



# Bishop's Waltham Gardening Club

## MAY 2026 -All systems go!



**You will soon start digging up your first early potatoes.** The green stalks have begun to wither a bit. It might be worth carefully digging about 30cm away from one haulm (that's what we call the foliage) to see if any potatoes are large enough to harvest. If not make sure you cover them with soil, otherwise they go green and slightly poisonous. If they are okay, you could chop off the stems and leave for a few days before digging. This lets the potatoes mature a

bit. If your crop has been clean and you have the sort of efficient compost heap that heats up well, there is nothing against chopping up the haulms, with a sharp spade, while they are soft and green, and treating them as any other waste. In a good compost heap they will soon rot down.

**I don't know if this works as I have never tried it.** Some advice given in the USA is to trim potato haulms to 8" as they say that this is enough to grow and excess will slow the production of tubers. Too much nitrogen and consequently long lush growth leads to what old boys on the allotment would call "all top and no bottom." so high potash should help whatever the variety. Worth a try on one or two plants perhaps?

**Potato blight**, also known as **late blight** to distinguish it from a different potato disease called early blight, attacks the foliage and tubers of potatoes, causing rotting. It is most common in warm, wet weather. The same pathogen also affects tomatoes. **It is the most serious and damaging disease of potatoes.**

We had a very interesting talk at one of our monthly 'Speaker Events' and it seems the blight starts in the west country and spreads rapidly from there. One way to protect your crop of potatoes and tomatoes is to put mesh (available at our Shop) around/over the crop - making sure the mesh doesn't touch the crop - as the blight will land on the mesh and die if, within 24 hours or so, it does not land on something that will provide it with nourishment. There are 'blight free' (more likely 'blight resistant') varieties of both potatoes (and tomatoes) but not necessarily in the type (e.g. early) of potato required. The blight will still attack, and it will show on the plant, but there will be a recovery. It still affects the progress of the growth of the plant so surely, it's better to protect it whether 'resistant' or not?

**Don't forget to 'earth up'** around the emerging leaves to protect from frost and ensure the young potatoes don't get exposed to the light. This needs to be done several times and, when any frost is over, give the plants a further boost of Growmore (from our Shop) making sure it doesn't touch the foliage. Keep weed free and well-watered.



Pink does more than you think????? Our Desiree potatoes have a pink skin and give a great taste and crop.

**I don't believe it!!!** Who on earth would call a potato 'International Kidney'? Well, it's now called 'Jersey Royal'!!!



It has always been suggested that you rub out all side-shoots on tomato plants -except the ones designed for hanging baskets such as 'Tumbling Tom'. This will lead to strong upward growth which may, or may not, be ideal. If you want to keep them a bit shorter, perhaps try leaving the lowest side shoots and train them laterally. The crop shouldn't suffer – which is the reason why side-shoots are removed- and it makes the plant tidier and probably stops it falling over when it gets high and full of tasty toms. It is reported that, in general, tomatoes grown outside are tastier than those grown inside. Either way, they must be better than shop-bought ones!

**Top Tomato tip...**it's important to choose the sunniest spot in your garden for your tomatoes. They soak up sunshine just like water. Aim for plants to get seven hours of sun a day. Give your plants room to grow, too.

### Seeds of Success



With the warmer weather and thus warmer soil with frosts -hopefully- in the past but do be careful- we can really get things under way. Whilst plug plants are so helpful in avoiding all the seed-sowing rigmarole, especially for tiny seeds, larger seeds are easier to deal with and,

also, many gardeners just like the challenge of growing from seed. So, just a few tips to help you along the way, care of [Andrew@Quickcrop.ie](mailto:Andrew@Quickcrop.ie) (adapted from)

### Moisture, heat and light

There are some exceptions but, for the vast majority of seeds, we only need two things for seeds to germinate - moisture and heat. If you are the little organism tasked with starting a new plant, the reasons are obvious; you don't want to shoot your bolt unless conditions outside are favourable for growth. Cold seed temperatures signal winter while dry conditions signal drought. Temperature is controlled by heat triggering enzymes while moisture is gauged by the seed coat softening or breaking down and allowing water to reach the seed embryo. It is the seed coat that keeps the embryo dry with some seeds having thicker coats than others and therefore longer or shorter germination times.

**Soaking or scraping the seed coat;** This is why soaking pea, bean or sweetcorn seeds for 12 hours before sowing means they come up quicker

**Temperature;** Seeds will germinate at a wide range of temperatures, mostly above 10 °C but they will do so quicker if they are warmer. 18 to 25 °C will generally suffice for most vegetables with 18 °C being good for crops destined for outdoor growing and between 20 and 25 °C for warm climate greenhouse crops like tomatoes, peppers or cucumbers.



