

Reprint Island Tides

Visit www.islandtides.com for more interesting articles on other BC, national & international topics

Reprint from Volume 25 Number 15

Aug 1, 2013

August Garden Calendar - Brian Crumblehulme

Politics and science aside, the world's weather systems have turned topsy-turvy. Daniel McKenney of Natural Resources Canada, Canadian Forest Service, says simply 'there is strong evidence of a pending and profound change in global climate.' Here on the west coast and comparable areas in Europe we are seeing wetter milder winters and dryer summers. Every recent summer has all the islands on the look out for wildfires. Embrace it or deny it, today's weather is not what it used to be.

What does this mean for farmers and gardeners on the islands in the Salish Sea? On the positive side it implies we can grow many more plants and trees previously considered exotic. Ten years ago I planted a fuchsia hedge. Now as I write it is 12 meters long, over a meter high jungle of red and purple flowers, a year-round evergreen home to Anna's humming birds, and is completely drought-resistant.

Grapes, pomegranates, loquats, kiwi, lemon and lime trees, persimmons, olives, apricots and figs, even Bougainvillea, bananas and palms can be inspired to flourish next to the venerable King apples. In their North Saanich nursery, Fruit Trees & More, Bob & Verna Duncan have a demonstration orchard stocked with mature examples of all the above—and more.

Winter snows and ice are giving way to a rainy season where many traditional garden flowers just keep on trucking and roses have to be pruned to induce them to take a rest.

On the downside new invasive insects are moving in and native bees and wasps are succumbing to damp wet winters. Meanwhile, mildew and blackspot leaf fungi have increased on roses and fruit trees. Native trees like cedars are also giving way to more drought-resistant firs and maple, and we've all seen the effects of the pine beetle plague across the province and into Alberta.

If you like horror stories, look up images of Kudzu. Originally from Japan and South China, Kudzu behaves like the invasion of a man-eating ivy in a B-movie, and at last count it has crept up to Oregon. And don't even get me started about the huge

increase in the slug population with all their new hybrid varieties.

Winter has become a season of moss and heavy rain which means don't build your house on a slope and plan for water run off. The BC Government are advocating a tree planting program to mitigate warmer summer temperatures, absorb winter water and reduce erosion. Water needs to soak into the ground not get sluiced into the sea and that means seasonal mini-wetlands and flood zones. Low lying clay soils will turn to gumbo if not planted properly and high clear-cut slopes such as driveways will wash out unless run-off channels are created.



Weather has to be the most crucial factor when it comes to growing plants in any garden wherever you live in the world and gardeners are finding that well-defined growing seasons no longer exist —BBC Garden World.

My driveway has a distinct dip in the middle where rainwater meets from both directions. For several years we drove through a mini lake that lasted for weeks until a few years back when I dug out a drain pit and filled it with rock and then back-filled with gravel. Now even after a November downpour, all the water soaks away within a couple of hours.

Dry summers also imply managing our water. About the size of Saltspring, Malta lies a few miles north of Tunisia, has about 2 feet of rain a year and supports a population of 350,000 people plus a few thousand seasonal tourists. Potable water and produce are ferried in and trees are not part of the landscape. We are not there yet but I predict a few water collection tanks will be in everyone's Christmas stocking this year.

The venerable British Royal Horticultural Society have taken to planting tropicals outside, and the Editor in Chief of the RHS Journals remarks that 'we will have to be more ecologically sensitive, adapting what we grow and how and where we grow it. Gardeners of old knew how to manipulate micro-climates and also use valuable natural resources such as soil, composted garden waste and rainwater to best effect, selecting the right plant for the right place.'

Visiting Europe a few years ago I chatted with a gardener from the UK who informed me that French wine companies were buying up farms in Yorkshire in anticipation that the north of England would soon become the next Burgundy.

When we think of gardening we tend to think of summer

© Island Tides Publishing Ltd. This article may be reproduced with the following attribution, in its entirety, and notification to Island Tides Publishing Ltd.

*'This article was published (Aug 1, 2013) in 'Island Tides',
an independent, regional newspaper distributing across the Strait of Georgia on the Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island.'*

Island Tides Publishing Ltd, Box 55, Pender Island, BC V0N 2M0 • 250-629-3660 • islandtides@islandtides.com • www.islandtides.com

with a few token bulbs for spring. Now with dryer summers we are encouraged to plant xerophytes and drought-tolerant varieties. Well and good.

However, milder winters are a perfect opportunity for winter gardening where the cooler wetter weather means no watering and less weeding, and now is the time to sow and plant for winter. Browse through the West Coast Seeds Fall & Winter catalogue for ideas or take a spin into a good local nursery for winter vegetable and bedding plants.

Although almost all the climate zones in the USA have consistently recorded warmer weather for the past 10-15 years, it may not be correct to infer a uniform warming trend. The *New York Times* called it 'global weirding' with strange and unpredictable weather patterns.

I leave the last word to the RHS:

- plant for the future, using trees, shrubs and hedges that are drought tolerant;
- plant windbreaks to protect the garden from stormier weather;
- prepare soil thoroughly to maximise drainage, adding organic matter, gravel or grit;
- set up a water butt, or two, so you have your own natural supply during warmer weather;
- create wildlife gardens with ponds and water features to give some respite to animals in hotter drier summers;
- don't plant for the long-term in flood areas; and
- be careful if gardening on slopes not to clear too much of the existing vegetation, as this will create problems with erosion.

Summer Veggie Recipes

Summer is such an amazing time for really great fresh fruit & vegetables that meals begin with a walk in the garden to see what jumps into the bowl. First question: is this a potato, rice, pasta or bread affair? Because these carbohydrate require the longest cooking time in that order.

On The Grill

For potatoes I start by turning on the BBQ, cut small potatoes in half, larger ones in quarters, toss lightly in canola and throw them on the grill. Next gather a bowl of vegetables and salad greens. Eggplant, carrots and other firm critters also take a while to cook through so they quickly follow the potatoes on the grill. Green beans, cauli, snow peas, tomatoes and perhaps a crisp apple really just need searing.

In The Skillet

This can be done on the same grill by adding the ingredients in order of cooking time, but frankly I find my heavy iron skillet so much easier and with less hazard of loosing precious portions down between the slats of the grill. Olive oil works well for this hot salad; and a splash of sesame oil adds a wonderful aroma to the mess. Add cherry tomatoes last.

Put all the vegetables in a large bowl with the drippings from the skillet, toss the coarsely chopped greens beginning with basil and arugular and put a handful on each plate. Top with a few grilled prawns or your favourite local chèvre, a drift of gently burnt almonds or pine nuts and serve immediately.

A great idea from British chef Yotam Ottolenghi has lime juice/tahini/green chili & yogurt blended until creamy, then spooned on. I also like sour cream, chives and pomegranate with a dash of lemon. The sky's the limit.

If you are entertaining kids (and those that still think like kids) the same principle can be used in a pizza. Brush the shell with a little olive oil and pre-bake until done but not browned. Make up your mix as above, heap it onto the hot shell and cover with grated cheeses, sliced olives, sun-dried tomatoes, anchovies, chocolate bars, whatever... and bake in a hot oven until the cheeses melt. Serve with cold, dry cider. 🍷