

MEETING REPORT – Planting Seeds Indoors and Outdoors.

George Lockwood gave us a fast and furious gallop through seed planting. His two handouts, which contained a wealth of information, are attached separately. His main take home points were to choose seed from a reliable supplier. He particularly recommended Special Plant Seeds, available online at www.specialplants.net.

Wherever you source your seeds, try to get F1 seeds which breed uniformly. F2 seeds are cheaper but hybrids, which may not breed true. If you are saving your own seed, ensure it is dry and store in a sealed jar or tin in cool dry conditions. Don't forget to label it! Hard coated seed may need soaking for 1-3 hours, and rubbing with fine sandpaper. Good seed always floats at first, so fish out and throw away any that sink immediately.

Always plant to twice the depth of seed in good quality potting compost with some horticultural grit or vermiculite added. Never sow from the packet, but tip into your hand and take time to plant each seed individually, preferably one per seed plug. This saves work thinning out and gives more germination.

If planting indoors, keep at an even temperature of 16-17C. Always read the instructions, and if they say seeds need light then surface sow them. Once seeds have sprouted move into lighter conditions but not direct sunlight. George advocated placing seed trays in a larger container with half an inch of water and allowing the compost to soak for 10-15 mins until damp. This prevents overwatering and seedlings damping off. Only handle seedlings by their leaves, and an old pencil or plant label come in handy for tweaking out the roots. If seedlings get leggy, ease them out and replant deeper to just below the leaves.

Never plant out until all danger of frost is passed, late May or early June is usually early enough. The earlier you plant, the longer you have to look after them. Easy to grow seeds include Cosmos, sunflowers, sweet peas, Alyssum, Nigella and Aquilegia. He particularly recommended Aquilegia vulgaris "Black Barlow", a deep purple black double that does not fade to white.

To combat slugs and snails on Delphiniums and Lupins, make a garlic drench by adding 12 cloves of garlic to a 4 litre milk container full of water, leave a few weeks then spray over and especially under leaves. Effective until it rains. Similarly use shredded young nettles (top 6 inches) or comfrey in a 4 pint container of water and leave 6 weeks. Dilute this (1 cup to 5 litres water) as an excellent liquid food. Warning – it does pong!

Persicaria will really benefit from feeding after flowering. Never over feed or it will kill the plants. To combat black spot on roses dilute one third ordinary milk to two thirds water and spray on. It will deter but not eliminate it. When planting bulbs, always plant 3 times the bulb depth. You can give them a good shaking in a bag with cayenne or chilli pepper to stop squirrels eating them too! If your bulb flowers fall over it is because you did not plant them deep enough. To stop bulbs rotting in pots or soil, place a good handful of grit under each bulb for drainage. Hopefully all these hints will result in masses of entries for the village show.

