

Lavant Horticultural Society

December Meeting 2015

Notes taken from Barry Newman's talk 'The Modern Kitchen Garden'

With **raised beds** no cultivated soil is wasted, since plants can be grown right up to the edge and they can be tended without walking on the bed – this avoids compaction and maintains good soil structure - just light superficial forking is needed, no digging. Raised beds can provide a good growing medium, no matter how bad the garden soil is, and drainage is improved. If you are putting raised beds on a slope, make sure that the beds are kept horizontal.

For raised beds and containers planted to last more than one growing season, use a blend of 60% soil and 40% compost (using all compost would be too light to support plants and retain nutrients).

Similar benefits can be achieved even in the smallest garden, by planting in **containers**, with the added advantage that they can be moved around the garden to make best use of them at various seasons. Many containers will benefit from a quarter turn every week to ensure equal exposure to sunlight, helping the plants develop more evenly.

Paths between raised beds are best covered with wood chippings, providing good access in all weathers and eliminating the need to mow grass, get rid of weeds or combat slugs and snails, which cannot move over the wood chippings.

Many vegetables can add to the aesthetic effect of beds or borders of **ornamental** plants, particularly useful where space is at a premium.

Rhubarb – with, say, 3 crowns, one in turn can be forced each year to extend the season. Every fifth year rhubarb should be divided, to ensure a supply of tender shoots rather than the thick, tough ones produced as crowns get older.

Barry has found Vitax Q4 the best **general fertiliser for vegetables** – for dry conditions it is better to use powder than pellets, as more moisture is needed to break the pellets down in order for the nutrients to become available.

Courgettes grown vertically - trained up 7ft tree stakes - at the end of the season you will be picking courgettes at head height. Apart from the smaller space that this takes up, it is more difficult for slugs and snails to get to the courgettes, it avoids the mass of foliage on the ground, so conducive to rotting when it is wet, and weeding is easier.

Likewise, Barry showed **squash climbing up a hedge**. The squash should be planted in soil enriched with manure or compost a couple of feet away from the hedge, with a support to lead them up to the hedge. Use a different part of the hedge each year. Training squash up against the side of a shed or similar would serve equally well.

Barry introduced his **bag growing system for potatoes**. Not the bags sold for this purpose, to stand on a patio, where in sunny weather the soil inside could easily reach the temperature where tuber formation is inhibited. Instead, tough plastic bags are filled with compost and one seed potato is placed in the bottom of each. The bags are then half immersed in a prepared trench where the soil has been well fertilised; cuts are made in the bottom of the bags first, so that the roots will go out of the bag and develop in the trench. Most of the watering is made into the trench. There is no need for earthing up, as there is already sufficient depth of compost in the bags for the tubers to form. The haulms are held up, so that you do not get rotting leaves on the soil harbouring slugs.

Just put your hand down in the bag to check whether the potatoes are ready for use. The bag can then be taken out of the trench with all the potatoes inside - none are left behind to appear in the middle of following year's crop. Also, after lifting, the potatoes can be stored in the compost in the bag, with the haulms cut off and the roots removed. This compost can be reused for several years, since it is the soil in the trench that supplies the nutrients for the potatoes.

As many **grow-bags** have just a thin layer of compost, Barry advocated bulking up the compost into about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the grow-bag, folding the empty part of the bag underneath and just planting 2 tomato plants in the shortened bag. Then use **plant rings** to sit on top of the grow-bag. The outer ring is to water through, whilst the tomato plant grows through the inner ring – if this is filled with compost as the plant develops, the stem will form additional roots.

The first truss of **tomatoes** is self-regulating, but subsequent trusses should be pinched out at 12 – 14 fruits.

In the case of **high potash feed** for tomatoes, aubergines, peppers etc., applying a strong solution every week or so can give plants quite a shock – much better to use a more dilute solution for every watering.

Hopefully these notes are useful reminders; unfortunately they cannot attempt to replicate Barry Newman's excellent talk.

Any comments to webmaster@lavanthortsoc.org.uk