



## Gardening News for Hopeman BALL Group

### Introduction

I wonder how many of you have had firsts this year? I have tried a few new things in the garden and I know that some of you have too. As you know, I have had varying degrees of success but the joy is always seeing the seeds germinate, or the cuttings take root and grow into plants or plants flower and of course collecting the fruits and vegetables of our labours.

You may remember that I planted 50 Sunflower seeds in March, one for each of the BALL Group members. My plan was for us to have a competition to see who could grow the tallest sunflower or have the largest flower. Of course, like many other plans this year, that one barely got started and I put most of the small sunflower plants on the wall for people to take away. Yesterday I was sent a photograph from someone who grew on one of those plants to show me the results (see picture below).



I also kept a few and planted them in various places in the garden, some in pots, a few in the garden and one in a raised bed to see what would happen. One in a pot has already flowered and died back and the other ones have all grown to different heights and now have buds on. I went to measure their heights and the diameters of their flowers. The seeds all came from the same packets which means you may expect them all to be the same. However, I measured the tallest plant which is in the raised bed and that measures 51 inches. The one that has flowered measured 46 inches and the flower was 6 inches in diameter. The next one in a pot measures 41 inches and the smallest one in the garden is only 23 inches in height. Why all the differences?

To begin with, they didn't all germinate at the same time and therefore were not planted out into their final growing places at the same time. The pots are different sizes which affects the growth of the roots. Restricting the root growth often means that you will get an earlier flower. 'Pot bound' is not always bad. My garden soil is very poor and that could be the reason for my smallest plant. My sunflower in the raised bed is planted in new compost which probably accounts for its size. I have fed all of the Sunflowers with Tomerite at some point. However, they all have buds now and they will flower at approximately the same time. This is a plant's way of aiming to produce the next generation. I normally leave the heads on to allow the seeds to mature either for the birds to eat or to plant again next year.

Quite a number of my more sensitive pot plants managed to survive last winter outside. There are many varieties of Geraniums but the ones we normally grow in pots are really Pelargoniums and normally do not like the cold, the first frost will often kill them off. Last winter, I had too many plants to take inside and having made sure that I had one of every variety either in the greenhouse or in the house, I left some outside. I made sure the pots were in a sheltered place by the house and left them to their own devices. Amazingly they all survived and



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have bloomed beautifully this summer. But they weren't the only plants to amaze me. An indoor Fuchsia also survived but my biggest surprise of all was a Begonia. Normally, Begonias have to be removed from the pots once they have died back. It is important to dry out the corms and store them in a dry frost free place. Last winter, I forgot to do this and left a Begonia in a hanging basket. It is only just beginning to flower now but below you can see the result.



It isn't the most beautiful specimen you have ever seen but it survived. I will make sure this year that I remove the leaves, dry out the corm and put it in my shed until next spring.

The great excitement this week has been red tomatoes. I have checked everyday for weeks to see if I could see any colour change and finally the green tomatoes started to go yellowish, then orange and finally red.



They are cherry tomatoes and I have tried to control them by stopping them after two trusses by removing their terminal buds. As you will see, there are lots of fruits and leaves and they are somewhat like Triffids I can hardly get into my greenhouse. I have had to support some of the branches because they are so heavy and I have removed some of the leaves. Apparently reducing the watering will encourage the tomatoes to ripen but I am concerned they might die.

For the first time this year I have planted Purple Sprouting Broccoli in pots and have had varying degrees of success. Even though I have fed them, some are pretty small especially since the snails have had their share. I also put one plant in a bag and set it between bags of potatoes.



I don't know if the potatoes acted to keep the snails away ( I have talked about companion planting before) but the results have been much better than my pot grown plants. I am also surprised that I have broccoli florets at this time of year because it has normally been the springtime when they have appeared. My guess is that it is a variety specially bred to crop in the same season as it was planted.

I have also grown a Sweetcorn plant this year for the first time. A friend gave me three plants but I gave two away since I didn't have room for them. They are all doing well and my one looks like it may have a cob soon.

The good thing about sharing plants is that the new owners often let you know how they are growing, especially if they are doing well. I now know many more people in the village because we have shared plants and have a shared interest.



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