

# **Cauliflowers for Exhibition**

## **Jim Pearson**

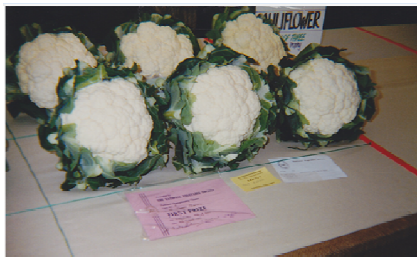


**The National Vegetable Society  
Scottish Branch**

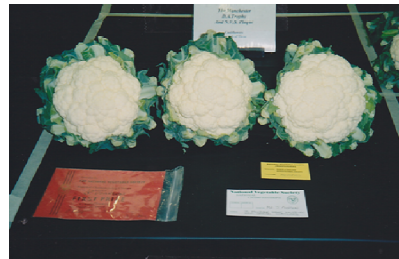


## Introduction

I have been growing Cauliflowers for 36 Years now, and in that time I have had some tremendous success at shows up and down the length of Great Britain, including winning the National 6 times and 1<sup>st</sup> prizes at the Scottish, Welsh & Midland Branch Championships.



The National @ Southport 1993



The National @ Harrogate 2003

In my opinion, with a bit of hard work and dedication any grower is capable of growing Cauliflowers to National Standards and unlike some other show vegetables, you don't need grow lights, heated greenhouses or polytunnels to have a go. The most important aspect to growing top class cauliflowers is getting the garden prepared correctly.

## Ground Preparation

Preferably in the autumn, dig a trench 1ft deep and one spade width. Then double dig in the trench a spade depth. This aids drainage.



The trenches are now ready to fill. I use homemade compost consisting of vegetable and fruit waste, grass cuttings, leaves, egg shells, coffee and tea bags. I have 3 methods of composting; black compost bins, old barrels & wooden pallets



You will see from the photo below, how the compost mix looks after 6 months. Transfer the compost to the trench.



Even though I do lots of composting, I never have enough, so I also do trenches with fresh material ; cabbage, cauliflower, carrot leaves etc. I also add slug pellets. When covered with soil, fresh material rots away.



Each Trench then gets Blood , Fish & Bone added; one handful per yard, followed by “6X” fertiliser and either Levington Organic blend farmyard manure or Westland Gro Sure Farmyard manure (whichever I have available at the time of digging), again, one handful to the yard of trench



After the trenches are completed, I add garden lime in February and leave for the rain to wash in. I would add that I have never had the pH of my soil tested as I am happy with my method.



## Sowing

I do 4 sowings;

25<sup>th</sup> April, 5<sup>th</sup> May, 15<sup>th</sup> May,

25<sup>th</sup> May.

I sow in Levingtons Multi Purpose Compost, 1 seed per plastic drinking cup.



If you do not have a greenhouse or polytunnel, a cold frame would do to start seeds. Each year, I grow 3 varieties. I have often been asked about when to sow for a particular show



but with cauliflowers this is impossible to time and even with 4 sowings, I was not able to stage an entry at the Nationals at Dundee 2015 as none were ready due to the weather over the Summer, but they came good for the Scottish Branch Championships at the end of September (first prize) and RHS show at Westminster in October (3<sup>rd</sup> in the individual class & 1<sup>st</sup> prize as part of the 10 veg collection)



## Varieties

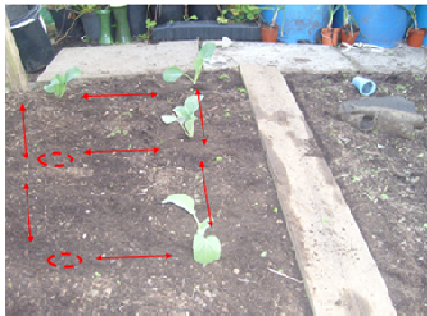
My favourite variety for show is **Memphis**, which I grow every year along with **Raleigh** or **Boris**. I like to grow a different variety some years and this year, I am trying a new variety called **Rauol**. Some cauliflowers appear good when you read about them in catalogues but turn out not to be what I am after when grown. I enjoy the excitement of growing a new variety. I have also had some success with **Cornell**. Grown well, there are a number of Cauliflower varieties capable of winning the National Championships, unlike other vegetables, where we are down to 1 variety e.g. Show Perfection peas, Sweet Candle Stump carrots and New Red Intermediate Long carrots.

I am fortunate having large gardens and do a 4 year cycle where growing brassicas. This way, I find I avoid club root in the soil and the quantity I grow varies from year to year depending which garden they are in. I only grew 21 cauliflowers in 1990 and got my first ticket at the National Championships at Ayr. The variety was Dok Elgon which is no longer available.

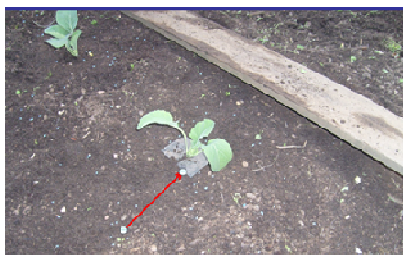
Winning my first ticket at National level made me more determined to do better and looking at my garden after coming back from Ayr, I had 50 cabbages and a number of Brussel sprout plants, so I cut down the quantities of these the following year and grew 179 cauliflowers. When asked why that number, my answer was *"I didn't have enough room for 180"*. I would add that I won 1<sup>st</sup> prize at the Nationals in Wales that year.

## Planting Out

Plant out 4 weeks after sowing at a distance of 2ft by 2ft and sprinkle slug pellets around each plant.



