

Growing Pinks

By Keith Stockton

I have grown vegetables and flowers, particularly roses, most of my adult life and the bulk of these were grown on an allotment near my home in Atherton. However following a heart attack in 1994, I let the allotment go and decided to take things a bit easier and grow everything in my gardens at home where I have a 10' x 8' greenhouse and 3 large cold frames. I have always shown at the Southport show so knew Bill Wilkinson and Brian Dean very well from there. It was around this time I was given some pink plants to try by some of the members of the Lancashire and Cheshire Carnation Society. It is fair to say I 'took to them' at once and loved growing them and the veg and roses were gradually replaced by pinks and this is all I now grow. I joined the Lanc's and Cheshire Society in 1995 and have been a member ever since. In fact I have been a committee member since that time and in all those years I have only ever missed one meeting. Knowing I was new to pinks, 'Wilky' introduced me to Monty Ray and Doug Cottam both excellent growers of pinks and from whom I learned a lot in those early days. Pinks soon took over my garden and within a year or so I was probably growing about 300 to 500 plants. I have never learnt to drive so living in Atherton where both the Lanc's and Cheshire shows are held is great for me as the shows are virtually on my door step plus I manage to get a lift every year to the Southport show which I still like to support.

Stock Plants

I currently have some where in the region of 500 pinks in pots or growing in my house garden. All my pinks are grown outside in the open air and only go under glass when the flower stems begin to spindle. They love the fresh air and I believe this enhances the colour in the subsequent flowers.

Propagation.

My normal routine has been to begin rooting during early August but over the last few years I have moved this to late June to give me a good succession of flowers during the season.

My cuttings are inserted into 40 or 60 unit cell trays into clover multi-purpose compost with lots of perlite added to open the mix plus I firmly believe it helps them to root better and faster. I do not use any soil warming cables and I do not use heat of any kind, they are growing cold at all times. I do believe in misting the cuttings with a sprayer containing weak maxicrop during the rooting process and I also use this when watering. I always root more cuttings than I will require for myself as friends and Society members always want some in the spring.

1st Potting.

Once well rooted, the cuttings are moved into 3" pots into a mix of clover professional multi-purpose compost with added perlite, nothing else. They stand out in the cold frames with the lights off so get plenty of air.

Stopping.

I like to produce strong stocky plants so like to stop the cuttings when the main stem gets to about 3" tall so this operation is usually carried out whilst the plants are in the 3" pots. As of today, (2.12.2012) I have around 1000 to 1500 young pinks and the bulk are already stopped. In point of fact some of the earlier rooted plants have been stopped twice and so are making lovely bushy plants indeed.

Final Potting.

I begin to final pot in early March once the weather begins to improve into 6" pots using a mix of clover professional compost with added perlite. I do add a small amount of calcified seaweed and some vitax Q4 but cannot detail precise amounts as I simply empty the bag and spread the ingredients over until I am satisfied I have the mix right. I do add a little bit of lime and the plants go straight into this.

I am amongst the plants every day and will look for the best 500 or so and these will form the basis of my show collection and will go under glass once the flowering stems form. Some of the remainder will stay in these pots and will stand out in the cold frames whilst many of the others will get planted into the beds in my garden where they give a wonderful display of colour plus on occasions some good show flowers.

Over the last few years I have also began to add a product called 'root booster' to the final mix which I have found on the shopping channel and which I believe gives me a better rooted plant.

Feeding.

I do liquid feed and like the 'root booster' mentioned above, I have found a product called 'flower power' from the same source. I begin to use this once I have the basis of a strong plant and before the flowering stems begin to form. I am convinced this improves flower quality in due course.

Flowering Period.

Once the stems begin to form the best plants are selected and they go under glass, either into the greenhouse on the high staging or under the glass in the cold frames which I raise to about 3 feet high. This allows plenty of air to circulate around the plants and keeps them healthy. I never let the plants get dry and during this period the majority of pots are stood in saucers as a preventative.

Spraying.

I do spray my plants and carry this out three times each year, namely May, July and late August to early September. I use a good insecticide and select the ones which will give good protection against red spider but thankfully I do not get troubled with this pest. Thankfully I do not get troubled with rust either.

Varieties.

I probably in all truth have in excess of 50 varieties which I re-select each year to improve upon the strain and maintain vigour.

I have been lucky during my 'pink years' to become friendly with Bob Snowball and Tony Derrick who usually let me have some of their new varieties to trial and grow on. Clearly the best ones go back to them along with an assessment of how they have grown and performed. Bob has the prefix 'Moor' whilst Tony is well known for his 'Anders' prefix. Many of the plants are seedlings and therefore un-named, for instance at Southport show this year (2012) I won the silver medal with one of Bob's laced seedlings which is a real belter.

I currently have 3 beauties from Tony which are named but as yet un-released. One is a red called '*Anders Old Trafford*' which is a real cracker plus '*Anders Maureen Lee*' and '*Anders Maureen Turner*'.

From Bob I also have a pink double called '*Moor Michael Gallagher*' and a white double called '*Moor Nola Gwynne*', neither of which has yet been released. I also have one called '*Moor Nicki Doo*' which I have won with each time I have shown it. It is a deep pink bi-colour and a real beauty.

Bob has recently allowed me to name one of his seedlings after my grand daughter 'Olivia Woods' but again this is not yet on release.

Banker Varieties.

The following are wonderful flowers and should be grown by all serious pink enthusiasts. '*Oakwood Erin Mitchell*', '*Anders Dora Bryant*', '*Anders Lavender Girl*'. '*Anders Patricia Griffiths*', '*Anders Acclaim*', '*Anders Emily Elizabeth*', '*Lillie Brooks*' and '*Moor Nicki Doo*'.

2013 Season

I have grown more plants for the 2013 season as I am currently undergoing treatment for bowel cancer which I was diagnosed with in November 2011. I have increased my stock to ensure I have a good foundation of varieties whilst I am under going chemotherapy which will keep me focused and busy during this period. Working the pinks is a most satisfying and rewarding pass time and keeps me in good spirits. Best wishes to you all and I hope you have found something of interest in these notes.

