

Garden Club February meeting

It was a cold day for a meeting but we managed. The tea and cake [made by my own fair hands] helped.

This week we discussed seeds and we covered how to break dormancy, how to store and how to read a seed packet.

Some seeds exhibit quite difficult dormancy [this means that they do not germinate easily] and often require special treatment. The most common seeds that we will encounter like this are tree seeds which often require one, two or even three years of alternating warm moist conditions with freezing before they will germinate.

The storage of seeds is very important and for most seeds they simply need cool, dry, dark conditions to stay viable [able to grow] so don't leave your seed packets on a sunny windowsill near a steamy sink.

Most seed companies print a sow before date on their packets and so for best results you should use this but often enough an old packet of seeds stored well will have good germination rates. Always worth a try.

Most seeds that we sow on a regular basis are contained in the three categories of Hardy Annual, Half Hardy Annual and Biennial. I am not covering Tender annuals but the treatment of most of them is the same but for making sure that they never experience temperatures below 20° Celcius.

Most annuals will germinate with very little trouble. The hardy ones can be sown direct to carefully weeded soil. As soon as the weed seeds around the garden start to appear then that is the sign that hardy annual seeds will germinate if sown. If any seeds are sown when it is too cold and wet they might rot so never sow too early.

Examples of Hardy Annuals [annuals germinate flower and die in the same year]:-

Calendula, Larkspur, Sunflower, Sweet pea, Ammi majus [ornamental cow parsley], Cornflower, Linaria [toadflax], Echium [Viper's Bugloss. Can be treated as an annual but performs better if sown in autumn and treated as a biennial], Malope, Orlaya, Poppies and Nigella. There are many more than this but these are easily available and very reliable.

Half hardy annuals [means that they will not take any frost or severe cold] can be sown under cover now so a sunny windowsill is perfect. By the time that they are getting leggy due to not enough light through the window they will probably be safe to put outside in a cold greenhouse or cold frame. If in doubt about late frosts simply make sure that they are close to the window which has been cleaned and then turn them regularly in order that they get light all around the seedling.

Examples of Half Hardy Annuals:- Cosmos, Antirrhinum [although these do sometimes self seed in my garden for no apparent reason!], Tithonia, Cobaea scandens [as the name suggests it creeps around and climbs], Zinnia, and Gaura [although, again, will often survive the winter].

I think that many factors influence the hardiness of plants and not just cold. The degree of drainage in the soil is important too as some plants can cope with cold but not wet cold.

There is another category of short lived plants called Biennials and for our purposes almost all of them are hardy. These plants form roots and leaves in their first year and then flower in the following year and I suppose the commonest would be the foxglove. Foxgloves often last more than one year and so are sometimes short lived perennials [plants that last years]. The seeds for biennials can be sown now or in the autumn.

Examples of Biennials:-

Foxgloves, Aquilegia, Honesty, Echium, Delphinium, some Poppies and Eryngium.

The next meeting is on Tuesday the 28th March at Poppies starting at 14.30hrs.

Happy sowing to you all.

Michele Cameron

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