

Allotment and Gardening Jottings

Dilly's Diary

By the time this article appears, spring should be with us. Already, some of the late February days have given a hint of better weather to come after weeks of very cold conditions, prompting a flurry of renewed gardening activity.

18th Jan: A bright cold morning draws me to the plot. The globe artichokes which were previously sporting vigorous silvery leaves have been cut back by the frosty weather but seem ok (see later!), while the winter onions and garlic look fine with bright green shoots. A few garlic cloves are proud of the soil and I add a little earth around them. Cut three small January King cabbages and dig some leeks. The soil is still rather wet and claggy after a period of sub-zero temperatures, but I set about removing some large clumps of couch grass then fork and weed most of the herb bed. It is lovely re-engaging with the soil and the earthworms. The small box plants which were set around the edges of the herb bed when starting the plot in mid 2007 are now looking more substantial. I allow myself to cut a few spikes of the luxuriant rosemary bush and some grey-green sage. At home in the glorious afternoon I work in the garden, accompanied by birdsong from robin and blackbird, pruning a rampant grapevine and removing dead wood from the climbing roses.

Buy shallots for planting later along with a few garden sundries.

4th - 6th Feb: Heavy snowfalls followed by more icy weather puts serious work out of bounds for several weeks (though the plot looked wonderful under its blanket of snow). Buy First Early (Maris Bard) potatoes and put them to chit in

open cardboard egg boxes arranged in a cool light place. Good Friday (10th April this year) is a traditional time for planting potatoes but I may do it sooner if the soil has warmed up.

27th Feb: A spring-like, warmish sunny morning, although enthusiasm to make up for lost time at the plot is tempered by awareness that the forecasters are

expecting another cold spell in the coming week. As I feared, the globe artichokes have not survived the icy weather. I regret not having protected them properly at the onset of winter. Recent winters have been relatively mild, allowing risk-taking with some vulnerable subjects: Dahlia tubers, for example, which were not lifted and put into store, may be another casualty for many gardeners this year. Pot marigolds have withered, so new ones will have to be sown this time. The garlic has even longer, strong-looking green shoots now but I am still wondering if the cloves were planted deeply enough. The purple and green sprouting has been decimated by the pigeons but the plants stand tall, leafy and elegant. There are still plenty of leeks and small cabbages (I cut three Savoys). To my shame I discover a patch of undug potatoes which have been savaged by the deep frost, so I clear these and fork over the soil. Set to work preparing several beds one of which will be used for the shallots once the next period of cold weather passes.

Dilly Marigold

