Growing potatoes in bags

The Capel Horticultural Society has organised a competition for members to grow the heaviest crop of spuds from a single tuber for a number of years now. The following hints may help you increase the overall weight of your crop and, with luck, the heaviest single potato.

You get your single tuber around the end of March/ start of April at the Society's Spring Show or Plant Sale. It is still cold at night and only in exceptional weather does the daytime temperature get above 15/16oC so put your bag in a greenhouse, if possible, otherwise keep it where there is shelter and warmth. Using the best compost you can, for example well-rotted garden compost, or a mixture of farm yard manure and soil, put the tuber on top of about 10cm depth and cover it by another layer of 5cm. Make sure that the shoot is pointing upwards and take off any other shoots so that there is only one. This will place all the growth in the main stem which is where the new tubers will form over time.

Make sure the compost is kept moist. Then, when the first leaves start to show cover them with another layer of compost. In this way you will ensure that tubers will be formed all the way up the stem of the plant, otherwise they just form at the surface.

As it gets warmer and the risk of frost at night has gone, towards the end of May, place the bag in full sunlight. All the time make sure to keep the compost moist, without flooding it. Keep adding compost regularly as the plant develops, until the bag is full and the top growth showing. About once a month add a small amount of fertiliser, such as Growmore or pelleted chicken manure. This will help the leaf growth and should be stopped at the end of June to be replaced with liquid tomato feed that encourages the tubers to grow. In the later stage of growth keep a watchful eye for any sign of blight and remove any infected leaf. Watch out for slug or snail damage and treat appropriately.

The main ingredient for a really heavy crop is water.

For the Summer Show entry

Please complete and submit your entry form either to the Show Secretary at 37, The Street, Capel RH55LD by the Wednesday before the show, prior to 8.00pm, or on the day of the Show. Entry forms are in the Show Schedule or may be obtained when you enter. It is free to enter if you are a member of the Horticultural Society.

Please bring your potato sack (with minimum or no foliage) to the tables outside the marquee situated on the Recreation ground between 8.00am and 10.00am on Show Day. A permit is needed to bring cars onto the

Showground – available from the Show Secretary (above) during the preceding week. We will have a wheelbarrow available for transporting your sack from your car if needed.

Collect your entry cards from the Show Secretary in front of the marquee. The entry card will have string attached so that it can be tied to your potato sack.

Judging will take place from 10.00am. The results will be displayed on the board in front of the marquee from 12.00. The winners of the heaviest crop and the heaviest single potato will be presented with prize money from 3.30pm and a certificate at 4.00pm, when the Show trophies will be presented.

At 4.00pm you may collect your entries. We will have removed the soil, so you will be able to collect the potatoes in your sacks.