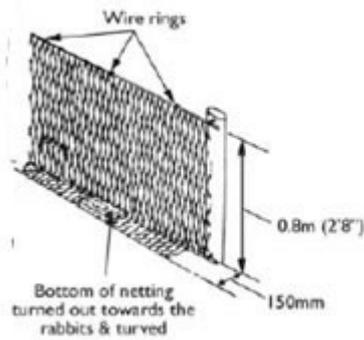


Big Onion Get Growing event February 2012

30 people came along to a talk on what veg people find grows well locally.

Mark Kidd from Sunny Orchard Farm, on the Kentmere Rd.

Mark moved here from Kendal 5 years ago. In his first year rabbits were the problem



(solved with a rabbit proof fence like this one) and in his second, slugs got 95% of his crops. This was solved with a flock of ducks (khaki campbells, best for slugs apparently!) who feast on the slugs, so now only 5% or so is lost to slugs.

Tomatoes: Mark hasn't found tomatoes to grow well outside (although Nicola grew tiny toms in hanging baskets in the Mill Yard which did really well!) but he gets a good crop in his solar greenhouse (pictured).



Carrots: try short stumpy carrots for our thin soil. Mark doesn't add manure to the soil where he plants his carrots to discourage them from branching and growing in funny shapes! He doesn't have a problem with carrot fly but this might be because he doesn't have any neighbours close by.

Brassicas: suggest covering with a net or with fleece to reduce damage from pests. Mark doesn't tend to grow them as they take up a lot of space in the beds.

Peas: seem to do ok in our poor soil.

Courgettes and squash: need deep rich soil so a good place is the compost heap!
Turnips - great, and stay in the ground over winter.

Apples, pears and plums are great, although they do have good and bad years.

Hard to grow:

aubergines - maybe not a long enough season? French beans. Celery - seems to need a lot of water and maybe some shade? Spinach - can grow it but it seems to have a short season as it bolts early - but it's easy to save the seed!

Saves seed from: lettuce, corn salad, spinach, brassicas, turnips, tomatoes. You can't save seed from F1 hybrid seeds, only open pollinated varieties.



Easiest crops to start with:

turnips, Jerusalem artichokes are bomb proof (you might not enjoy eating them though! Good grated raw though!), strawberries, garlic (likes full sun), potatoes (like the wet!).

The field next to Marks used to be called 'Strawberry field' which shows they do well here! 'Cambridge Favourite' is a good one to try, but don't bother with 'Elsanta'. 'Temptation' is one you can grow from seed, but it's so easy to get strawberries from runners. Alpine strawberries are good if you have a more difficult site, for e.g. with less light. The fruit are smaller but they fruit for longer than ordinary strawberries. Good ground cover!

Onions do ok, but best to grow from sets rather than from seed. Plant out in April and try to keep weed free. 'Ailsa Craig' is a good variety to try but most are good.

Shady gardens: try rhubarb possibly peas, salads, radish, spinach - should grow but productivity drops with less light. Fruit won't do very well in low light though.

Andrew Taylor

Compost is essential. Straw and old animal bedding is good to make compost from, but you need to let it stand for 3 or 4 years ideally. He puts the contents of the Hoover bag on the compost heap as well. Also shredded paper. Andrew limes his soil each autumn..



Peas: 'Calvin wonder' is a good early pea and 'hurst green shaft' is a good one.

Kale 'dwarf green' is a good one, pests leave it alone and Andrew's been eating it since October and is still picking the leaves.

Parsnip: 'gladiator' and 'pearl' are good, again short stumpy varieties are good around here.

Runner beans - don't bother with dwarf ones because of soil splash on your beans. Climbing French bean 'Blue Lake' is a good one. Andrew waits til June to plant out or sow beans.



Potatoes - Andrew only grows first earlies and grows a different variety each year to avoid disease.

Leeks: 'Musselburgh' is a good leek - they only get to thumb thickness but you can harvest them from the bed until April.

Turnips: 'purple top' is a good one, sown every 3 weeks to keep a good supply. Swede is a good one to try as well.

Onion: 'Stuttgarter' is a good one. A tip is to plant them facing outwards so you can hoe around them easily. Andrew has also has success with shallots.

Salad: cut and come again is easy (pictured).



Strawberries: 'May' is a good one. You can dig up and burn the old plants after 2 or 3 years to keep productivity high, replacing them with runners.

Raspberries: Andrew finds summer fruiting raspberries often have a grub in them when you come to pick them so he just grows autumn fruiting raspberries.

Soft fruit: tip: use carpet tiles to keep the weeds down around your soft fruit.

Tayberries (varieties with thorns to keep the birds off) are good.

Damsons are good but Andrew's not had success with apples: problems with scab and canker.

Pears are good, especially 'conference'

Plum: try 'Guinevere'

Grape: Andrew has found them very successful although they don't get very big. He wishes he'd chosen a seedless variety!

Moles - tip, rake off the soil then spray the mound with WD40. Moles are a sign you have worms in the soil which is great.

Slug pellets: if you are going to use them, try putting them under a slate so the birds can't eat them. CD's are good to scare away birds.

Wasps: try putting a bit of jam in a jam jar, putting a hole in the lid and hanging them from your fruit trees to stop the wasps eating your fruit.

