

TRAINING YOUR PLANTS

Plant supports prevent many species like tomatoes, peas and French and runner beans from sprawling around, getting broken in the wind and splashed with earth. The support must be in place before the plant needs it and be of a size to cope with the eventual height and spread of the plant.

There are many different materials that can be used, many of them reusing and recycling garden "rubbish" like twiggy prunings Christmas tree branches and willow. You will probably have to tie stems and branches to the support and the correct method is to use soft string, tied once round the plant and twice round the support in a figure of 8. Spread the stems/branches of the plant, don't let them loll against greenhouse glass or polytunnel plastic and make sure that there's good air circulation round them to reduce the risk of fungal attack.



To see examples of all these techniques and a wide range of organically grown plants visit

the ASK Organic Garden

a half acre garden within Woodside Walled Garden, situated 4 miles north of Jedburgh, east of the A68 on the B6400.

The ASK Organic Garden is open 7 days a week March to October 10am to 5pm. Someone from ASK is usually on hand to answer questions on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays between 11am and 4pm.

Produced for the ASK Organic Garden Club by ASK Organic, Wolfhopelee, Bonchester Bridge, Hawick. TD9 9TP. Telephone 01450 860291 and 860778. email da@askorganic.co.uk.

www.askorganic.co.uk

Printed by Reiver Press, Galashiels (01896 752444)

HOME GROWN:

the organic way



Be a Control Freak!

We want our gardens to be as productive as possible, while at the same time making sure our chosen plants get all the space and nutrients they need. This means we must control weeds and the size, shape and health of the plants we want.



WEEDING IN THE VEG GARDEN

Hoeing is the traditional way to keep veg free of weeds and some crops, roots, the onion family and salad leaves, need bare soil round them. You will make hoeing easier by spacing seed and young plants far enough apart to allow the hoe in between the rows. This will let you hoe regularly, before you can almost see the weeds. The hoe should be kept sharp and should only be used when the soil is dryish. If the weeds get large or there's a long spell of rain, you'll have to resort to the less satisfactory hand weeding. (Less good because the weeds have 'stolen' nutrients and some of the soil will be removed with the weeds).

Mulches prevent weeds growing at all. They retain the soil's structure and prevent moisture from evaporating. The classic way to grow potatoes is to 'earth them up', ie build a ridge on the row by raking up soil from each side of the dreel. An additional way is to mulch along the original small potato ridge. Straw or hay can be used, but grass clippings are an excellent choice. The slightly acidifying effect of the grass helps prevent potato scab and the soil is greatly improved as worms take the mulch into the soil.

Other vegetables that benefit from mulching are: the cabbage family (but don't use acidifying grass), peas, beans, tomatoes (again no grass), courgettes and squashes. When grass is being used, it's very important that the clippings should not touch the plant stems which could be scorched as the grass heats up. An under soil watering system should be used to keep the plants moist. Although a mulch keeps the moisture in the soil, it also makes it harder for summer rains to penetrate the mulch.

Some crops, like runner beans and courgettes need to be mulched so weeds don't grow where it would be very difficult to get at them when the crop is fully grown.

Perennial weeds can be killed by covering the whole area with a light excluding mulch for two years. If you need the ground sooner you will have to dig, deeply to extract as much couch, ground elder, bindweed, dock, nettle and dandelion root as you can. Don't put these roots into a general compost bin, but you can process them quickly and profitably by "drowning" or "stewing". Soak the roots in a bucket of water, making sure they are well submerged, and cover with a lid. The roots will start to break down after a few weeks and then can be safely composted. The additional bonus of this

"drowning" method is that the roots will have leached their nutrients into the water, so you can use it as a liquid feed, diluting roughly 5 parts water: 1 part weed root.

Another way of dealing with these roots is to stuff them into a black bin liner, mixing in plenty of fresh grass clippings, seal it and leave in a sunny place for a few weeks. The resulting "stew" can then be safely composted. Many perennial roots can be treated like this, so make the most of your soil's precious nutrients even when they've been stolen by its less welcome residents.

WEEDING IN THE FRUIT CAGE

Fruit bushes and trees should be mulched to reduce weed competition. Several pests, like gooseberry sawfly and raspberry beetle, overwinter close to their host plants, ready to emerge in the Spring to repeat their destructive cycle. It's a good idea to mulch round these plants in early Spring, but to remove the mulch in the Autumn and compost it. This clears away many of the sheltering pupae and so reduces the problems in the following year. When the soil is lightly forked over, birds will pick off more pests, and weed seeds; as a final deterrent, lay a new mulch down in February/March to make it harder for remaining pests or weeds to emerge. Black plastic or cardboard is good for this.

CONTROLLING YOUR PLANTS

Most tomatoes need to have their side shoots pricked out to prevent a jungle of poorly growing tomatoes. A shoot will try to sprout above every leaf joint and this should be removed. When growing tomatoes outside, don't let the plant produce more than 4 trusses of fruit as they'll never ripen before the sun loses its strength in the Autumn.

Broad beans can suffer from black fly and now is the time to nip out the growing tips to deny the black fly a home.

Squashes grow vigorously, putting too much energy into leaf production. You will need to nip out several of the growing shoots to produce large squashes. Otherwise reduce the vigour by growing the plant up a strong support or bending the growing shoots round in a circle. When not shaded by leaves the fruits will ripen better. Runner and climbing French beans need poles or wigwams, at least 2.5m tall, to grow up. Old-fashioned tall peas and sweet peas need a 2m high frame or netting for support.