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Reprint from Volume 20 Number 17

September 4, 2008

Good Life Gardening ~ Brian Crumblehulme September Calendar

On the coast at least September is the 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness' and, I should add, the season for heavy dews. In recent years in the UK, there has begun a mild passion for 'dew art' whereby a grass-artist brushes a maze or pattern on the dewy grass before breakfast. These ephemeral designs are best appreciated from above, viewed from a deck or window, or by walking them before the sun evaporates them, and they look much better if you are holding a hot cup of coffee.

Potatoes

Speaking of projects, now is the time to dig and store potatoes in a cool frost-free place. Most people keep the small ones as 'seed' for next year. However, the green ones are more resistant to rot or drying out while in storage. I also found that many of the small ones I missed germinated well enough left in the ground; a covering of straw was sufficient to resist any errant frost.

Apples

The next few weeks are also the time for picking and storing most apples. The exception is Granny Smiths which taste better if left on the tree until after frost. Assuming the raccoons don't get them first! Before storing them, always examine the fruit carefully for any signs of damage that might lead to rot. I find they keep well if wrapped individually in newspaper; never store them with other produce because the gas given off by ripening apples will cause other fruit to over-ripen very quickly

Winter Sowing

Early in the month is the last time for sowing onions, lettuce, rapini, & mesclun mixes for winter. Don't forget to sow spinach, parsley, bok choy, broccoli and other brassicas for next year. Then, sometime before Thanksgiving, collect a few bags of seaweed and dig it into a bed for garlic that will sprout and root before the cold. Last year I did this with my shallots as well and they are nearly the size of onions.

Rhubarb & Asparagus

Rhubarb and asparagus will be fading fast now and a thick covering of manure or compost over the crown will provide stronger shoots next spring. Asparagus is also partial to salt,

and therefore appreciates a dressing of seaweed. Both plants are very hardy so frost is not an issue but early heat is needed if you want to pick them in February. These plants can also be forced by lifting in the winter so allow them to rest now by removing any remaining leaves.

Raspberries, Strawberries

Excepting late varieties, raspberries will have finished fruiting and this is a good time to remove all the old canes and to shorten and support the new ones followed once again by a thick layer of manure or compost. The plants may seem dormant during the winter but the roots are still growing slowly and taking in nutrient in readiness for a burst of growth in spring.

Strawberries too will produce much better next year if they are planted out now in deep well-manured ground. If you have the time and space, you can plant a few in pots to be taken inside in October. Keep them in a greenhouse or cool window sill and only water them when dry.

Flowers

The flower garden can be extended in the same way by potting up a few favourites such as geraniums, salvias, carnations, antirrhinums, and pansies or violets for indoor use. Trim the plants to remove any long shoots and old flowers and leave them outside as long as there is some warm sun, after which they too can be encouraged to continue flowering through January on a cool north or east-facing window sill.

Spring Bulbs

One of the fun activities in the flower garden this month is planting bulbs. I choose bulbs that will naturalise in my garden so I do not have to replace them each year. Daffodils are the most obvious because the deer don't like them. Dwarf varieties like Tête-à-Tête will flower very early if planted near a south-facing wall, while the larger daffodils and narcissi look better in drifts under the fruit trees. I have also been successful naturalising hyacinths in a bed under the blue geraniums where they provide a fragrant mid-spring show; the deer sometimes nibble a few leaves but will not touch the flowers. Hyacinths are one of those curious bulbs which produce a

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'This article was published (Sept 4, 2008) in 'Island Tides'. 'Island Tides' is an independent, regional newspaper distributing 17,500 print copies in throughout the Gulf Islands and the Canadian Strait of Georgia from Tsawwassen to Campbell River, BC.'

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growth inhibitor that retards their development until the sun is warmer. That inhibitor is destroyed by exposure to cold, hence they can be 'pre-chilled' in a refrigerator and tricked into an early start. These treated bulbs can be started outside, brought inside in November and be flowering by Christmas. After which they can still be planted outside again to flower next year.

Sweet Peas

This is the best time to sow sweet peas. Sown in late September through early October, sweet peas will germinate and develop 6-12-inch shoots and long roots that will withstand all but the hardest frosts. Sweet peas will initially send up a single shoot that can last all winter to support the growing root system. The main shoots, the ones that will grow to 8 or 10 feet, will only develop later in spring when the weather is warmer. Ideally, they should be set directly into deeply dug well-composted trenches where they are to flower. I can rarely spare the space for them at this time so mine end up in a couple of big pots from which I transplant them in early spring. Transplanting always slows them down for a couple of weeks but the trade off is that they can be moved into a shed for a while if the winter turns really nasty. Either way, I have a few to grow near the pergola and enough to plant in the kitchen garden for continuous cut-flowers from June through October. Under no circumstances should sweet peas be used as food; many other pea shoots and flowers are not only edible but very good; sweet peas, despite their appearance, can make you ill.

Recipes for September's Weather

For a Cold Day - Burnt Apple Borscht

Prep Time 30 minutes, Cooking time 3 hours, Serves about 6

- 4 Tbsp Butter
- 1 Kilo fresh raw beets, peeled & chopped
- a couple of leeks, chopped
- 1 cup of chopped cabbage or kale
- 2 carrots grated
- 2 onions grated
- 2 cloves mashed garlic
- 2 Kilos beef bones or 1/2 kilo stewing meat
- salt, pepper, bay leaves, parsley
- 2 beaten eggs
- 2 large apples, sliced
- juice of 1 lemon
- sour cream

Melt the butter in a large casserole and toss in the beets, leeks, cabbage, carrots, onions & garlic. Saute for ten minutes stirring frequently. Add the meat bones and seasoning, cover with cold water and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer for 2 1/2 hours. Remove the beef bones and bay leaves if you can find them. Put about half the vegetables and some stock in a blender, add the eggs and puree until smooth. Return to the

stock-pot and stir well. Meanwhile, slice the apples and wash them in lemon juice. Heat up the BBQ and grill on both sides until brown and bubbly, or, fry in butter until golden.

Ladle the soup into pre-heated bowls, add a generous dollop of sour cream in the centre and float the apple slices around the sides. Serve hot with fresh bread.

For a Hot Day – Apple Nut Salad

Prep time 10 minutes, Cooking time 10 minutes, Serves four

- 2 Tbsp butter
- about 1 tbsp chilli powder
- salt
- 1 cup of peanuts
- 2 crisp apples, cored & chopped
- 2 cups shredded lettuce
- juice of 1 lemon
- 1/2 cup raisins

Melt the butter and add the chilli powder, salt and peanuts. Mix well and cook gently for five minutes until hot and sizzling. Add the apples and lemon juice and continue to heat stirring regularly for a further five minutes. Quickly combine the hot mix with the shredded lettuce, toss well and serve at once with a topping of raisins.

Note: this can be as 'hot' or cool as you like. The hotness of the chilli is mitigated by the cool apples and the cold lettuce. I haven't tried it with pears but that should work with walnuts and garden-fresh figs. 🍷

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