I am Shantibaba, the owner/breeder of Mr Nice Seedbank, a European spread company based in Holland. We breed in several EC countries whose constitutions permit research into the medicinal value of cannabis and allow patients to self-medicate with the plant.

This Outdoor Grow Special edition of Weed World has asked me to contribute, so I am giving ten top tips (derived from my and some excellent growers’ experience) to guide those looking to hone their skills for their 2008 outdoor grow.

Outdoor growing is the most natural way of cultivation for all plants and is the traditional method used for most grain and seed crops. Over many centuries of cultivation, farmers/growers have naturally selected their plants and learnt how to improve soil fertility, use irrigation, deal with pests, and resist diseases. However, as our climate begins to change, we must learn how to adapt to its vicissitudes. The move to cultivation in green-houses and tunnels has been one of the more positive advancements in the agricultural world over the last several decades, as these methods allow the farmer/grower to control certain aspects of climate at particular times of the life cycle of the plants. This allows us to maximize yields and increase the health of the plants.

After speaking to hundreds of growers and examining their suggestions, I came up with the following set of 10 top tips; I trust this will aid those intending to grow outdoors in 2008.
**1 Selection of a seed or clone appropriate to the area’s climatic conditions**

The most important element to understand is the length of the cultivation possible in the climate of the area of the intended grows. In the UK, for example, the season is shorter than in the south of Spain, so choosing a plant with a flowering time of 6 weeks for the UK or a plant with a flowering time of 10 weeks for Spain would both be correct: the climate will affect the ability of the flower to achieve its potential. In the UK, cold weather comes in October, so a plant that finishes by the end of September would be perfect. Understand this principle, do some research on a strain that fulfils the flowering time of your area, and you will be off to a great start. Most strains originating from areas such as Afghanistan (where the cold weather also comes after a short season) would be sensible. Equally appropriate are strains with skunk in them, as these also usually finish flowering after 6-7 weeks.

**2 Finding a site for outdoor growing.**

Finding a suitable and safe location is obviously of paramount importance as it could make the difference between harvesting or not. Check the planned grow site at different times of day and night before attempting to cultivate. Making or having a worn path to the grow area is hazardous and likely to compromise the activity, so try to hide any tracks with bushes or spiky vegetation. Most bush walkers do not cut through vegetation but use a worn track, so go that extra step and burrow under blackberries or similar plants, rather than place dead branches over an obvious pathway.

**3 Seed, seedling or clone.**

Plants are at their most venerable at early stages of growth and serve as tasty morsels of foliage for the local fauna. Birds and rats eat seeds for nourishment. Accordingly, it is highly recommended to grow the plant at least 10-15cm high prior to transporting it to the chosen planting site rather than to merely plant seeds and wait to see if they get through to seedling stage. Ideally, sex the seed and clone the female plant to ensure that every plant counts. This requires germinating seed earlier than one might expect, then shading part of the lower branches to pre-sex them, which usually takes between 10 to 15 days of 12 hours. There is no threat to pollination if every plant is female.

**4 Soil and the fertilizers needed to grow to flower.**

It requires hard manual work to physically weed a site, turn the soil, and replenish the earth to allow the plant the start to life it
needs. One could be lucky and find a plot with good soil, but usually one does not. Visiting the intended site a few months prior to planting will help immensely. One can gain time by digging bigger holes than needed and bringing in bagged pre-mix soil with slow release fertilizers mixed in to the right requirements for the intended strain. It will also be advantageous to dig the holes and fill them with the bag of pre-mix several weeks before planting to allow the animals of the area time to satisfy their curiosity. Weeding, digging holes, fertilizing, and planting unsurprisingly attract curious animals, and there is a strong chance of them disturbing or eating the plants or seeds before they get a chance to grow beyond the seedling stage. Having some time to let the rain settle the newly dug holes and begin the process of leaching nutrients down into the surrounding soil will pay its dividends when the plants go in.

5 Watering the plants and Mulching

It is difficult to find sites with a ready water supply, and bringing in water is often too difficult due to its bulk and weight. Using natural catchments or watching for natural drainage areas might enable utilization of the sub-terrain water movement. Sometimes the soil a few inches down is humid enough to sustain plants without watering, especially if vegetation is already growing there. Tell tale signs that excess water is under the ground include patches of clover and other water thriving ground covers. Use as much organic matter that can be bundled together from the surrounding area to mulch the base of the plant as this will reduce the water loss and keep the humidity in the base of the root ball. Plants become hardy once they establish their root ball and actually fend for themselves, so it is important for the initial first few weeks to ensure that water and mulching is available. The plant’s roots will take on the job of searching out new water and food sources, so establishing the initial growth spurt is the time the plant needs the grower’s helping hand. Obviously if the site is dry with little rainfall but fits the bill as regards all other prerequisites are concerned, one will need to work out if it is worthwhile digging in small reservoirs or using a catchment area to collect water. Toddlers’ inflatable wading pools dug in and camouflaged with the foliage of the area are good stress free ways to collect rain water and provide plants with their water requirements.

