



Rob interviewing Tim the Gardener

Tim: I think the best advice to gardeners is keep your hands off your garden.

Rob: Why's that?

Tim: Well the main problem I think I had with my garden was being too keen to get into it. For me generally it gets to the middle of January and you get a first nice sunny day and I think great, year begins.

Rob: So you think actually you should hold back a little bit and wait for the soil to warm up?

Tim: It more than pays off. The soil's warm, the days are longer, the plants will just grow a lot faster when they do grow. The seeds will germinate in half the time and when they grow they won't just sit there in the ground, because that's what can happen. The plant can come out of the soil and that's when it's in its tender phase. If you've got slugs that's when they're gonna get it, either when it's got its first tender leaves and the longer it sits in the ground it sits there in that tender phase the more vulnerable it is. If it's, you know, only got its first 2 leaves for like a week, that's a whole week that it's gonna be susceptible to slugs. If you plant it later it's a lot more dynamic. It grows, gets its second leaves straight away, you might lose some to slugs, but if you're lucky you might have a week of good weather and your carrots can just get over all the problems in like a week and a half.

Rob: So what are the plants that are going to be first in the ground?

Tim: It's shallots and onions. I mean with the onions if you're planting the seeds, yeah that's March. If you're buying sets generally with onions it's easier to buy the little onion sets and for me that just depends when I see them in the shops.

Rob: They're certainly on sale at the moment.

Tim: Generally it's good to get them when they're fresh. The longer they've been sitting in the shops the less good they are, so when you see them in the garden centre buy them and stick them in.

Rob: Does that apply to garlic as well?

Tim: Yep. That applies to garlic. For the past few years I've managed to have enough garlic of my own so I replant some of my own cloves.

Rob: And that works just as well does it?

Tim: That works just as well, yeah.



Rob: Now there's a school of thought that says you should put your garlic in the ground on the shortest day of the year in December some time and harvest them at the longest day of the year. You don't hold with that one then?

Tim: I could be starting to hold with it. For the first year I have planted some garlic in November on the advice of one of my neighbours and I'm going to see. It's an experiment yeah. He's been saying to me for the past few years why do you plant it in the spring but actually my garlic's been very good from my spring planting so I don't think there's that much to it but I'm gonna see all the same.

Rob: OK so we put in our shallots and our onions and our garlic ...

Tim: And leek seeds. That's another thing. If you want to have your own leek plants.

Rob: Grows well in Brittany

Tim: It's one of the main crops so why not dedicate a bit of time to it? And they like to be planted really early and the little plants when they come up they're not really susceptible to slug damage so if you can get a nice seed bed going somewhere just put in a few leek seeds. The seeds take like a month to come up one of those things that pays off planting early.

Rob: And you thin them out?

Tim: Thin them out and then at the end of June you can dig them up and plant them into their final position.

Rob: And do you hold with this thing where you snip the roots and the leaves before you put them?

Tim: Yeah when I transplant them I trim the roots and the leaves. That's just something I picked up from spying on other people's vegetable gardens.

Rob: And how about potatoes? Are you going to put some in early or

Tim: Good question. It might be advisable to sprout your potatoes. Put them in a box, a crate, spread your potatoes out in it, so they're just 1 deep and put it in a frost-free attic without a lot of light and get nice little sprouts on the potato. The thing is if you've got potatoes without sprouts you can plant them early and they'll take about a month to come up. If you sprout them indoors then you can wait until quite late. The thing with potatoes are they're frost sensitive. You never know when the last heavy frost is going to be. Sometimes you get lucky and you don't get a frost after the third week of April. So what I actually do I've got quite a big potato patch and I sow some really early just in case.



I've had years where the last frost has been the middle of April and I've just been the one that's been laughing you know when everyone else has planted their potatoes late, and I've got these great plants and you've got potatoes at the end of May, so it actually pays off. It doesn't take up very much space. So stick some potatoes in. Why not? What's to lose? So I think that's the thing stagger your potato planting, don't plant them at the same time. Plant your first ones at the end of March and keep planting until the end of April.

Rob: Anything else that should be going into the ground in sort of March/April time?

Tim: Well peas are the next really good early crop. There are 2 sorts of peas, there are smooth skinned peas and wrinkled skinned peas. The smooth skinned peas can start planting them from February because I think with the smooth skin the water doesn't sit around on the skin underground they don't rot in the ground and the wrinkly peas you plant them later.

Rob: How about using peas from the last years crop?

Tim: If you've saved a few pea seeds from last year and er...

Rob: Peas are the seeds aren't they?

Tim: Yeah, well I eat my peas when they're small and they're tender, Rob. I don't wait until they're big and fat. The seed you've got to leave them to dry on the plant, and if you're not very organised and you don't pick half your crop then yeah you have a great year for seed.

Rob: I'm just thinking about broad beans

Tim: Yeah very good point. I do a first sowing in November and often if the winter's heavy it can kill half of them off and so what I do I replant all the gaps in March/April.

Rob: It's not too late?

Tim: I think you can even plant them in May. The problem with late sowing of broad beans is that they're more susceptible to black fly because the black fly they like to eat the tender top of the broad bean plant.

Rob: That's right, you're meant to pick them off aren't you?

Tim: If you see the black fly you pick them off. That's the advantage of the November sowing. The problem with November sowing is the winter often kills half of them off, so it's the same as the potatoes I just always plant a few as a lottery just to see but then actually in the gaps of all the ones that have died plant broad beans in March or April and you actually get 2 different staggered crops on the same patch.



Rob: OK. Any other advice then for this early time of year? Compost? Anything to say about compost? I notice that you've got a very active compost heap over there with birds all over it.

Tim: Yeah. Its my bird table is my compost heap, they love it. That's obviously the thing isn't it? I mean I do most of my planting in April and May which basically means I'm looking at my soil in March and beginning of April, keeping an eye on it, that it's not getting overgrown with weeds, imagining how I'm going to find it when I want to start planting which for me it involves covering it with mulch.

Rob: OK well we haven't got time for it today but I think we ought to talk about mulching in our next talk.

Tim: Yeah I think we could have an extra long programme on mulch.

Rob: Tim the Gardener, thanks very much indeed for your time and its great looking over your garden

Tim: Yeah, thank you.