

Gardening Notes for March

It's still really cold ... some seeds can be started inside but only inside; onions and leeks, early caulis and celery. Outside broad beans, onion sets and early potatoes should be ok to sow at the end of the month if it's warm, but be prepared for them to take a while... The clocks go forward on 27th March which is a good indication that light levels are higher and plants will be happier to start growing.

Seed sowing and potting on of small plants requires some kind of growing medium in trays and pots. Gardeners nowadays buy compost in plastic sacks. Some of these mediums contain peat despite the Horticultural Trades Association's attempts to ban or cut back on it. If you buy in compost make sure it's peat free and try and find a good reuse for the plastic sack it comes in (containers for making leaf mould or rotting down weeds in the absence of a compost heap. Any other suggestions gratefully received). If you want to buy in, try Dalefoot Composts. Their composts are made from bracken, sheep's wool and comfrey, there is a good choice of mixtures for different uses and as they are based in Heltondale near Penrith, their delivery distances are much shorter.
www.dalefootcomposts.co.uk

Their prices are higher than the average bag from the garden centre but it's money well spent, as they also do a lot of work in peat restoration. Try Brampton Wood Fuels for the cheapest local stockists though they do not always carry a wide range of the Dalefoot products. Both Dalefoot and Brampton Wood Fuels will deliver.

Traditionally, and best of all, make your own. Absolutely no peat and plastic packaging!
Basic recipes are:

Seed sowing compost: 1 part garden soil, 1 part leaf mould, both sieved

Potting on compost: 1 part garden soil, 1 part leaf mould, 1 part garden compost

Cuttings compost: 1 part sharp sand, 1 part garden compost.

One of the drawbacks to this is the need to sterilize your garden soil. It sounds drastic to sterilize soil when we have only just begun to realise the importance of the teeming microlife in it, but soil is also full of pathogens. Onion white rot, club root, the bacteria which cause damping off and the like will affect your seedlings before their life has even begun, will stunt their growth and deprive you of good veg in the future. The amount of soil you will need to sterilize is relatively small. There is lots of information on line about how to do this - putting a large tray in the oven seems to be the most efficient and easiest though it seems it does smell horrible. I have never done this myself but am going to give it a go this year. The importance of making compost and leaf mould suddenly seem even more relevant. I will, however, also be buying from Dalefoot ...