

AWASH WITH SQUASH & FEASTING ON FRUIT

Fergus Dowding is storing for Winter



Hello everybody, hope you've all been growing monster crops while I've been away from the *Marshwood*. This year has been about coping with the wonderfully intense sunshine and endless strong wind. Water, water, water, more than you thought necessary, much more, because the ground just below the surface was like concrete.

When it finally rained in September, growth was astonishing. We now look like we have enough to eat through the winter. We enjoy mild winter weather here in Martock and leave crops in the ground, all except carrots, which get eaten too badly. Beetroot go woody if left out, so are stored in paper sacks in the barn. If winter turns frosty we'll store celeriac, cabbage etc like this too. Parsnips, which need the cool of winter before they taste sweet, taste better straight from the ground, bacteria getting into slug and carrot root fly divots causing stem canker as winter proceeds.

One of our favourite crops is Winter Squash, principally butternut, which are last to mature, these we store all over the house as they need it dry—the house looks beautiful! They keep well right into midsummer.

Winter salads grow well in the polytunnel, true spinach the complete favourite, outdoors they

grow so slowly that slugs eat big holes in the leaves. Not disturbing the soil too much helps the survival of ground beetles that eat slug eggs. Generally, plants sown in August will be strong enough to produce leaves all through the winter. We plant our garlic indoors too, all around the perimeter of the tunnel 12" apart, they get less rust there and much bigger bulbs, harvested three weeks earlier than outdoor ones.

We also sow overwintering Aquadulce broad beans in November and December, this stops them getting too leggy and getting damaged by frost. Sowing indoors in seed trays for transplanting 6-8 weeks later escapes rodents. You need good compost to do this, the quality of today's bagged, overly-woody composts is a troublesome subject.

This has been a top year for all fruits and nuts. Apples particularly. It is proving difficult to use them all. We store a lot in a cool damp place, Cox varieties until Christmas, Spartan, Winston and Ashmead's Kernel until February. Our favourite cooker is Warner's King, much sweeter than the Bramley. We are juicing a lot this year. Once bottled, it keeps full flavour for many years. And what was Guy Fawkes' favourite meal? Bangers and mash.