Alan

Suggests doing a bulk seed order to save on postage costs. If anyone is interested in doing this, please get in touch.

Alan's soil is very gritty - he lives at the bottom on Reston Scar. Consequently, it's very dry and everything washes through it, so it's needs fertilising each year. Alan grows organically, without using any chemicals. He doesn't bother trying to grow root crops, neither does Dave.

Broad beans: Alan defeats the slugs by sowing the seed quite deep 4'' or so. He likes the longpod varieties. If you get blackfly, a good tip is to pinch the top leaves off and burn them.



Turnips: 'golden ball' is a tasty one. Alan sows turnips in modules then plants them out.

Leeks: Alan sows a few seeds in a tetrapak in the airing cupboard. Once they are 5'' high, he teases them out and plants them in a hole made with a dibber (an old stick) in a bed in the garden.

Broad beans are good and beetroot and onions (sets only). Also rhubarb. Blackcurrants are nitrogen hungry so give them plenty of compost each year.

'Nothing grows very big in Staveley in my experience'.

Tayberries (pictured) are good, but you need to grow them in a fruit cage because they are best if you wait until they are really ripe (and they are very tempting for the birds). Tastier than raspberries!



Apple: Alan just has one tree, a Burr Knott, which came from down south somewhere but does very well up here. (also called 'Bide's walking stick') The apples are great but they don't keep really well, up until Christmas or so. Pick your variety with apples: something which flowers later and matures earlier is a good idea.

Double digging is impossible in Staveley, you are lucky if you can even get your fork in all the way. Alan finds he needs to add compost to the soil every year.

Easy crops: if you grow nothing else, a crop of beans grown in a big pot is worthwhile.

Steve grows a lot (around $\frac{1}{2}$) of his veg in pots or grow bags. He finds sprouts (F1 'Bridget' - good at Christmas!), calabrese, autumn sprouting broccoli, leeks, peas, beans (try 'scarlet emperor') and French beans (try 'cobra'). Also courgettes,

carrots and potatoes (try 'Charlotte'), all in bags or pots. Even though you might not save money growing your own potatoes, it's worth it because of the taste 'wow'!

Try 3 potatoes per bag, half fill with compost then top up ('earthing up'). Make sure you chit your potatoes indoors before you plant them. Keep well watered.

The old varieties are the best! Steve has tried the new ones but always goes back to the old varieties.

Strawberries - Steve recommends just planting the first plant on a runner, cut off the rest,

His hot tip is Aldi for seedlings, especially tomatoes!

Anne Hayward - Anne talked about 3 particular vegetables.

She grows climbing French beans in her poly-tunnel. French beans she finds you don't need to blanch before you freeze, so you save a bit of time.

Garlic: grows in Anne's garden all of the time. She's found it grows planting it out any time of the year, but she plants out in December and harvests in June/July when the leaves go papery. You can save a few bulbs from your crop and plant out the biggest ones that last the longest without sprouting. A tip is to eat the garlic 'volunteers' that come up in the spring from last years crop you thought you'd harvested efficiently!

Spacing for garlic is obvious, about 4'' or 5'' in all directions.

Peas: often pests go for your peas, mice for example. So Anne sows in guttering hung up in the poly tunnel out of mouse reach. She does a succession, refilling the gutter with new seeds after each lot is planted out when the peas are about 3'' high. Anne sows 3 lots in guttering then starts sowing direct into the ground (figuring the mice have enough to go at by then!).

Mange tout are so easy! 'The most wonderful bit of the gardening year is eating your first lot of peas!'. Mange tout are pretty in the flower border. Anne likes 'Carouby de mausanne' mange-tout original old variety, French heirloom, having large flat, mange-tout pods, which have an excellent extremely sweet flavour, Carouby de Mausanne can be used for pea shoots.



Pick your mange tout every day. They are easy to freeze. Mice don't bother them so much as ordinary peas. They do need support.

Think about growing extra ordinary peas and drying and storing them - a good source of protein.

Potatoes: 'apples of the earth' - so underrated. Possibly the best staple to grow around here. But blight can be a problem. Anne's best tip: use an old carpet. Put lots of organic matter on the soil (straw, comfrey leaves etc), lay down your carpet, and plant your potatoes about 6 inches down, through crosses cut in the carpet. Then just forget about them until it's time to harvest!

Try new 'sarpo' varieties traditionally bred to resist blight. There is 'nothing like a new potato'! Don't buy King Edwards Anne says (but Steve grew them last year and he found them fine. It's worth experimenting with different varieties. Anne grows 1st or second earlies.



Beetroot - before you thin them out you can eat the leaves. It's fine to eat turnip leaves to but the younger the better. Andrew's tip for helping them to strike - sow, sprinkle soil over them then cover with a plank. Jump on the plank to firm the seeds in well and make sure they are in contact with the soil.

Crop rotations were universally practised.

Timings - just add a fortnight or a month to what it says on the seed packet.

Steve never sows or plants anything outside in the soil until the first week in June (to avoid the last of the frosts). He finds plants grown from seed often catch up with seedlings planted at the same time, but is an eternal optimist!

More information: <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/>