

## Notes from Agric Hadron Talk 23 March: Colinton Garden Club

### “Year round vegetables – Lessons from Utopia?”

#### North IS different 1

Cooler in summer

- Too cool for some (sweet corn, tomatoes, aubergines, peppers, butternut squashes...)
- Marginal for some (french and runner beans, pumpkins, squashes and marrows)
- Extends cropping for some (peas, lettuce)

#### North IS different 2

More light in summer

- Plants growing between April and September get more light
- It's a HUGE difference, 90+ minutes a day at midsummer versus London
- Some vegetables benefit very noticeably...
- Direct sown onions work!
- Carrots and parsnips enjoy
- Must maximise this advantage: sow in time

#### North IS different 3

Less light and colder in winter

- Not too serious a problem, but...
- You need to get your winter crops established sooner
- Light is the bigger problem: less sun energy = less growth
- Fresh: leeks, kale, PSB, cabbage, swede, jerusalem artichoke, parsnip, chicory
- Stored: potato, carrot, beetroot, onion, garlic, shallots
- Protected: lettuce, mizuna, spinach

#### Potatoes are surprisingly different from one another

- Soil, variety, cultivation and weather interact affecting yield and flavour
- What does well in one place and season can do less well nearby and in a different season
- There are about 200 varieties available from retail seed merchants in UK
- In 2007 we grew 30 varieties, 2008 we grew 38, aiming for 50 in 2009
- Personal flavour etc preferences vary widely

#### First Earlies

- First earlies tend to crop less well and lack flavour compared to later varieties
- We had a usable crop of Swift by 21st June from a 31st March planting with only a bit of straw to protect
- Red Duke of York, Sharpe's Express, Accent and Lady Christl were favourites
- You get decent crops from a double row with 12" to 15" between seed tubers

#### Second Earlies

- Probably most versatile, reliable and useful type, usually produce a good crop in poor seasons and when blighted
- Can be planted late – even to late June
- Kestrel and Milva are good croppers, general purpose, good flavour
- Cherie and Franceline are tasty red skinned salads; Anya is like Pink Fir Apple, nutty flavour
- Salad Blue for lilac mash, Edzell Blue for white

## **Maincrop**

- Desiree cropped well, some people liked, Picasso even better, good general purpose
- Pompadour produces good yields of new potatoes, Bambino looks promising
- Highland Burgundy Red and Shetland Black are good for mashing, roasting and frying
- King Edward is a good maincrop for roasting
- More affected by blight than earlies

## **Late Maincrop**

- Pink Fir Apple varied a lot with season
- Kerrs Pink is the best of all for roasting, very reliable, good yields
- Arran Victory yielded very well early and late, excellent floury spud for mash & roast
- Plant before maincrop and some second earlies

## **Planting Timetable for Inverness**

- Late March to late April: First earlies and some second earlies, protect as required
- Mid to late April: plant late maincrop
- Mid April to mid May plant maincrop
- Mid April to mid June plant remaining second earlies
- Keep coolish when chitting unless you want to speed up, 5 C to prevent sprouting
- Varieties wake up at different times

## **Peas**

- Cropping date is 'day degrees' dependent
- Grow early dwarf (1' – 2') varieties unsupported
- Grow tall (5' – 6') maincrops for longer and heavier cropping
- Mangetout 'Carouby de Mousanne', sugarsnap 'Sugar Lord'
- Cooler climate extends cropping

## **Broad Beans**

- Do well in north
- Variety 'Witkiem Manita' outperformed all others
- Can steam young pods whole, especially variety 'Optica'
- I grow triple rows at 9" between plants

## **Runner Beans**

- Short season so far north
- Try to plant out mid to late May, sow reserves in pots about 2 weeks after main sowing
- Plenty of compost in trench 2 spades deep, make it a slight depression for ease of watering
- We had enough rain to almost never need to water

