

NOTES FROM MY GARDEN

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HAPPY NEW YEAR. May 2007 bring you all that you need, the happiness that you deserve and an overflowing cornucopia of fun and laughter.

It is the holiday season, time to take a break from the daily routine of our lives, put the feet up and survey all that we have achieved and to think about the coming year. It is the silly season and for me the quiet time. The wireless is turned off. The once great National programme of Radio NZ has degenerated into mindless blatherings of a gaggle of people singularly lacking in the talent to amuse or inform. The off knob has been used with increasing frequency and ferocity to prevent my blood pressure from scaling the heights of Everest. Whereas in the past the wireless was a source of great pleasure and gentle education, always accompanying me on my forays into the herbaceous borders, now it sits forlorn unused and unwanted on the back shelf in the greenhouse, being rapidly smothered in a blanket of cobwebs. Instead I have rediscovered the pleasure of listening to Mother Natures own broadcast. The twittering, chirping and generally dulcet sounds of my avian neighbours and sometimes even the strident clackering of the territorial tuis are a joy compared to the mindless drivel that spews forth from the wireless at the moment, the excuse they offer is that it is holiday time..... Yeah right!.

In the garden this month

The garden this month has been dominated by two beings, The Great Goddess and Madam. To be quite honest I am not sure which I fear the most, both are capable displays of extraordinary gentleness and the ferocity of a whirling Dervish (usually in the space of 10 minutes).

The great Goddess has delivered the greatest mixed bag of weather conditions that I can remember, searing heat, high humidity, lack of rain, then torrential downpours, and that is only in the space of an hour! Not ideal conditions in which to toil. The kitchen garden has suffered from a lack of breezes to stir the hot air and humid conditions, creating the perfect breeding ground for most blights known to the long suffering gardener. As the gardener ages (as opposed to getting old) the humidity takes its toll and he finds himself dragging his feet around the garden, wasting so much energy trying to raise the enthusiasm to labour, which in less trying conditions would normally be a breeze.

Madam descends on the kitchen garden, most afternoons or evenings, with trug and kitchen scissors in hand scouring the beds for delectable tid bits to tempt the palates of her family and guests. It is a source of great pride that the garden has been able to satisfy these demands on all but one occasion, when the request was for more broccoli. A desperate search by the anxious gardener revealed only two tiny heads, these were apologetically laid in the trug, with head hung low, nothing being said by either party. However the gardener knew deep down, and by the smile hovering around Madam's lips, that he would not get away unscathed, maybe not right now, but this singular lack of success would be stored up and used to his disadvantage sometime in the future. He was not to be disappointed!

Madam's forays into the kitchen garden are always looked forward to, because apart from the light hearted games of one upmanship indulged in by both Madam and the gardener there is also a serious side of learning, discussion and planning for the future, which is essential if the garden is to continue to develop and grow.

Another task that has to take priority at this time of the year is the preserving of the gardens bounty to enjoy in the winter months.

The kitchen garden

We must indulge in a little gentle bragging. The tomatoes have been a great success, particularly those grown in the new manner as discussed in earlier newsletters. The plants have been tall, healthy and laden with a great number of

large fruit. The varieties planted this year were *Oxheart* and *Amish paste*. *Oxheart* have proved to be true to description, large, with lots of wonderfully flavoured meaty flesh. The *Amish paste* while not being so large are just as good.

The beans, both dwarf and climbing have produced large quantities of produce for the kitchens. I have extolled the virtues of the *Shiny Fardenlosa* climbing beans on many occasions in the past and once again I have not been disappointed, they are about to start on their second flush, but I have also removed the *Sweet peas* from their frame and planted a second crop of *Shiny Fardenlosa* which should take us well into Autumn. The second crop of dwarf beans have also been sown and are now up and thriving, so we will be well served with beans for a while.

The sweet corn has been another successful crop this season, providing succulent cobs for the table. Second and third crops have been planted to ensure a continuing supply.

Miss Juliette, Madam's youngest daughter arrives for an extended stay on the Third of February, and corn is on her most favourite list, so hence the number of plantings. Miss Juliette is of the vegetarian persuasion and when she was here last month I blotted my copybook quite severely. I presented her with several heads of young broccoli for her supper (along with other interesting tid bits as well), extolling its virtues etc. The next morning I had to face a rather distressed young woman, the broccoli had been filled with green cabbage white caterpillars, unbeknown to me or anyone else, only discovered when cutting through the cooked heads on the plate. This is quite a problem with home grown broccoli, no matter how hard you search, the caterpillars are so well disguised, there are always some who escape this search. I have since found come across a solution to the problem. Put the broccoli heads into a bowl of cold salted water prior to cooking, this discourages the creatures and they quickly remove themselves from their hiding places.

The kumara, new cabbage and broccoli plantings, beetroot, celery, lettuce, and aubergines are progressing and are on schedule to replace the earlier crops.

The bed of potatoes that was devastated by the Pukekoes in November, was dug last week, and we did manage to get a bucket full of good sized tubers out of what the Pukekoes left behind. One can only wonder at the crop, had the avian terrorists not decided to visit.

A word about the Pukekoes. They have not visited the garden now since the middle of November. I put this down to the stringing of the yellow plastic strips across the garden. Don't ask me why or how, I just know at the moment that it works, and as long as it works I shall keep the yellow strips flying. All thanks to Betty Tatt and her finding and passing on of this information. This gardener will always be grateful.