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Brenda G kindly sent me an email with some useful tips on kitchen gardening from Helena Dove, who is the Kitchen Gardener at the Royal Botanical Garden at Kew. Here's a few of her tips.....

Using Comfrey as an organic mulch



Comfrey plants are rich in nutrients and can be used to feed your plants in an organic, eco-friendly way. Helena suggests that you just drop comfrey leaves directly into the soil.

She doesn't use liquid feed because once you start using liquid feeds, you often have to continue. For heavy feeder plants like potatoes she gets the comfrey leaves and put them in the bottom of the planting holes, and waters them in. The nutrients go straight where they're needed, and it retains moisture in the bottom of the holes.

Wild comfrees like common comfrey are fantastic for bees and pollinators, too. However, if you're using comfrey in a kitchen garden bed, you might want to choose the 'Bocking 14' variety, as it's the only sterile comfrey. 'Every other comfrey will self-seed, which is great in a wildflower area, but in a kitchen garden you might not want that.'

Feed the soil, not just the plants

Helena says the key to good soil is to use the no-dig cultivation method, and add good compost. Digging does a lot of damage to your soil. Instead, you can apply a layer of well-rotted compost to the soil surface, usually in autumn. 'Vegetable plants generally have quite shallow roots, so putting compost at the top makes more sense. The nutrients will be readily accessible and naturally work their way down to beneath the plant anyway.'

Plant to attract beneficial insects



Beneficial insects like bees, hoverflies, and wasps will help pollinate plants and control other garden pests. She says to plant flowers to attract the insects that prey on common pests like aphids. Hoverfly larvae are the biggest aphid eater, and they really like wild carrots. At Kew they grow patches of wild carrots - you can grow them like you would a patch of carrots.'

Helena says it's also a nice idea to incorporate edible flowers such as *Calendula* species into your vegetable beds, to attract pollinators and beneficial insects.

Thanks for the tips Helena and thanks to Brenda G for sending them to me