I then put a 3" square collar (using builders damp course) over each plant to help prevent cabbage root fly, followed by two carpet squares rotated in differing directions.

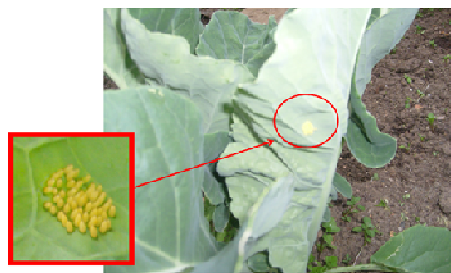


This way, you will have great success against the Cabbage root fly.

## Watering & Feeding

I don't water throughout the season, but we get a lot of rain where I stay. I would only get the hose out if we had a prolonged dry spell.

If growth looks slow, I would give a feed with Chempak No. 2 and as plants become established, I give 2 foliar feeds with Maxicrop, I find this gives the foliage a real healthy look.



## Pests

I inspect my plants every two days looking at the underside of leaves for butterfly eggs, removing any that are found.



If cabbage root fly gets through, they will destroy your plant. Remove the affected plant and soil and place in your household bin. Do not put in the compost bin.

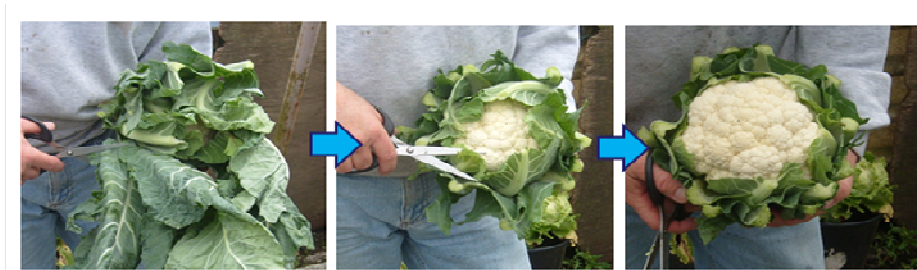
## Monitoring

Check each plant regularly for the curd starting. As soon as the button forms, tie the leaves up with string to keep the light out. Untie and check every day looking for slugs and snails.



## Initial Preparation for the Show

Gradually cut the leaves away until a good round curd is showing, but leave some stalk for the final cut at the show for freshness.



## Faults

Below are some examples of faults.



**Too much cut off**



**Starting to blow**



**Gaps & Snail marks**



## Preparation for the Show

Give the plants a good soaking in a sink of cold water, with salt in it, to wash any hidden pests off. Leave on a table to dry and then select, cover the curd with Kitchen towel, wrap the whole cauliflower with clingfilm and store in the fridge if required. (At the National at Malvern one year, I had three beautiful cauliflowers, but when I un-wrapped the clingfilm, one of the curds was badly marked by a small slug and I did not have a spare).



There is nothing you can do to hurry the cauliflowers to mature. At the Nationals at Wales in 2006, held in the middle of August, I knew my cauliflowers were not going to be ready, so I gave them a high Potash feed. This resulted in all the cauliflowers maturing too small and I wasted a full growing year.

If they are ready before a show, then lift and keep in the fridge with kitchen roll over the curd and wrap in clingfilm. At the Nationals at Dundee in 2005, I came second with cauliflowers that were in the fridge for 10 days. I had no other ones ready.

## Use in Collections

Cauliflowers are a 20 point vegetable and enhance any collection or basket.



Dundee Show  
Collection of 4 Veg



2005 Scottish Branch Show  
Gourock, Best in Show



The R.H.S. Show - Westminster 2015 - 1<sup>st</sup> prize

My friends Ian, Simpson, Jim Gradie & Fiona Shenfield helped out with the collection. It was a long journey for Grace and myself, but to win the cup was worth it.



## And Finally

Most growers start by showing at the local village show, then progress to larger shows, like Ayr & Dundee in Scotland, then on to Branch Championships and hopefully the N.V.S. National Championships.

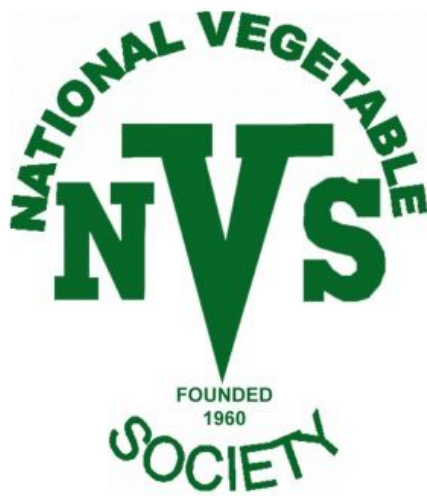
No matter what level you compete at, there is tremendous excitement going into the hall or marquee, wondering if you will get a ticket.

I have always considered myself a good grower, competing against very good growers and have always won prizes with various vegetables when competing at National level, but first prizes don't come along too often. To date, I have attained 6 firsts with cauliflowers, 2 with peas and 1 Millenium Class and to me, getting a first at the National is the pinnacle of growing.



This was the National at Dorchester in 2009. My good friend and Scottish Branch Secretary, Fiona Shenfield, was waiting, camera in hand, for me to arrive at the cauliflower class.

*All the best in growing*



If you are interested in growing vegetables for exhibition or the kitchen why not join us. Please visit [www.nvsuk.org.uk](http://www.nvsuk.org.uk)

Published by the National Vegetable Society Scottish Branch.