Growing the clones in advance will win growing time when there is a quick change over of crops.

Many growers and interested hobby breeders have asked me to talk about the reality of increasing the use of natural sun to be able to harvest more than one time a year. It is not difficult but needs a lot of careful planning and readiness with plants. It will incorporate large chunks of turn around planting work, and of course a lot of clone work, but it will give the grower a real feeling of accomplishment when it works out. Not only is it probably the most cheap and high yielding source of work that can be done with a free light source, but it will explain the real elements that come into play to create that perfect compact and quick turn around harvest. It is one of those quantum leaps a grower takes on board in his or hers belly full of experiences that will bring a smile to their faces if ever they get the chance to put this knowledge into action in a greenhouse or protected outdoor space.

Let us first put all of this into a time line for the Northern hemisphere (NH) growers. The first possible time to be able to get plants into the earth of a greenhouse or an outdoor grow space is when the hours of light allows the plant to grow. This normally begins around the 20th of April and means that the sun light hours are around 17 or 18, but depending upon where you are in the NH it can be plus or minus a week either side of this date.

Spring Harvest is not a myth!
Sitting down with a pen and paper and dividing the growing time and flowering times on a time line are important points of reference.

Considering that plants will usually begin to change their hormones to flower when the hours of light drop to 12 or less it would be fair to say that by the end of July or the first week of August the plants will be shifting to flowering phase. The problem is that for 2 weeks after this phase begins you will only identify it on the plant, physically. So as a general rule, when you see pistils forming on the plant and it is not an auto flowering type, then two weeks before was the date that triggered the plant to begin the shift to the flowering phase. In a natural occurring flowering cycle the plant being used should complete its flowering between 6 to 10 weeks of a 12 hour phase.

Now to attempt to consider doing and harvesting a spring planted crop and then doing the quick turn around of plants to also harvest an autumn crop you will need to be ready with enough plants, preferably clones as this will allow for a consistent harvest and the element of consistency of one type of plant for all the growing needs.

Consider using a clone plant that has a short flowering cycle preferably 6-8 weeks, so something that is predominantly indica would be the best for attempting to do two crops in a natural season of sunlight.

A mother plant that will allow enough clones to be taken to begin in April will need to be grown under lights around January…cutting the clones 3-4 weeks before the intended date of April therefore allowing time for the clone to establish a root system that will take off as soon as it is planted in the ground. Always cut 20% more clones than you will require to allow for any losses during the rooting process, as you can always throw the extras away, but if you are short you will not be able to fill the space by re-cutting clones and rooting them on time.

Beginning to plant around April 20th, would mean the clones should be cut from the mother plant the last week of March to be on time and with healthy root system. Planting the clones and letting the natural sunshine do its thing and allow the plant to set down its roots should take about 2 weeks maximum. After this 10 day-2 week period the clone should have begun its growing phase and more than likely put on a few sets of leaves as well as a few cm of height.

The secret to bringing home a spring planted harvest is to not wait till the plant is at a height that you may normally feel is acceptable before triggering flowering, but to darken the entire plant area or individual plants after this two week period of growth has passed. That means the clones should be subjected to a darkening regime no later than the 10th of May. Darkening plants for a regular 12 hour period each day for the entire 6-8 weeks will be the single...
most determining factor in harvesting on time as well as harvesting compact healthy flowers.

Darkening is something flower growers in greenhouses or tunnels have been using for many years now. Each different type of flower has a photo-triggering phase, which means it will begin to flower when the natural sunlight reaches the required dark to light ratio. Magnolias flower at the very beginning of the spring and sometimes at the end of the winter months where the hours of light reach 10 hours with 14 hours darkness ...and therefore every plant has a predetermined light meter that tells it whether to flower or to grow. Since we already know that Cannabis is triggered generally at 12/12 and grows at 18 / 6 with light to dark being the ratio, we can block out the natural sunlight to replicate flowering instead of leaving the plant to take its natural course and continue to grow until the natural sunlight hours reach 18/6 according to the phase of the seasons.

There are a lot of automatic systems that can be installed in a tunnel or greenhouse that will do this perfectly and without the use of manual labor...but they do cost. A cheap version is to use a black plastic bag or build a darkening dome that fits over the plant easily and can be done by a person on a regular way with consistency. It must be pitch black assimilating night time if it is to be effective, and is advisable to do it at the same time day in day out so the plant can form its flower in a healthy and consistent way.

Pitch blackness is the reason flowers form well and densely, not sunlight as many people believe. Sunlight is important in photosynthesis which converts sunshine into growth and development of a plant. The flower from the plant relies on pitch blackness in the case of cannabis. So test that the darkening system you choose to use does not allow for sunlight to enter, and if you are in doubt then act as the plant and place yourself under the material you will be using to darken the plant. If you cannot see your outstretched hand while in the darkened area it will mean all is good enough to flower. If however there are areas under this darkening that allow sunshine to infiltrate then the plant may become confused and act accordingly, producing fluffy non compact unfinished flowers. I cannot emphasise how important it is to have complete darkness otherwise this process will not be rewarding or much use.

To recap, we cut the clones in the last week of March, rooted them and then planted them by April 20th, allowed them to grow under the natural sunlight until the 10th of May where we darkened the planted area on a regime of 12/12 for 6 to 8 weeks, taking us to the end of June or the first week of July whereby we harvest. However at this phase of the journey we should have made it clear that we need to make new clones from the mother plant and have enough clones on hand to replant the space where we are harvesting the finished plants. This means on our time-scale the second set of clones should have been completed and gone to be rooted by early to mid June, so they will be ready for planting by the first week of July.
Once the second set of clones are planted then you can choose to allow them to follow the season naturally as there will still be enough time for the plants to grow and flower as per normal. I would recommend using the darkening system again once the plants begin to naturally go into the flowering phase which would be expected to occur in August. The reason for this is to make sure that the potential of the flower is reached without failure since there are times in Nature where cloud cover or poor light can adversely affect the end result. Darkening a plant means you can count on a due completion date plus or minus a few days...which means you can work out dates where you will need help and so forth.

There are ways to go on and do a further crop with the use of supplementary light and Sativa predominant plants, but we will discuss this in the future as it is costly and needs a lot more specific type of species, but it is possible. Most people who try this technique of darkening become convinced of this cost effective method and excellent yield per plant and may find it very difficult to go back to growing indoors with lights(unless it is over the winter months). So if you are in a position to convert a small greenhouse or tunnel and are able to make the commitment and investment of regular darkening system, I assure you it will change how you view growing. In fact I would suggest it will be the beginning of a quantum leap in your development as a primary producer.

Planted and grown clones after 2 weeks from initial planting.

Growing clones show uniform development in a darkened situation.

Freshly planted and uniformly spaced clones in a darkened greenhouse.