

DAVID STEPHEN'S

with monthly guide by
PETER CUNDALL

ORGANIC GROWING CALENDAR

EARLY SEEDLING CULTURE

The purpose of raising some seedlings of warm season crops, indoors, in small individual containers (or trays for multiple crops) is to get an early start for spring planting while waiting for the outside beds to warm up. The two halves of a dissected milk carton, or the depressions in an egg carton are often used, but neither are really suitable: the former is too large to encourage a small root ball that can be grown in four weeks the latter is too small and the wrong shape. Another point against using larger containers than necessary is this: they require large amounts of expensive seed-raising medium. However you can concoct your own mixture by rubbing equal parts of garden compost and sand or sandy loam together - as if you were preparing a cake recipe. Dust with some blood'n'bone meal and stir it in too. Used plastic or foam coffee cups are ideal for starting off climbing beans, tomatoes, cucumbers or pumpkins.

SEPTEMBER

PLASTIC TUNNELS

An excellent technique for warming the soil for early spring planting - thereby extending the season - is to use a plastic tunnel for row crops of warm loving tomatoes, beans, sweet corn and so on. I have made a number of tunnels by shaping 2m lengths of heavy gauge wire or steel rod into hoops to support a length of plastic. Plastic conduit used by electricians to house cable lines in your home is another excellent material for fashioning into hoops. You may need to soften the conduit beside a radiator before it will bend. Also sharpen each end to penetrate the soil. House studs or other lengths of timber hold down the sides of the plastic tunnel, while house bricks or nicely rounded rocks anchor the ends.



WOODEN ROW MARKER

This is an old fence paling from 1m - 2m long, pointed along one edge to make it easy to slide along cultivated soil, resulting in a nice straight drill a few centimetres deep. Ideal for most flower and veggie seeds. Rock the board from side to side to form a long lasting 'V' depression for effective irrigation.

PETER CUNDALL'S GUIDE

Spring brings enormous activity. As wattles and other flowering native plants finish blooming, prune away spent flowers. Cuttings taken in autumn will have formed roots by now, so plant some out into the garden, or pot them on for further development. Lime beds which are to grow annuals. Aphids are attacking roses and other plants, so use pyrethrum, a safe spray which will exterminate them. Plant gladioli corms. The tiny, pea-sized cormlets can also be planted to provide future displays. Divide chrysantheums and other perennials which normally die down in winter. Spread animal manure, blood and bone and organic mulching materials between all shrubs to control weeds while feeding the soil. In warm frost-free districts, most annual plants can be sown either directly or into containers. In cooler districts, seedlings are best raised under glass or in a protected environment, such as a windowsill.

SPRING AUSTRALIAN HERBAL CALENDAR

DIVIDE THE ROOTS OF THE FOLLOWING:

AGRIMONY
ALOE VERA
BERGAMOT
CHIVE
CORSIAN MINT
CURRY PLANT
COSTMARY
CAMPHOR
CHAMOMILE
*COMFREY
FRENCH TARRAGON
FEVERFEW
GOATS RUE
GARLIC
*HORSERADISH
HELIOTROPE
LOVAGE

LEMON GRASS
LEMON BALM
MINT
OREGANO
PYRETHRUM
PINEAPPLE SAGE
POTATO ONION
SOUTHERNWOOD
SHALLOTS (LIFT AND DRY FIRST)
TREE (EGYPTIAN) ONION
THYME
TANSY
VALERIAN
VIOLET
WELSH ONION (EVERY TWO YEARS)
WORMWOOD
YARROW

* small pieces of root left behind in the ground will produce new plants in the spring period.

MANAGEMENT OF CITRUS

Include the lemon tree in your pruning each spring (early). It keeps them neat and uncluttered. Allow good air circulation through the branches, and the sun to touch each fruit. A mature tree could be pruned on a three year basis: this year, shorten back every third limb to 2/3 of its length. Next year, cut another third of the tree, then the third year shorten the remaining limbs. In year four, start the rotation again. Mature passionfruit vines can be pruned in a similar fashion.

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