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October Garden Calendar ~ Brian Crumblehulme

Whenever you plant your shoots, be sure to spread rich dung around and bury them in plenty of earth—Virgil 29 BC

'Putting the garden to bed' is a common catch phrase at this season and for summer gardens that is indeed true. After frost or heavy rain, cut the tops off perennial plants, weed flower beds, mulch with manure or compost, and leave the garden tidy until spring. In many regions of the country this is your only choice before freeze-up but here on the Salish Sea the growing season just keeps rolling along.

Spring bulbs are an obvious example, grass is another cool weather plant. Grass sown now will germinate and grow slowly through winter to provide an established green mat in spring. Trees and bushes will also develop roots even after the leaves have fallen, so the earlier you can plant the stronger they are for next spring.

In the vegetable garden beg, buy or borrow some hardy winter plants and get them in the ground asap. I have half my cauliflowers, broccoli, kale, lettuce, etc, in the greenhouse and the rest outside. That way they will grow at different speeds and I will get some crops even in very cold weather.

Early perennials such as rhubarb and asparagus require a rich earth. So clean them up after the first frost, remove any weeds, and mulch heavily with farmyard manure and wood ash from the stove. At this time too you can sow broad beans outside and snow peas under glass. October is garlic planting time. Garlic needs a good quality loam to grow well but not too rich or it will produce too much leaf. Remove any weeds, add some compost and turn the soil over. Then after the first storm collect a few bags of seaweed and spread this over the ground before you plant. The garlic bulbs will benefit from the minerals and the salt.

In the flower garden, this is the time to think about

sweet peas. Yes, you read me correctly, sweet peas. Indigenous to Sicily, the sweet pea was introduced to Europe 250 years ago by a monk called Friar Cupani who sent a few seeds to friends in England and France. These specimens dithered along for some 100 years until Victorian times when growers decided to do something with this weedy fragrant plant. The first breakthrough came in the 1880s from a gardener called Silas Cole working on the estate of the Earl of Spencer. Cole's varieties were huge, fragrant, colourful and politely named after his boss, Spencer who likely couldn't tell a sweet pea from any other P. They were so successful that in 1900 the Royal Horticultural Society convened an international conference on the new flower! In the next generation a master gardener developed a technique to grow the flowers to perfection and E R Janes went on to win the annual flower competitions for the next thirty years until in 1952 he published his secret. Here it is:

Sow your seeds under glass in late September or early October individually in 3" pots filled with compost. Once germinated the plants should be left outside unprotected except in the most severe weather. Protect from slugs, birds and mice.

Meanwhile, select a low area of the garden where there is some protection from summer heat (sweet peas grow best in cool earth) and dig a trench 3ft x 3ft by as long as you wish. Fill this trench with equal parts stable manure, compost and a sprinkling of lime and bone meal and leave until spring. Then erect a fence down the center of the trench with a double row of bamboo stakes 10ft high, 18 inches apart. In late March pinch the tops off each seedling and plant them one to each stake with an additional sprinkling of lime and wood ash. Ensure that each plant is pressed firmly into the soil by treading the ground. As the seedlings grow they should be tied to their supports with string every few inches and remove every

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side shoot and every tendril. Do not water the plants unless it is very dry and then you should flood the trench. Remove all weeds and keep the top soil loosely cultivated. Remove all flower buds as they appear. Cultivation should not take more than an hour a day. When the warm weather arrives the peas will begin to grow rapidly, perhaps 2 inches a day and once they have reached 5 feet high let them go and allow them to bloom freely. Under the correct conditions they will produce blooms with 18inch stems, the plants will grow 12 to 14 feet and they will flower until frost. By mid August you will need a stepladder to pick your flowers.

Okay: so I've sown the pea seeds and prepared the trench.

Wanted: flower pickers, ten feet tall, to work next July and August.

October Feasting Recipes

Canadian Thanksgiving, though named after the American holiday, is celebrated around the time of the Pagan/Christian harvest festival, with all its emphasis on feasting. Besides roast pigs, game and geese, the most prominent ancient harvest foods were root crops, apples and pears, bread, cheeses and a quaint fruit called gourds, now commonly referred to as squash.

Cleopatra's Squash:

This recipe harks back to the days of Cleopatra, the last Queen of Egypt and if you ever have the urge to die for food, this is it. In reality it is a sauce, suited to almost any winter squash: acorn, Hubbard, buttercup, pumpkin, etc.

Steam, roast or bake the squash as you prefer for your dinner. Meanwhile, prepare this sauce in a saucepan. (Prep time 10 minutes, Cook for 10 minutes)

- 1/4 cup Olive oil
- 1/2 cup chicken or vegetable stock
- A splash of white wine
- 1 Tbsp honey
- 1 cup cooking dates
- 1 Tbsp white or cider vinegar

Then add: Ground black pepper, cumin, coriander, fresh or dried mint & ginger. This is a sweet sauce so you can be fairly liberal with the spices. Gently simmer the whole mess together for at least ten minutes, stirring from time to time. Then blend until smooth. The result should be a rich, chocolaty aromatic sauce. If it's too sweet, add a dash of vinegar. Too spicy, make it sweeter. Too thick, add stock or wine. Too thin, more dates and oil. Serve the squash on a silver platter and pour the hot sauce over. Garnish with a drift of toasted pine nuts. Goes great with

chicken, turkey or ham and it's the nearest thing to Nirvana because you can go back for seconds. You can also use the sauce as a dip for pumpkin chips.

Left-Over Squash Soup

In a deep pan fry some chopped onion in a little Canola until transparent. Pile some cold cooked squash onto it and add salt, pepper & nutmeg to taste. Add a couple of tablespoons of frozen orange concentrate or the equivalent in fresh orange with some grated rind. Stir well and add sufficient chicken stock to make a good consistency. Bring to a boil and simmer for five minutes stirring occasionally. Serve hot with a drizzle of unsweetened whipping cream or reduce the amount of orange and grate in a quantity of ginger, then blend well before serving. Top with whipping cream and a sprinkling of fine chopped chives or scallions.

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