

HARVEST FESTIVAL BUT IT'S A BIT EARLY...ISN'T IT?

Well yes and no. As everyone knows, no matter what you do in life you only get out what you put in. Now is the time to prepare for harvest festival. Surely not. It's only April, but as any gardener will tell you, the secret to success is preparation. If you don't prepare there will be no harvest, and if there is no harvest there will be no festival. I know it is difficult to think that far ahead but if the seeds are not sown now there will be no harvest.

Speaking as a gardener and allotment holder I have a vested interest in the harvest. Home made pumpkin soup, constant supplies of runner beans, onions, garlic, herbs, carrots, parsnip, potatoes, leeks, cabbage, marrow, butternut squash, to name but a few (this year hopefully asparagus and horseradish) will feed my family, friends and guests all year round and last into December making a fine addition to the Christmas fayre.



As a small boy at North Ealing Primary School I remember very well my first experience of Harvest festival. There were jars of home made jams and pickles, baskets of home grown apples, plums and pears, and all of the winning entries from the local allotment society. We are talking runner beans at least two feet long, marrows at least two feet round and home made gooseberry pie at least two feet in radius! Don't forget I was probably only about four feet tall at the time, so my sense of scale was probably compromised. Not only were these on display at

school but also at Church Parade, and that was when the event really exploded. Not only were all the above on display, but the piece-de-resistance was the bread that one of my friend's mum made. It was in the shape of a wreath, twisted, plaited, glazed, larger than life, magnificent. This was obviously, apart from St Georges' Day Parade, one of the most important events in a small boy's life and promoted a sense of 'Englishness'. Most of the above items are considered to be perishables and as such are not considered suitable to be distributed to the needy as they were forty or so years ago. I find it a shame that only foodstuffs crammed with preservatives are considered ok by today's (sub)standards.



So. Come on you enthusiastic English country gardeners. Get sowing. Get planting. Get your hands dirty. Muck in. If you're not interested in veg then grow flowers. If you haven't got a garden or an allotment then use a windowsill and grow something as simple as cress. Cress is still a harvest.

Above all, enjoy the whole experience of the festival.

Gary Marsh