

GOING UNDER COVER

Fergus Dowding talks about successional sowing, smart watering and organic controls



My overwintering broad beans sown in November cropped in May rather than June this year, our first taste of summer. Every plant cropped as heavily, after a combination of healthy, well composted soil and favourable weather.

Lots to pick, lots to sow. In July you can sow lettuce, endive, chicory, beetroot, carrots, savoy cabbage and bulb fennel. At the end of the month and into August true spinach, rocket, oriental leaves (which will all last through the winter) and turnips.

Our brassica crops are under 20 year old veggiemesh. It is possible to grow them without this ugly stuff but there are so many pests interested in eating our brassica before we do that mesh is best. They grow so well under it, some sort of ecosystem seems to develop. Otherwise you can spray DiPel on cabbages, this contains *Bacillus thuringiensis*, a bacteria that finish off cabbage white caterpillars. It does the same to box moth which has been causing such havoc this year.

Mesh can be used on carrots too. They grow bigger and it keeps root fly off. Last year we had no fly damage even without using mesh, although they were seen laying eggs on them, the soil was too dry for the fly maggot. You never know how much or when they will damage your roots, but mesh keeps them off as do organophosphate

sprays, which latter also helps to kill you—another reason for being organic.

Tomatoes take a lot of time but the family think it worth it. We grow all ours indoors for more dependable cropping, Sungold and Black Cherry from June and Alicante and Golden Sunrise from July. We water every other day to prevent fruit split and blossom end rot. Cut off all flowers from mid August as they never get to ripen before winter. Blight is another issue, it helps to keep them healthy and stress free. Take the lower leaves off to allow air flow, which prevents the spores settling on the leaves.

Keep your beans and courgettes well watered at flowering time to help the flowers set fruit. Many people ask why their courgette isn't fruiting well in a pot. They are greedy plants and need a lot of space, feed and water. For continuous cropping we sow three or four lots of dwarf French beans, variety Sonesta. First in April in the tunnel, outdoors in May and June, finally a crop in the tunnels sown in July. And what do you call a Frenchman in sandals? Phillipe phollope.