

Allotment and Garden Jottings

Dilly's Diary

By late February Spring still hadn't truly arrived, garden chores were delayed by too many cold grey or wet-windy days, although snowdrops were almost over and daffodils were getting ready to bloom. Potatoes and onions awaited planting as it warms up!

24 Jan: the gloom is relieved by the appearance of snowdrops in the front garden, small tear-shaped pearls on low, pale green stems which will lengthen as the flowers open to reveal delicate apple green markings inside.



Spuds, Spuds Glorious Spuds

30 Jan: time to think about seed potatoes again! On first visit to a local garden centre since the turn of the year discover my preferred choice of First Early, Maris Bard is not available but settle for a small pack of Pink Fir Apple (the elongated, nobbly tubers, more reminiscent of its Andean cousins, with pink flecked skins) for later planting.

3 Feb: eureka! Find a 2kg bag of Maris Bard (one of only two left on the shelf) at Burford GC, usually I would prefer to select my own smaller tubers but these will do!

9 Feb: at last loose seed potatoes have arrived at Groves and at a very reasonable price (£1.50 a kilo). Pick up another First Early, Foremost, and main crop, King Edward.

12 Feb: now that potatoes are in hand ground needs to be prepared for them so take advantage of a lovely spring-like afternoon at the plot. The garlic planted last October is now sporting strong, bright green shoots about 4 to 6 inches high and the cold weather has kept the weeds at bay so far. Not all of the winter onions have survived but a few by early summer will be welcome. The leeks have come on but are still on the small side. Sprouting is

in leaf but no florets yet. Herb bed needs attention but some of the Rosemary has beautiful pale lilac-blue flowers. Plant up a couple of remaining garlic bulbs left over from last autumn. The soil is nicely workable having grown potatoes here last season, and I plant each clove 1" deep and 4 to 5 inches apart.

Then tackle the job of removing black plastic covering a previously fallow area which I intend to fork over for potatoes. The plastic has begun to crack during the severe winter so take care to remove stray bits from the soil.

Cold Again but Daffodils in Bud

18 Feb: Whilst on another errand in Chipping Norton, buy a few handfuls of white and red onion sets, and some shallots, sold loose (advised to let soil warm up before planting).

24 Feb: another rare fine day, but lack time to go to plot so catch up on a few tasks in the garden including late pruning of climbing roses and partial removal of some of last year's dried stems and foliage, but careful to leave some for sheltering ladybirds which are nestling in profusion in the afternoon sun. Plant left over allium and tulip bulbs into pots, putting a few violas on top.

26-27 Feb: grey, wet weather returns and another spell of colder conditions is forecast for early March. The snowdrops are almost over but daffodils are coming into bud. It will be a while yet before those potatoes and onions are planted!

Dilly Marigold