



Gardening News for Hopeman BALL Group

Introduction

Many years ago when my daughter was a poor student and I was an even poorer parent, I received a small parcel in the post around the time of Mothers' Day. There was a packet of white foxglove seeds and a note which read, flowers for Mother's Day, grow your own. I was very pleased with my present and thought this a very novel idea but I also knew that my daughter had no idea that these were **biennial plants** and it would be two years before I would get any flowers! I planted the seeds in my greenhouse which germinated in large numbers and planted them out in a wildish area in my garden. Two years on and I had a lovely show of white foxgloves. These foxgloves continued to grow year after year.

In my last gardening news I asked a few questions, one was 'Why did I plant annual seeds in my greenhouse?' In theory, **annual seeds** can be planted outside from May onwards but I have never been successful when doing this except for something like poppies which will pretty well grow anywhere no matter what your soil or when you plant them. If you have a patch of ground where you want a mix of annuals, you can scatter the seeds and you may well get a nice display. However you will find that certain flowers will dominate, e.g. poppies. By planting them in the greenhouse first, I can choose my own mix and I seem to have better results.

Pricking Out

Once the seeds have germinated and are large enough to handle they should be pricked out into larger pots.



Prepare your pots with multipurpose compost (I will deal with composts in another issue) and firm it down. This is a homemade tool which I find very useful. Of course, fingers will do. Over the years many people have given me empty pots and pot holders and I bring these out year after year.

Now you need a dibber, or a pencil will do. Make good sizeable holes in your compost so that the little seedlings and their roots will fit in comfortably without being squashed. For the next stage it is important that you are quite gentle. Take the two seed leaves of the seedling between your finger and thumb and gently ease out the seedling with your dibber. Don't hold it by the stem or the root. I



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lose quite a lot of plants at this stage because I am not careful enough and often pull the seed leaves off by accident. Then they won't grow. The actual growing part of the plant is in the centre, between the two leaves and is very delicate.



Here is a plastic dibber but you can make a wooden one, hence the use of a pencil.

Now here is another question: Is it better to prick the seedlings out individually or in bunches?



In this picture you will see that I have pricked out my Californian poppies in bunches, except for one in the top right hand corner. One reason is that there are a lot of them but I really want to see what happens.

Following the last Gardening News, Carol asked me about sweet peas. I must say that I have always found them quite difficult especially the scented ones which I prefer. One thing you should know is that seeds from last year's plants will not germinate because they are sterile.

I plant two seeds in a small pot and I grow them on until I have strong plants. Again, in theory you can plant them straight into the ground but that has never worked for me. Try to harden off your plants by putting them outside during the day when they are large enough. Once you have good strong plants, plant them close together by a wall in a sunny position or up canes or trellis work. Make sure you keep them well watered and cut the flowers often to encourage more flowers. Try not to let the plants produce seeds.

Tricia is going great guns with her planting and is growing flowers from seeds for the first time. I am interested to know how successful she has been with geraniums since I have found these very difficult to grow from seeds. I normally would grow them from cuttings.

Next time: Taking cuttings, My Balmoral Pockle