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'The Good Life' by Brian Crumblehulme **August Cornucopia**

There is such an air of expectancy this month when all the summer crops are in fruition and the flower garden is a blaze of brilliant colour. A gardening manual of mine dated 1688, claims that the best time for a walk in August is just after a rain, the dust is settled, and everything smells so fresh.

Memory Joggers for Your Garden Calendar

- This is the time for last sowings of traditional fall, winter and spring vegetables. The fast salad crops can be sown almost anytime through fall, outside if the ground is warm enough or under glass. Many slow-growing crops such as broccoli, carrots and beets, actually require a warm earth for germination even though they may be quite happy under snow (whatever that is) and actually taste better following a frost. After harvesting, the potato patch is ideally suited for sowings of winter cabbage, kale, chard, etc, or for transplanting those already started. After planting any of the brassicas (cabbage family) take time to tread the roots in very firmly as these plants thrive better on firm ground and the roots will suffer less from the late summer drought if they are watered in properly. The same beds will serve double duty if you inter-plant with faster growing salads. Successive sowings of lettuce, mesclun mixes, endive, kale, carrots, onions, will provide for graduated winter use.

- Onions and garlic should be ripened off in the sun before harvesting. Take care not to damage the leaves of garlic if you wish to braid them into handy ropes for the kitchen. Saffron is an autumn crocus that grows well in this region if you have a well drained sunny location. They can be bought from Richter's Herbs in Ontario and should be planted now. I find the deer will take the leaves if left open in the winter so I grow mine in the kitchen garden in a small raised bed dedicated for that purpose.

- Late summer is not just a time for harvest but a time for examination of each crop, what succeeded, what failed, and most importantly, why? If you have a good crop of any vegetable or flower, leave a few specimens to over-ripen so you can collect the seed for next year. The majority of traditional crop varieties will germinate true to form if the seed is stored in a cool, dry place. (New varieties of popular plants such as

tomatoes, corn and many of the super flowers will be hybrids or even patented and possibly sterile. Seeds from hybrid varieties will tend to revert to older stock with low yields.) If you save an excess of your favourite varieties, many communities hold a seed exchange in early spring where your giant sprouts can be swapped for some else's giant zucchini. If you save your own seed of Nigella, a jar of it will provide you with 'Black Cumin' for all those Indian and Middle Eastern dishes.

- If lack of water is an issue and you have vegetables to take care of, they are quite happy if you share your bath or shower with them. Although there is no substitution for an earth rich in humus, a good mulch will protect some plants. If you have a lawn, grass clippings work well, and seaweed works really well for alliums and tomatoes. I grow my dry herbs (oregano, lavender, rosemary) under a dry mulch of pebbles that keep the ground warm and facilitate weeding. Failing that, if you carefully hoe or break up the ground around the plants, taking care not to damage roots, the rough earth will act as a mulch. Many farmers in the South of Europe practice this technique of tilling dry ground between the rows and only irrigating close to the plants to promote deep roots. If you are attempting to cultivate large squash or marrows for winter, a length of cotton string carefully threaded through the stalk near the fruit and placed in a jar of water will quench the thirst with greater efficiency than spraying it over the leaves and ground.

- Left over seeds of many annual flowers such as schizanthus, antirrhinum, lobelia, and petunia, may be sown behind the salad beds or in pots set in the ground and raised as house-plants for the late fall and winter. This is also a good time to take cutting of chrysanthemums and geraniums. Many biennial and perennial flowering plants should be sown now for next year. Forget-me-nots, alyssum, poppies, and foxgloves will make far superior plants if started now instead of waiting for spring. Curled parsley sown now makes a fine winter border in the flower garden and they can be picked at any time through May when they should be pulled up before they flower.

- Pears come into season now and many varieties do not keep well. An excess of fruit can be made into an excellent pomade (pear cider), chutney, or served with chocolate sauce (Pears belle Hélène) if you want to impress friends.

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August Recipes

Chilled Cream of Pear Soup

Prep time 10 minutes • Cooking time 30 minutes • Chilling time 3-4 hours • Serves 4

About 3/4 kilo ripe pears, peeled and sliced
4 cups clarified chicken stock or consommé
1/2 cup sugar or honey, 1 tsp ground cardamom
Juice of 1 lime, 1/2 cup sherry, pinch cayenne
1/2 cup whipping cream,
fresh mint finely chopped

Place the pear sections in a saucepan with the stock, sugar, and cardamom. Simmer for 30 minutes or until very soft. Puree in a blender until smooth, add the lime juice, and sherry, cool and then chill. Whip the cream with the cayenne. Pour into serving bowls or glasses, top with the cream, dust with chopped mint. Reserve this dish for a hot day; makes a good aperitif for a BBQ.

Tomato Ice Cream

Prep time 10 minutes • Chilling time 1-1/2 hours • Serves 4

3-4 over-ripe tomatoes, Juice of 1/2 lemon
A generous dash of Tabasco Sauce, or to taste
Salt & Pepper, 1 cup whipping cream

Skin the tomatoes by dropping them into boiling water for a few seconds, after which the skin will fall away. Place the tomatoes, lemon juice, Tabasco and pepper in a blender and puree until smooth. Whip the cream and salt until stiff and fold into the mix. Freeze, stirring occasionally until firm. Serve with Scotch.

Salish Summer Squash

Prep time 15 minutes, Cooking time 15-30 minutes, Serves about four.

1 med squash: acorn, butternut, or 3-4 zucchinis

Sauce:

2 cloves shallots
1 tbl fresh grated ginger
A little olive oil
1 tsp black pepper
1 tsp cumin or Nigella seed
2-3 sprigs of fresh cilantro, chopped
2-3 sprigs of fresh peppermint, chopped
A large handful of fresh apricots, chopped
1 cup of chicken or vegetable stock
A glass of sweet white wine

Peel and cut the squash into serving-sized pieces. Steam or bake until just tender. Or cut the zucchini into halves and lightly BBQ.

Meanwhile: Heat the oil in a saucepan and sauté the shallots and ginger until soft. Add the remaining ingredients and simmer for 15 minutes stirring occasionally. Blend the sauce but not too much. Return the sauce to the pan and add the squash. Re-heat and serve hot with fresh buttered peas, potatoes with sour cream and chives, and a glass of pinot gris.

Brian Crumblehulme is a member of the Islands Sustainability Initiative (ISUNI) based on Mayne Island which is creating a book including this broad series of 'Good Life' articles published in Island Tides. Readers are encouraged to respond both on and off Island Tides' pages. ☞

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