

**Darren Everest**  
**Isle of Wight**  
**Sweet Peas**

With an extra helping of luck, I will be exhibiting my display of Sweet Peas for the second year running.

To say it has been a difficult growing season would be an understatement of the highest order. Excessive rainfall, probably experienced by every grower from the Autumn onwards has made growing very difficult. Although not suffering from severe flooding as some growers have experienced, my garden, where I grow, has suffered from being consistently waterlogged from Autumn right up to just a few weeks ago.

Despite having a gully running along the back of the garden to divert any excessive rainfall, this has on occasion not been sufficient and water has still managed to breach the defences and ingress into the polytunnels. This has caused rivers to flow down the pathways between the raised beds. Even as recently as three weeks ago the paths were underwater.

Although grown in raised beds the plants roots were still growing down into the sodden soil and several just rotted off. I probably lost up to a fifth of the plants.

To add to the stress, Sweet Peas do not like cold nights and their delicate buds abort if it drops below eight degrees at night. During the first week or so of May the temperatures dropped to only just above freezing and despite turning the heating on in the polytunnel, many buds were still lost.

Ideally I'd like to have a few blooms out up to two weeks before the show in order to evaluate them and just be a little more confident of having a good cut for the show. However, they have only just began to come into bud having recovered somewhat from the dreaded bud drop.

Unlike live plants, exhibiting cut flowers is all down to timing, especially when your chosen flower has a shelf life of just a few days. You can't really time Sweet Peas, you just have to cut them at the right time to encourage the next batch to come through.

Exhibiting at Chelsea will be down to mother nature looking after me. Gardening is supposed to be good for ones mental health. Growing for Chelsea certainly isn't!

If we manage to put up a display it will be nothing short of miraculous. Last year was our first year exhibiting at Chelsea and we were thrilled to be awarded a Silver Gilt Medal. I would normally be looking to improve on that and go one better and get a Gold, however, this year, I'll be happy just to be able to do any sort of display!

We have a few varieties that are new to our collection this year. We have added some more vibrant colours as the ones we exhibited last year proved to be a big hit with the visitors. Varieties such as Pluto, Milly and Hannah McGovern have been added to bring a bit more WOW to the display.

Hannah McGovern



Pluto



Milly

