

episode 96 show notes and advice

Episode description

In today's episode, Arthur talks to the owner of 400-year-old Easton Walled Gardens, Ursula Cholmeley. Nestled in a valley in Grantham, Lincolnshire, these spectacular gardens are particularly famous for their- abundant sweet peas. Ursula talks Arthur through her time at Easton, their approach to cultivating the finest sweet peas, and how family heritage serves as great inspiration.

In this episode, discover:

- ❖ Ursula's experience of a large garden restoration project
- ❖ How to get the best from your sweet peas
- ❖ The history of sweet peas and snowdrops at Easton Walled Gardens

episode 96 advice sheet

Growing sweet peas with sheet netting (5:38)

- ❖ Using a role of sheet netting for each variety provides great support. Ursula was inspired by visits to Wisley and their approach to growing carnations in drums on sheet wire, a method she was eager to try with her own sweet peas.
- ❖ Ursula explains that most growth happens at the top, so she always chooses sheet netting over common support structures like teepees. The wire isn't too hot for the tendrils either, even during the long hot summer.

Ursula's advice for feeding sweet peas (6:57)

- ❖ When it comes to feeding sweet peas, Ursula mentions that green manure is their feed of choice and produces very impressive results.
- ❖ They choose to feed their sweet peas as soon as the weather is warm enough, around the time when buds begin to appear.
- ❖ Like tomato plants, sweet peas need a great amount of food to sustain them. Keep this in mind as you grow your own.

The best time for sewing sweet peas (2:36)

- ❖ When Ursula first took over the garden, they preferred to sew sweet pea seeds in the autumn, but now that it's warmer for longer, they've begun to push this back into November time.
- ❖ They follow with a second sewing in the Spring, to ensure there's a good crop. Sometimes they flower together and sometimes they don't, but usually this means they have an abundant supply of sweet peas for many months.
- ❖ Ursula chooses to display five plants per support so each plant can be properly cared for without being overcrowded.

Ad-hoc breeding programme (10:00)

Ursula describes the informal sweet pea breeding programme.

- ❖ Sweet Pea 'Toffee Apple' is always covered in abundant flowers. Although they didn't intentionally breed this variety, Easton was originally sent Sweet Pea 'Winston Churchill' and after sewing, when it came to bloom, it came up in a vibrant red, much smaller than 'Winston Churchill'. In its fifth year now, it still comes true every year, and performs incredibly well.
- ❖ Sweet Pea 'Pink Pimpernel' deliberately bred. In a bright wild pink, Easton Walled Gardens now has enough seed to distribute, and this variety remains true in its third year. A really exciting bloom of their very own!

When to stop cutting sweet peas (11:27)

- ❖ At Easton, they choose to let the sweet peas flower for around a month, to six weeks.
- ❖ To get the best seeds Ursula explains that feeling the pod is a good way to tell if its ready for harvest. A green pod with an oily residue will be too young. As they begin to turn yellow, it is still too early, but as it turns brown and isn't too dry, this is the moment for perfect picking.
- ❖ If you wait too long the seed pod will then split open and will throw the seed across the entire garden. Act quick, but not too quick.

Incorporating roses into meadows (13:17)

A great way to add height into a meadow. Through the long grass, the roses are supported by structures crafted by Easton's local blacksmith. Ursula lists some of her favourite varieties:

- ❖ Rosa 'Lady of Shalott' – A beautiful orange/red
- ❖ Rosa 'The Lark Ascending' – a golden orange bloom
- ❖ Rosa Rugosa 'Rubra' - looks great in a wild area. This is a great choice to add colour, scent, and movement to your meadow. An experience for all the senses.

Arthur explains that many people might think the concept of growing roses in a meadow goes against the grain, as typically, these plants need space, and to be mulched. Ursula finds that the roses thrive, although they will still need weeding from time to time.

Snowdrops (18:10)

- ❖ Also famous for their snowdrop festival and wild snowdrop garden, Ursula explains that the snowdrops have held a presence at Easton well before they moved to the gardens in the 1980s.
- ❖ Easton is careful to not force a narrative onto the garden in snowdrop season, allowing them to naturalise organically. The snowdrops mark the turning of the year and symbolise new life after the cold winter.

Other bulbs at Easton Walled Gardens (19:47)

- ❖ Tulips – these are planted every year as the light soil means they don't last from one year to the next.
- ❖ Hyacinth – Ursula says these aren't planted enough. Their flowering period between the snowdrops and the tulips is always a welcome sight at Easton.
- ❖ Alliums – 'Graceful Beauty' – one of Ursula's favourites. Great in prairie planting, each small white flower has a delicate, pale pink centre. Around 30 cm tall.

More information on Easton Walled Gardens

With the central gardens open February until late autumn, the café and shop is open until Christmas. For more details and to learn more about Easton's exclusive varieties visit www.visiteaston.co.uk.