to them!

Our shows for the Horticultural Society have all been cancelled due to the virus so it's important to put on your own show at home! I have always encouraged members to "Grow to Show" as it concentrates the mind to try and achieve horticultural perfection and brings pleasure to both you and others around you. And at the end of the day after all your hard work you can relax in a deck chair to enjoy your achievements with a Gin and Tonic in one hand and a watering can in the other!

Happy gardening and stay safe.

Richard Maude-Roxby
Chairman, Burwash Horticultural Society
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Blooming Burwash Gardening Tips:

The two Ws - Weed and Water

The two Ss - Successional Sowing

The two Ps - Prune and Pinch Out