

SPUDULIKE!

It is this time of year that our thoughts turn to get our seed potatoes ready for the planting season, and over the years I have seen potatoes grown in a whole range of containers, not just in the vegetable plot.



Marshalls, the seed company based near Huntingdon, have cottoned on to this idea too and they have a splendid offer available that I would strongly recommend. They are offering 3 large gro-sacks (similar to the green garden waste sacks that the Oxford City Council ask householders to use in the city when they are gardening and producing debris, which the council collect every 2 weeks). These gro-sacks are portable and easy to carry as they have 2 handles, and are durable enough to last a good few years. The gro-sacks have holes strategically placed in them so as to avoid water logging. The Marshalls offer also includes 15 seed potatoes, of the 'Swift' variety, which are extra early potatoes, and can start producing edible harvests 3 weeks before other types of potatoes. You will have to provide your own planting medium, as this isn't included in the offer. Once you have the bags, seed potatoes and planting medium, the idea is to half fill the bag with the moist soil/compost, and plant the potatoes 4 inches deep. As the plants grow, you add more moist soil/compost so as to keep the growth tips just below soil level. Keep applying the moist planting medium regularly until it is 2 inches below the top of the bag. To ensure a great harvest, you will need to keep the bag lightly watered and fed throughout the growing process. You will then have some great waxy new potatoes to enjoy long before your friends.

This is a great way to grow potatoes on a patio, in a greenhouse or on a balcony/yard or roof garden. You can even try growing them indoors for an extra early harvest compared to outdoor gardeners. Call Marshalls direct on 01480 44 33 90 if you want to take up this great offer. Alternatively, you could try growing them in other containers, using the same growing techniques. However you choose to grow them, if you want to speed up the growing process, lay out your seed potatoes in trays in a cool light place in advance of planting and when the shoots are about 1 inch long plant them. This gives them a good head start.

Other varieties you could grow in the bags or in the vegetable plot are **Arran Pilot**, which is a hugely prolific cropper in light soils.

Sharpe's Express is a white fleshed potato and very good in heavy soil, but is can be hard to get hold of but stores wonderfully.

Catriona has creamy flesh, and is great for exhibiting as it has yellow tubers flecked with purple patches. **Romano** is an oval potato with white flesh but a red skin, it crops later in the year and it must be kept watered in dry weather, but will reward your effort.

Go on, get out there, spring is coming!

Happy Gardening

STUART MABBUTT

MARCHAM MOLDOVA LIFELINE

Moldova, a country about the size of Wales, which lies between Romania and Ukraine, is Europe's poorest nation. It was under the control of Russia until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the USSR, becoming independent in the early 1990s. Moldova has no mineral or energy resources. Agriculture, the main part of the economy in Moldova, was controlled by USSR up to that point.

When the Russians left, they took all the farm machinery, leaving behind little more than devastation. The people of Moldova were left with little memory of traditional agriculture, no effective means to farm, and a seriously impoverished seed bank. As a result, the economy is in dire straits. Many young people have left Moldova to find work, leaving a population dominated by the very young
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and the old. People trafficking, often for prostitution, is a major problem. Schools are ill-equipped and medical care is primitive and limited. Not surprisingly, the country has lost its spirit.

Yet, in the midst of these dire conditions, dedicated people are working to improve schools and medical care, and foster basic business skills in the young people who remain. A lifeline has been set up to support one of the groups in Moldova working against the odds to provide practical local assistance. The group, working under the auspices of the Agape organisation and initially introduced to Marcham through All Saints' Church, is led by Nicu and Lili (who visited here late last year). Support by assistants is dependent on availability of funds. A group of Marcham people visited Moldova last year and are building resources to help in some of Moldova's poorest communities. Abingdon School has also been active in raising funds and identifying practical assistance.

We are launching an ambitious lifeline initiative from Marcham to provide a continuing source of funds to channel through Agape into Moldova village and urban communities; we need as much help as we can muster to keep a local team operating to deliver local development assistance. Money is needed for tools, equipment, simple facilities and manpower, as well as keeping the local support group going, to bring hope and inspiration to the young people that a future can be rebuilt.

Several one-off donations have already been given and new donations will be gratefully received. However, we need to secure a stream of income from regular donation each month to provide a more sustainable source of funds. Some Marcham people have already committed to making regular monthly donations under gift-aid to maximise the value to the fund. We are seeking your support for this worthwhile cause, at the poorest margins of Europe.

A designated bank account is being set up for this purpose, with Eric Dunford as Treasurer. Please contact Eric (tel. 391439) for details of how to contribute.

We are also seeking ideas from Marcham clubs and groups for raising funds and providing support. A meeting will be held in March to describe the needs in Moldova and to exchange ideas for practical ways to help; all will be welcome. Please keep an eye out for details of the time and place on the village noticeboard and on the MADNews website. MADNews will be following progress over the coming months. **MARCHAM MOLDOVA LIFELINE**

FEBRUARY

*Every year when February is here
I think that winter is really past,
The tiny snowdrops start to appear
And it seems that spring has come at last.*

*Birds begin to think of nesting,
In the early dawn for a mate they sing —
But fickle February every time,
Too soon you tease me with thoughts of spring.*

*Just when the days appear to be warmer,
One morning the trees, their branches bare,
Will be etched against a steel-blue sky
And icing-sugar white in the freezing air.*

*The cold hand of winter has gripped the land
To remind me his course is not yet run,
He powders the earth with a flurry of snow,
And chill winds will blow before he is done.*

*But still, in February whatever the weather,
Freezing rain, sunshine or snow,
Spring is but a short time away,
Every year when it's February, this I know.*

