



Gardening News for Hopeman BALL Group

Saturday was an exciting day when I harvested the first plant of my early potatoes. I mentioned before that this early crop had not flowered and I was concerned that I was harvesting too early. What a joy when I pulled up the plant and found enough potatoes for a meal for two. They were also a decent size and when boiled, in their skins of course, they were delicious. I did the same thing on Sunday and we probably ate more potatoes than normal just because they looked so good. They were pure white inside but sadly I don't remember the name of the variety and I didn't keep the packaging.

I have done quite a bit of harvesting over the last few days. The mange tout plants have grown bigger than ever before and I am cropping them daily before the pods get too big. They are much tastier when they are young. I am probably harvesting enough every two days to add as a vegetable to our main meal. Once we feel we have had enough for a while, I will freeze them. However, at the moment we are enjoying them and I often eat some as I am picking. Not as good as strawberries but still tasty.



Can you spot the pods? They are really difficult to see sometimes and no matter how hard you look and think you have picked all the pods, you will always see another one later.

Growing anything in the pea or bean family is really good for the soil for your next crop since the roots have nodules which contain nitrogen fixing bacteria and nitrogen in the air is captured by these nodules and turned into nitrates in the

soil which the plants can use. Most plants do not have this nitrogen fixing ability which is why you will see nitrates listed on plant food containers. I usually rotate a pea or bean crop with a different crop every other year for this reason.

This week also saw me picking the first of my blackcurrants. I pick them as they ripen and keep them in the fridge until I have enough to make jam. I recently bought a 'preserve straining kit' with a stand to fit over a mixing bowl and a filter and I couldn't wait to try it out. I picked the first berries on Friday of last week and the second lot on Sunday between the showers. When I weighed them I had one pound of fruit so just enough to make a pot of jam but this time I wanted to make Jelly. I washed and boiled the fruit and then added a pound of sugar and boiled it some more until it reached setting consistency. I left it to cool for a little while and then strained it using my new gadget. It only filled one jar but I was very pleased with the result.



Last week I made strawberry jam from strawberries my neighbour gave me. Strawberries have very little natural pectin in them and I add lemon juice to the mix to help the jam to set. They also need to be boiled for much longer than blackcurrants or other fruits which contain more pectin.



Gardening News for Hopeman BALL Group

Do you remember my story about the cucumber plant I was given? It lost its main shoot through downy mildew but has since sent out 4 side shoots each with cucumbers growing. I now have two that are ready for harvesting.



If all the others continue to grow I will have enough to feed the street. I am feeding the plant with tomato plant food and hoping for the best.

My tomatoes have also set and I have small fruits on each of my five plants. I only intended growing two plants but I just kept them all. However, I have only allowed them to grow two trusses each (two sets of flowers on each plant) and have now stopped them growing taller by removing the terminal shoot. I will still have to remove side shoots as they grow. I found out that growing basil beside tomatoes prevents white fly and luckily I have a number of basil plants growing in the greenhouse.

My purple sprouting broccoli is also sprouting. I am quite surprised by this since I have normally harvested it in early spring. However, I am going to harvest what I see now and hope that it will continue to sprout. My battle with the snails is not won but I do think that the copper tape has helped. I noticed yet another one of my petunias was eaten yesterday.

I thought I had lost one of my favourite geraniums over the winter but it has now flowered and I am pleased to say that I had also taken some cuttings which are now beginning to flower. My main problem was that I didn't label everything. I should know better but it is always exciting to see what is coming.



This is the Apple Blossom geranium which I was given as a rooted cutting many years ago. It forms these beautiful balls of pink and white flowers and does resemble apple blossom, which reminds me that my very dwarf rooted Bramley's apple tree has about 4 apples on it. I wonder if I will get to harvest any.

This last week has mostly been spent tidying up the garden and greenhouse. I have reluctantly removed sickly plants from the greenhouse (I have what I call my plant hospital), to give me more room. Dying plants always make me feel a failure and I usually keep them just in case. It is important to remove dead leaves or petals that fall since these encourage pests. I have also been cleaning more pots and storing them away for next year. It's a tedious task but really important for healthy plants. Again, pests and diseases can lurk in old compost in dirty pots.

Let me know what you are harvesting and which plants are doing well. Please send me some photographs.



Gardening News for Hopeman BALL Group