

Allotment and Gardening Jottings

Dilly's Diary

There comes a point every year, usually in May, when verges, field edges and gardens reach a crescendo of exuberant growth. My allotment plot, which only a year ago was near virgin meadow, was no exception, resplendent in a haze of cow parsley, tall golden buttercups interspersed with patches of purple clover, drifts of white campion and splashes of red poppies. These were allowed to flourish mainly along the grassy paths between cultivated beds. I've also introduced a few other items such as borage with its bright blue star flowers, comfrey with its tubular purple flowers and rich dark-green foliage (good for use as a natural fertiliser), deep crimson mallow, and bright orange-yellow pot marigolds.



May Days

5th May: Early start on Bank Holiday morn, preparing a bed for sowing seed directly into the soil now it is warmer, and with the benefit of overnight rain. Making use of a simple line-marker of twine around larger pieces of stone either end and using a cane and trowel to draw out drills, I sow one row each of chard (*bright lights* has colourful stems), carrots and radishes. Then earth-up potatoes which are growing fast now.

11th May A bright warm day for planting out the sugar-snap peas raised in trays at home and already hardened off. This is a laborious task preceded by the placing of rows of medium canes for the little plants to climb around (twigs and twine are added later).

12th - 21st May: Several hot days with day temperatures up to mid-20s followed

by a cold northerly airstream some 10 degrees lower with a series of cold nights, are reminders of the treachery which still lurks for tender items.

Some of the potato leaves get nipped! Pick first radishes and leaf lettuce from last year.

27th May: Plant out French climbing beans (raised at home) on new bed near potatoes. Also put in courgette plants. More radishes are ready.

Flaming June?

3rd June: After a few days away, find meadow grasses have sprung up around plot edges and uncultivated bits, so embark on weeding. Climbing beans not looking happy (but I have more on hand to fill gaps or replace those suffering from weather or pests); ditto courgettes (still cold overnight: should perhaps have used fleece). Weed strawberry bed.

10th June: Sow several rows of Italian red/green leaf lettuce along edges of bed containing climbing beans: if the beans fail the lettuces will look pretty! A few strawberries to pick. At home sow another batch of sugar-snap peas and dwarf French beans to go in soon.

14th, 15th June: Plant out early purple-sprouting and Savoy cabbages; also sow some ruby Swiss chard; first planting of leeks using dibber bought last year which makes a smooth planting hole into which the plantlet is inserted then filled with water to draw down roots.

17th June: Dig sample plant of First Early (*Maris Bard*) potatoes to find tubers already quite large, so harvest a metre-square patch before slugs get to Work. First picking of sugar-snap peas!

Dilly Marigold