

Rob interviewing Tim the Gardener

Rob: I'm with Tim the Gardener once again in his most amazing garden. Congratulations on the display you've got growing here.

Tim: Yes - well I'm pleased to see the garden. I think at the end of June it looks the best. For me, it gets better and better. Generally, when the potatoes get potato blight then they start gradually going downhill.

Rob: We're in the middle of July. What kind of things are you getting up to in the garden at the moment, Tim?

Tim: Well, I'm going to be planting my leeks. This year I planted all my own leek seeds.

Rob: Why do you do that, when you can buy them so cheaply in the market?

Tim: Well, I think the first problem was, in the beginning I could only buy bunches of a hundred leeks and I wanted fifty and I said "can I split the bunch in half" and he looked at me like he didn't understand why anybody would only want to grow fifty leeks.

Rob: How many have you got growing this year, then?

Tim: I think I've been integrating too much - I've become Breton and I've grown about a couple of thousand leeks, which is stupid really, but I'm going to have to give a lot away. But they are good leek plants - I've got good soil for leek plants. So I'll be planting about 200 I think and what you do with a leek plant anyway - you dig it up or if you buy it from the market you trim the roots and then I trim the top of the leaves - not too low but just the top of the leaves and takes the stress off the plant, I think, the fact that it hasn't got so many leaves and then I dig a nice fat hole; pop in the leek. I don't fill in the hole; I just leave the leek lying in its hole and I fill up the hole with water and generally, because the roots of the leek are at the bottom, they're nice and protected, even if it's hot weather and I don't really need to water them again because generally, a couple of centimetres down, it'll be wet anyway so that's the leeks taken care of.

Rob: The other thing was the cabbages, you mentioned.

Tim: It's cabbages. Yes. I started with the cabbages - I mean cabbages are a crop that, if you really know what you're doing, you can have cabbages all year. I don't know what I'm doing with cabbages - it's random every year. I had a fantastic crop a few years ago and I haven't been able to repeat it since, but it's always worth planting - you never know what's going to work. I planted my seeds in May but otherwise you can buy the plants. I planted kale, Brussels sprouts...

Rob: Cauliflower, perhaps?



Tim: No, I don't bother with cauliflower actually. Maybe, when I become a really good gardener. But when you see the nice fat cauliflowers in the shops that everybody seems to be able to produce for a Euro and I see all my things which are pinheads and they've just got more caterpillars than cauliflowers...

Rob: Right - that touches on a very important thing now. Pest control.

Tim: Well - yes.

Rob: How do you manage? Because when I hear the word 'cabbage' I always think 'cabbage fly.'

Tim: Cabbages - I think everything likes them! Yeah - you've got club roots. But the idea of a club root is that you don't have the cabbages in the same spot year after year. You just have a really good 5-year rotation with the cabbages because the club root rests in the soil for 5 years. The first problem I have with my cabbages is pigeons. You're planting the plants; they're really young and tender; nice chewy, chunky leaves and along comes Mr Pigeon or Mrs Pigeon and rips it to pieces; and as fast as it makes leaves, as fast as it loses them.

Rob: But it's not too difficult to protect them against pigeons, isn't it, I mean you just put some sort of netting up?

Tim: Ah, yes but here, you can put up the netting but then the butterflies will come in the netting. If it's bird netting the butterflies can easily go into the netting. It will lay its eggs and then you've got two problems. One is that you can't get in the netting to crush the eggs and the other is, now in my garden for the past few years I believe that small birds are eating three quarters of my caterpillars. So my idea is that you want to put off the pigeons and encourage the small birds. It is often the case with pest control that you've got to be careful because you can do something against one pest and it might favour another and I think that small birds they play an incredible role - I mean I don't know all the things they eat but they just eat, they obviously eat greenfly, they eat caterpillars in limited quantities and they work all the time. So it's like a juggling act, really, and when I start doing my cabbages, I make a bamboo cage (it's my own invention but I've got lots of bamboo) and bamboo's easy to use. I planted my cabbages and then I make just a rough cage, you know, with four sides with rough weaving. ??? to the cage is that a pigeon is like a big jumbo jet - it needs a lot of space to land and a lot of space to take off 'cos it's so huge. Whereas the little birds they just can flit around. So my cabbage cage is four sides and then I put a few bits of loose bamboo on top. So the pigeons can't get in but the little wren and the dunnock and the robin and everything, they can and you just see them hopping around on the bamboo, in and out. Obviously, the butterflies can get in and I can get in, too. I can walk in between my bamboo and crush all the caterpillar eggs. I mean, for me, I actually quite enjoy my killing session every year. I don't have any domestic animals so I see it as my little moment of destruction.

Rob: But with all this creation going on, you're talking about destruction!



Tim: I think it's a whole isn't it you know? A garden is a whole - you plant and you reap. It's interesting
- I think to be a gardener you need to be a philosopher.

Rob: I think we might talk about that another time because I'm quite interested in the philosophy of
gardening as well. Isn't the philosopher Voltaire the one who said that one should be happy?

Tim: ???

Rob: Voila! I think on that note we're going to leave it just there for now. Thank you Tim.

Tim: Excellent.

Rob: And we'll speak to you again in the Autumn to find out what's going on in your garden.

Tim: Yes. Thank you Rob.

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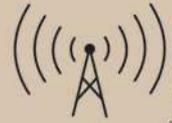
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