**Larger seeds are easier to sow in a warm soil.**

**According to the Internet...** Do not plant beans near garlic, onions, chives, leeks, scallions, shallots, peppers, wormwood, fennel, or gladioli. Alliums such as garlic, onions, chives, leeks, scallions, and shallots will stunt the growth of the beans. Beets are beneficial to Bush beans.

### **Light for germination**

There are some seeds that also need light to germinate (lettuce, celery, celeriac) and will technically give the highest germination rates with no compost covering at all. However, a light dusting of, say Vermiculite-available from our shop- will keep the from drying out.

It is also much easier to sow multiple light sensitive seeds in a small pot or tray and cover with some cling film or similar.

### **Overwatering;**

The single most likely reason for failure both before and after seeds have come up is overwatering. My advice for sowing is to water trays thoroughly *before* sowing and to then avoid watering completely until seeds have come up - unless it is very warm and the compost dries. My watering method is to stand trays in a tray of water for 10 mins to fully soak the roots and then leaving them for as long a period as possible before repeating.

### **Feeling thirsty? How much water, league table!**

It's amazing just how much of most plants is water. Unfortunately, they don't have storage tanks in the Winter to draw on in a dry Summer! So, we must keep an eye open for their needs.

CUCUMBERS 96% ; LETTUCE 96% ; TOMATOES 95% ;  
CELERY 95% ; ZUCHINI 94%

SPINACH 93% ; MUSHROOMS 92% ; STRAWBERRIES  
92% ; YELLOW MELON 91%

BROCCOLI 90% ; BRUSSELS 86% ; BLUEBERRY 85% ;  
RASPBERRIES 84.5%



**Little Gem Lettuce a great all-rounder and reliable, too**

### **Eat shoots and leaves!**

Many green veg can be grown just for the salad bowl. For instance, Peas can 'multi-task' Start picking when they are about 20-30cm tall. Many others can be picked when small and used as salad greens.



**Continue to.....** Hoe those annual weeds; earth up potatoes; protect carrots from the 'fly' by covering with fleece; water in new plants; control those slugs and snails; sow successions of radish. **If you only have a few Asparagus**, cut the long spears and store them in a glass of water in the fridge. They will stay fresh for a few days until, hopefully, more will appear on your plot to give you enough for a decent meal!





**If you have Sweetcorn in trays**, harden them off gently – it's a bit early to plant them out as the evening, especially, can still be quite cold. There's no guarantee that a late frost won't hit us. Wait until early June when the warmth should really be getting the soil nice and warm for your plants. They will grow away nicely and catch up with any 'early planters' and possibly be all the more tender for it, too! If you are growing 'regular size' cobs, then start thinking about how to protect them from the badgers.

Lettuce plants – either from sowings in trays or plugs- will need planting out, if you have hardened them off- and must be kept watered if the weather is dry. They don't need full sun as some can get scorched, but the RHS (whose pictures are shown here) states ' a warm sunny spot' so who am I to argue, I thought that they were more likely to bolt if they were too hot! Just to prove me right, they add.....



In hot weather, young transplants can quickly wilt, so [water](#) regularly and choose a lightly shaded spot, which should also deter bolting. . Protect lettuces from [slugs and snails](#), especially in damp weather. Early in the year, [birds](#) can be a problem too, as they find young lettuces irresistible. Protect with plastic-free fleece , chicken wire or similar.

**It had to be the RHS, didn't it? So darned neat!**

**A plea to save birds.**

**Netting your plants is almost a must for some crops such as Brassicas but PLEASE ensure that the sides are firmly in the ground or anchored all round. Check if there are any rips in the netting as birds can get in, but not out. It's amazing what a small space they can get into. In the past, Blackbirds and Robins have been found dead inside netting that has not been anchored and checked. Please look at your netting regularly, otherwise tragedy may strike.**

**PLEASE KEEP ME SAFE**



**DON'T FORGET OUR ANNUAL PLANT SALE.** There's still time to sort out plants for us, so please pot them up, label them and bring along on **FRIDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> MAY FROM 5-7PM.** The next day, **SATURDAY 9<sup>TH</sup>, BETWEEN 10AM AND 3PM** come along and view the selection, buy, then relax with Tea/Coffee and cake and have a chat with fellow gardeners. It will all be happening at our Albany Road Allotment shed!