## **French Beans**

- Dwarf varieties did fairly poorly, fleece helped
- Climbing did better, cropped a week earlier than runner beans
- Best climbing variety was Cobra

## **Brassicas**

- Generally performed well
- Don't leave planting out of winter brassicas too late, especially brussels sprouts
- A mainstay of our winter food, especially kales, swede and purple sprouting broccoli
- We had to fleece brassica seed beds to protect against cabbage root fly

- Overwintered spring cauliflower crop in a narrow window, grow 2+ varieties

### **Purple Sprouting Broccoli (PSB)**

- Can crop from late August through to May
- Summer varieties now available
- Early to mid winter varieties eg Rudolph, Bordeaux, Red Arrow
- Will need quite a few plants

### **Kales**

- Can crop from July through end April with multiple sowings
- From left: Red Russian, Pentland Brig, Tuscan Black
- Red Russian very good, tender, steam or use raw
- Tuscan found winter too cold

### **Onions and Shallots**

- Loved the summer sunlight, weed well to reduce competition
- We got excellent crops from indoor sown (February) transplanted onions
- Good crops from direct April / early May onion sowings
- Onion sets crop earlier
- Small shallots produce fewer but larger offspring, large produce more but smaller!
- Drying for storage was a problem

### **Leeks**

- Can crop from October through mid May
- Plant out as early as possible (June) for best crops
- All varieties we tried survived winter, Natan did well
- Won't grow much from mid December to early February

### **Garlic**

- Best planted in October, needs cold, survives -10 C fine
- Try several varieties from local growers and seed merchants
- Harvest as soon as foliage yellows
- Results: WOW!

### **Carrots**

- Did very well but maincrops suffered from carrot fly, alternate blocks with onions etc to reduce
- Grow as a jungle – rows 9” apart in blocks of 5 or 6 rows – weed well and thin early on then you can virtually ignore them until digging
- Maincrop carrots: Yellowstone, Autumn King, Berlikumer, Red Elephant, James Intermediate did well
- Nantes and Amsterdam Forcing for earlies
- Early Scarlet Horn and Chantenay throughout season, esp. on shallower soils

### **Parsnips**

- Did very well and were very popular, especially roasted
- Grow like carrots but with a bit more space within the row, 3” to 6”
- Don't germinate well in cold soil but like a long growing season, I pre-germinate and / or wait till late April or May to sow
- Lancer crops as early as mid Sept, liked White King of other standard varieties

## **Courgettes**

- Italian varieties / sources good & better value than UK, eg Seeds Of Italy
- Round varieties, eg Rond de Nice, good for baking / stuffing

## **Courgettes Cultivation**

- Need LOTS of water at roots when fruiting
- And plenty of feeding
- But like good airflow to prevent mildew, so...
- Grow on ridges, using gully between to irrigate
- Put plenty of compost / manure beneath ridges
- Plant some out immediately after frost risk over
- And more 4 to 6 weeks later – the early ones will get tired before end of season
- Beware slugs and wind for young plants

## **Celery and Celeriac**

- Start early (Feb/Mar) indoors in warm, don't cover celery seed
- Need fertile, moisture retentive soil
- Self blanching is earlier & easier eg Celebration
- Trenched is more frost hardy and later eg Red Giant

## **Lettuces**

- Cool, moist summers mean slower to mature but stand longer
- Some varieties will overwinter unprotected – Rougette du Midi – and crop early May
- ...but they hate the summer and bolt if sown then, so
- Use different varieties to suit season, experiment!
- Sow a row and transplant some from it – transplants are delayed about 2 weeks

## **Salad Leaves**

- Mizuna was popular, successful and crops most of year. Frequent sowings, eat thinnings
- Sorrel in moderation was good, perennial, crops March to December
- Radicchio and forced chicory for winter
- Spinach, beetroot leaves, tender kale
- There are many kinds of rocket, try several
- Wild plants like young ground elder

Extracted from Agric Hadron's presentation  
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