

## Quality Vegetables from a small Garden/Allotment

Over the winter months the National Vegetable Society(NVS) has run a number of excellent zoom talks which were recorded and are presently available for members of the NVS on their website.

The latest talk was entitled “Growing Quality Veg on a Tiny Plot” an excellent talk by a member who has won red cards at several shows including the NVS National Show at Harrogate.

The talk is split into a number of sections which I will try to paraphrase below:

**Making a Start:** There are a number of important decisions one should make to get the best from one's plot; organise your space by thinking ahead to the growing methods to be used, the vegetables, herbs and flowers you intend to grow and make a plan of the layout. Perhaps for instance you might like to practise crop rotation or employ a no dig method but by making a plan you will be able to manage the growing and produce you harvest from your plot.

### Using the Space - Raised Beds:

The use of raised beds have become very popular over the past few years and offer growers a relatively easy method of growing produce. They offer many advantages that include good drainage, no walking on the soil and most of all easy access.

Raised beds can be made from scaffolding boards or wooden palette extension packs. Scaffolding boards, if you can get them are perhaps the best as they give a good height and the size can be adapted to your plot layout. Alternatively you can buy treated planks from a supplier such as Wicks /B&Q but these tend to be expensive.

There is a balance in the design of the raised beds, as small beds dry out quicker and it can be difficult to reach into the middle of a wide bed. Design them to a size that suits.

### Soil/Growing Media:

The use of raised beds enables a good depth of soil which can be varied to suit the type of crop grown e.g sand can be added for the growing of carrots/parsnips. Farmyard manure and compost can be easily added and dug in along with fertilisers to ensure a good growing medium. The soil at the bottom of the raised beds tends to be heavier than the rest which is good for water retention.

It is easy to check raised beds for soil ph and nutrients. Ph is important and it is good practice to be aware of the ph of the water used; in Lincolnshire the water tends to be very alkaline, resulting in a high ph high because the county sits on limestone.

When starting with raised beds it is very important to start out with the very best soil possible and over time the quality of soil will improve.

### **Greenhouse/Polytunnel:**

A greenhouse/polytunnel provides many advantages and if space is a limiting factor then a greenhouse is a must. I do not intend to offer advice on what to buy as they all have different advantages but what I should say is that one should purchase the largest within your budget constraints as you will easily fill it very quickly.

One of the main advantages is that one can start growing vegetables or flowers earlier thereby extending the season and importantly one can continue gardening when it is raining. If you have a favourite vegetable or flower then one can specialise especially if the plant has a long growing season. In October/November my polytunnels are full of late flowering chrysanthemums - a picture.

Greenhouses are brilliant for home grown food such as tomatoes and cucumbers, the taste of these early crops is incomparable to those shop bought tomatoes.

### **Water**

It is important to harvest rain water wherever possible. There are several drip type watering systems that can be used throughout the garden and/or the allotment. Check the pH value of both rainwater and tap water to ensure the soil/compost does not become too alkali.

### **Just before one starts growing:**

Get a diary and keep a record of everything, the number of times someone has mentioned a tomato, tasty and a really good grower but cannot remember its name - write it down in the diary. Different areas within the plot may be more beneficial to some vegetables rather than others. Environmental factors will affect flowers and vegetables differently giving variations on how ones vegetables grow. Record sowing dates for future years don't always rely on the dates on the back of seed packets.

### **Grow some nice Vegetables:**

Be proud of the vegetables you grow and take them to a local show out show this year is on 14th September details are on the website or Show Schedules can be found at the Store. There are classes for everyone. Never forget that the best exhibition vegetables is a vegetable at its prime to eat. One key element is to note the varieties that are being grown by experienced growers they will generally know which are the best varieties to grow to get the best results.

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## **My Thoughts/Conclusions**

The series of zoon talks by the NVS have been excellent in both subject and content, very informative and aimed at the experienced grower and those just starting out. The NVS website is full of valuable information however to access some areas of the site one has to be a member. A single membership costs £20 per year and the benefits can be found at this link <https://www.nvsuk.org.uk/pages/64-benefits-of-joining-the-nvs>

Growing nice tasty vegetables that one can both eat and bring to our Show, or eat after the Show, is not rocket science, but it is important as previously mentioned make a plan to follow. One thing that I have learnt from growing exhibition chrysanthemums is that if an exhibition class asks for five varieties then concentrate on growing your best five with perhaps one in reserve - don't reduce your chances by growing too many varieties. Its the same with vegetables decide on the varieties you enjoy and restrict your choices to those varieties rather than a scattergun approach.

A final word. Should you need any help ask either on Facebook, the website or face to face at the Store; it is more than possible that you are the only person with that particular question.