

# Reprint Island Tides

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## April Garden Calendar Brian Crumblehulme

It never ceases to amaze me how different are our world-view and our expectations. In my world, gardening, building, cooking, dancing and living, are all *processes*, one long continuum where we fit our tiny lives into the matrix of a culture.

Consequently, I am intrigued and perhaps uneasy with the more contemporary concept of the 'project'. We divide our lives into *projects*, things we do and supposedly complete. We learn and apply a skill, then move on.

In days of yore, the skill of the process was infused with the skill of patience: 'to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose...' and so on.

Now it is spring, warm, wet, loud with frogs, full of hope, and we think of projects. What do we see when we look out at the garden? Work? Optimism? Responsibility. An opportunity to engage with a little bit of that process?

Garden books are full of projects: dig the flower bed, plant a tree, weed the garden, mulch the roses, and so much more.

Better yet to say: prepare that bed for the veggies, plant a tree for the grandchildren, clean the garden because I care, feed the roses because they are my children.

### Tomatoes For All Seasons

I like tomatoes and I use them for everything from salads to stock. A creeping tropical vine, wild tomatoes hail from central America. Although they are perennial they will do very well as an annual.

Tomatoes need time to grow, flower and ripen and in our climate, early April is the last realistic time to sow tomatoes for this year. I like to grow a selection: cherry tomatoes for speed and fun. Small fruit ripen quicker and small plants in tubs can be easily moved into the sun or shelter as the weather permits.



Happily may I walk.

Happily, with abundant dark clouds, may I walk.

Happily, with abundant showers, may I walk.

Happily, with abundant plants, may I walk.

Happily, on a trail of pollen, may I walk.

Happily may I walk.

Being as it used to be long ago, may I walk.

—Navajo Chant

A few Italian plum tomatoes for flavour, also fairly early; one or two novel varieties, heirloom perhaps, just to see what happens— and a good quality main crop to last through fall.

This year I am trying Silver Fir Tree, a Russian variety with a lovely name. If the write-up is to be believed, they are bushy with large tasty fruit and spectacular foliage so a few pots on the patio might be mistaken for begonias. Last year I grew Big Beef as a late crop and they kept going till nearly Christmas when I picked several kilos of green fruit that continued to ripen through February.

Also part of the process; winter flowering shrubs are past their best and now is the time to prune them or clean them up before they produce new branches that will flower next winter. Camellias and rhododendrons usually don't need much tidying, but older plants can get straggly and sometime damaged by animals or snow and a light haircut can do wonders for looks. Winter heather and forsythia will always look better with the old growth clipped and with some mulch and fertilizer, it promotes them into fresh new growth. This year too, I have a bed of carrots underglass for a few weeks. Partially to keep them warm, and partially to keep the critters away. Later this month and again in July, I will sow more for late summer and winter use. Carrots and parsnips, like kale and cabbage, all taste better after a winter frost. Baby summer ones in orange glaze are good too.

If summer isn't too late, this may be a good year for figs, grapes and lemons. Mine all have big buds. As of writing in mid-March, the grapes and lemons are loaded with flower buds and the figs are covered with tiny 'figgets' that will grow slowly through August.

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## Food

One of my standbys, when I have less than an hour to prepare dinner, is a classic soufflé. What the French have not done to the egg, cannot be done. The soufflé can be made in 30 minutes, is light, meatless, and goes with anything.

I begin by turning on the oven to about 410°C. Then make a bechamel sauce with a little butter, milk, loads of grated Cheddar or mashed Brie, a pinch of flour or cornstarch, and some fresh grated black pepper. Melt all this stirring until it is creamy. Off heat: stir in the yolks and very carefully, fold in the beaten egg whites. One egg per person is fine. Three between two people is ample. Pour it in to a glazed ramekin and pop it in the oven for 20 minutes. If you make individual soufflés, they will be ready. If you make one large one, then turn the oven down to about 375°C and leave your creation for another 10 minutes to cook through.

Most people assume that a soufflé rises because of the

trapped air bubbles in the egg albumin. This accounts for about 20% of the effect. Most of the rise comes from steam created by the high heat on the milk and eggs. That is why after you have carefully carried your masterpiece to the table, and everyone has applauded, it will collapse in a cloud of steam when the first cut is made.

To optimize your soufflé, the oven must be hot, at least at the beginning, your egg white should be quite stiff to trap the water, and the ramekin should be near the bottom of the oven so it will get hot quickly. I like to sprinkle sliced almonds over mine so they toast during baking and add crunch to the otherwise soft experience. Underdone asparagus works well too as a sidedish, especially with a lemon sauce. A cheese soufflé demands a fine white wine, a Muller Thurgau for example, or a Pinot Grigio, with perhaps a little chocolate something to follow with an espresso or fresh mint tea. ☞