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## Garden Calendar for May - Brian Crumblebulme

In May get a weed-hook, a crotch and a glove,  
And weed out such weeds, as the corn do not love.

Tom Tusser's earthy advice is as cogent now as when he penned it in 1568. For the umpteenth year I have vowed to remove only the really aggressive weeds from my garden: thistles, brambles, and dandelions; the rest are welcome to share my space. And every year it's the same; the weeds win. They seem to have no sense of morality at all; it's like making a deal with a slug, 'I'll give you 20% of my lettuce if you leave the petunias alone.' After which they take 90% of the former and 100% of the latter.

But May is not the time for discontents, it is the season for surprises. It always amazes me how those supposedly fragile and tender plants keep on growing even following a -8°C winter. On the terrace, pineapple sage and lemon verbena are sending up strong shoots after five months of sleep. While across the path nasturtiums and California poppies are sprouting like cress.

Which reminds me; this year I am experimenting with cover crops in newly dug beds. Two weeks ago I scattered alfalfa seeds in the vegetable garden, now the ground is covered with a dark green blush of the little legumes. And last year's oregano and thyme beds are successfully creeping over the most unfertile looking rocks and shale with no help from me.

This year too, I intend to introduce another element of controlled chaos by flinging seeds of tough but delightful annuals wherever they stand half a chance. *Mathiola bicornis* or night-scented stock adds a wonderful touch of the imagined Orient to al fresco evening meals, while borage and *Schizanthus* (butterfly flower) can fill in the random gaps.

For many weeks after the frost my fall-sown sweet peas looked like the morning after a wild night before, so I took the precaution of germinating another packet of seed in February; now I have both. One group in the kitchen garden will provide cut flowers through October while the second batch have been planted not too far from the bedroom door to provide an extra boost to the night air.

Still on the subject of flowers, May and June are excellent times to sow seeds of favourite biennials and perennials. There are thousands of varieties available today, some of which are spectacular and some just silly. Foxglove, delphiniums,

aquilegia and poppies all grow wild in this region so hybridized varieties usually do very well. Last year I also grew hollyhock with indifferent results so now they are removed to the fence in the kitchen garden to be used for cutting.

May is one of those bizarre seasons when you are still enjoying produce from plants established last year, frantically planting out the summer crops, while planning and sowing for next winter. In reverse order, this is the best time to sow winter root crops such as carrots, parsnips and beets, and plan for a succession of brassicas like kale, cauliflower and broccoli for a steady supply through fall, winter and next spring. Which reminds me, if you have any ambitions for a fall or winter crop, buy your seeds now while you have a choice; many garden centres still operate as though this is Ontario where there is only one growing season.

Mary and I always enjoy fresh basil so I have a few started in pots for planting out under glass this month, after which the main crop can wait until it gets warmer. Browsing through Richter's catalogue I counted forty varieties of basil available this year. I might indulge in one or two decorative varieties but for flavour my favourite is still the dark green Sweet Basil, very easy to grow and so satisfying to sprinkle over everything.

Even when the weather turns warm for a few days, exercise restraint before planting out any of the solanums. Tomatoes are fairly tolerant of cool May nights, peppers (sweet and hot) must never be planted out before June unless protected by glass, and eggplants really like it hot; glass covers all summer.

Spring sown peas and beans will be ready for picking by month end and any warm day we can begin sowing their sun-loving cousins; green and yellow snap beans will generally respond quickly to a little sun and rain; runner beans by contrast will require something to climb on then they will produce until frost if you keep picking them. All legumes respond well to deeply dug rich earth but with a little sun, water and TLC you can still get a tolerable crop on relatively poor soil since they produce their own essential nitrogen. I often sow mine between rows of slow growing carrots as the former mature faster and help nourish the latter for a winter harvest.

Gardening is a moral conundrum. The act of selecting and promoting certain plants while attempting to kill or restrict others is part of the process of imposing our version of civility

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on the wild. The same goes for visiting animals. May is aphid month and a colony of these tiny insects can devastate your dream crop. It takes a little getting used to but the simplest and safest method to limit unwanted guests is to rub them out with your finger and thumb. One of the first target plants for aphids are roses because the young sweet shoots stand up high in the air and provide good landing sites. Examine carefully all the leading buds and under leaves for signs of infestation and just rub them off before they cripple the shoots and move on to the dill and cauliflowers. If you cannot bring yourself to this act of aggression, proprietary brands of insecticidal soap work indifferently well or you can make your own aphicide with a dilute mixture of liquid dish washing soap flavoured with Tabasco.

## Recipes

In traditional terms spring was the time for celebrating fresh food gathered from the garden, forest and field. Here are two recipes adapted from *The English Housewife* by Gervase Markham, 1617.

### Salat

First gather your herbs, Prep time 10 minutes, Serves about 4

- 1 cup torn kale
- 1 cup torn spinach
- 4-5 leaves of torn sorrel
- A few sugar or snow peas
- 2 sprigs chopped chervil
- 2 sprigs chopped Italian parsley
- 1 sprig chopped peppermint
- 1 sprig salad burnet
- 1 sprig fennel
- 4-5 chive shoots, chopped
- A handful of currants
- 1 chopped green apple (optional)

Dressing:

- 1 Tbsp cider vinegar
- 2 Tbsp orange juice
- 2 Tbsp Olive oil
- 1 tsp honey
- 1 clove crushed garlic
- Pinch of salt

Blend the dressing and toss into the herbs minutes before serving. Dress with a drift of marigold petals and serve with herbed paté.

### Herb Paté

Prep time 10 minutes, Cooking time 1½ hours, Cool for ½ hour

- 500 gms ground pork sausage meat
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 cloves minced garlic
- 6 slices chopped bacon
- tsp black peppercorns, or 1 tsp homemade Jalepeno sherry
- 8 sage leaves
- 6 chopped lovage leaves
- 4 sprigs oregano
- 4 sprigs thyme (without the woody bits)
- 1 large fresh egg, beaten
- ½ cup dry white wine
- Some brandy

Mix all the ingredients thoroughly. Grease a bread tin (with bacon fat if you have it) and spoon in the mix. Place in a pan of hot water, cover and bake for about 1 ½ hours at 350. Test for doneness with a toothpick. For a vegetarian option, omit the pork and bacon and add 2 more eggs and a cup of sour cream. Allow to cool and store in the fridge, or serve warm al fresca with a salad, fresh bread, a glass of wine, espresso and a friend.