6 Sunlight direct and indirect

Physical features such as mountains, ridges and hills block the sunlight as the summer changes to the autumn, so it is of paramount importance to visit the area at different times of the year and follow the direct or indirect hours of sunlight to which the proposed plot is exposed. This factor affects the growth time of the plants, so to get bigger ones it is better to plant them late April to early May in southern Europe or a month later in the north of Europe. Having direct morning sun with indirect afternoon sun prevents
over-exposure; otherwise, watering becomes a chore during the
growth and flower periods. However, indirect sunshine makes the
plant spindly low in yield - a factor worth considering before
doing all the hard physical work.
One grower made the following comment: “I've had my share of
outdoor grows and I feel location is important. Always plant in an
area where your plants will get maximum hours of sunlight. Since
I am in the US, it also needs to be stealth from any air patrols. So
I plant along a tree line to the north and my plants still get a full
view of the southern sky where the sun "arcs" from 10am till 5pm.
I am at 38 lat. So I guess my suggestion is to watch how the sun
arcs in your area before planting in the ground and check the area
every 2 hours to see how much sun they will get.”

7 Pest, Plagues and Predators

Digging, cutting down scrub, and pruning trees will initially
attract animals no matter what is done to attempt to avoid it. Do
things in stages to let the curious ones nose around until they are
content. Digging holes and fertilising soil attract pests and ani-
imals. Try to clear the land, dig, add the food, and leave it for a
while. Return, plant seedlings (or clones), and lay copper wires or
pellets for slugs and similar pests. Small wire-proofing domes cov-
ering seedlings dug into the ground to a depth of 10cm stop ani-
mals eating the seedlings and allow the plants to get to a level of
growth that sustains them to maturity. In Australia, kangaroos
love to eat all the little shoots so it is necessary to build wire
caging to bring a plant to maturity. Cages, however, are rather
conspicuous and might bring unwanted visitors if not hidden.
Soapy water regularly drenched onto the foliage will reduce pests
and plague insects. Caterpillar faeces inside the bud cause mould,
so thorough inspection during flowering is essential.

8 Planting a plot and key rules.

The quality and general fitness of the plant are often compro-
mised by planting too many plants. A single plant, well looked
after and tipped at the early stages of its growth, will spread out
and produce more than six plants competing for space and nutri-
ents. Removing what I call the ‘organic bridges’ - lower branches
or dead leaves that hang to the ground while still attached to the
plant - will reduce pests, as will ensuring there is space between
plants in a plot so their leaves do not mingle. Space surrounding
a plant increases air movement and reduces the likelihood of
moulds arising from overgrowth.
**9 Darkening or weather proofing plants during the final weeks**

Outdoor growers in colder climates often fail to bring a plant to maturity and complain of having to harvest too early before the frosts or heavy rains arrive. In recent years, growers have successfully used different types of woven fabrics in greenhouse and tunnel grows, so one now knows how to protect plants or darken them the last weeks to make sure they finish compact and in time. (Clearly, this is easier for plants in pots or on terraces rather than in plots of state forest or country regions.) From the onset of 12/12 hours of darkness, the plant goes into flowering. At this stage, 6-8 weeks of putting a darkening hood over the plant at the same times of the day and night will result in the plant producing regular, compact, and mature flowers. I usually make a wire frame that fits over and around the plant and then with plastic ties attach a piece of shade cloth (90% reduced to light) or even white/black/white plastic (so totally blackened). I then take the darkening hood off at 7 or 8 am and re-hood the plant 12 or 10 hours late. This procedure forces the plant into flower consistently and produces a good result.

**10 Harvest, drying and making good or average flowers into great product.**

Unless one puts in considerable time and effort, outdoor grows are at the complete mercy of the elements and passing animal (including human) life. Accordingly, if the plants are within 2 weeks of being completed, take the option to harvest early, thereby avoiding theft by those who know or are on the look out at that time of the year. On several previous occasions, I decided to leave plants for another few weeks to get the maximum yield and bring them to full ripeness only to lose the whole lot. The trick to harvesting early is in the curing, and this is often where early plants make the grade. Do as much leaf trimming as possible while the plant reaches its last stages - so only flowers stand erect on the plant, then cut the branches off the main stem, and take them away to a cool and dark cellar type location. Hang them up with enough air moving to prevent moulds from settling and leave them for several weeks while reducing the humidity. Slow drying in a cool room with slight air circulation over time is a great method. Airtight sealed curing while opening the jars each week to allow the gases to escape can only improve the finished product.