

Reprint **Island Tides**

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June Gardening Calendar ~ Brian Crumblehulme

In 1393 an elderly business man living in Paris married a teenage girl. He did it for companionship knowing he would soon die. His young wife had some education but knew nothing about running the affairs of a household and told him so, thereupon the elderly gentleman set about to write a manual of domestic instructions. He was very kind to her and a few years later died leaving his house, money and a (now) priceless manuscript of several volumes to his young widow. It is a marvelous read; in the section on gardening here are just a few of his observations about June.

‘Always sow, plant or graft in damp weather, at the waning of the moon, and in the evening or early morning before the heat of day.’

‘Rainy weather is good for planting, but not for sowing seed, for the seeds will cling to the rake.’

‘Sow [winter] greens up to the end of June.’

‘On the eve of the feast of St John the Baptist (24th June), plant parsley. When it rains, plant cabbages for winter.’

And so should we.

Besides going to the beach or enjoying that cool drink on the deck, this is the time to plan for winter. All the hardy root crops (carrots, parsnips, beets, etc) can be sown now so they will mature by fall. It might cost you a couple of dollars for seed and about one hour of work, then if the vegetables are left in the ground until needed they will taste as fresh and sweet as spring even in December. Commercial crops that are picked for storage rapidly lose their flavour and will convert all their available sugar into starch and so taste flat. Winter cabbage, broccoli, kale, cauliflower, celery, peas and beans should be sown at about four week intervals between now and the end of August for a continued succession through next March. Sown now, winter squashes too will thrive through the summer and can remain on the vine until frost, after which it is better to store the fruit in a cool, dry shed until needed.

Many summer flowering plants will survive the occasional drought but will most likely cease to flower if left dry too long. This is when traditional compost performs better than the sterile peat/vermiculite mixes because the humus in a real earth is able to retain water in a colloidal form that is still available to plant roots.

Speaking of earth: ‘tilth’ is a Saxon word meaning the

cultivation of the earth. It was also synonymous with the cultivation of wisdom. Meanwhile the word ‘cultivate’ implies the same thing except that it came from Latin. There is a moral there somewhere if only I can think of it.

June is rose season although many of the recent hybrids will continue to flower until frost if they are not stressed. Clip off dead flowers as they fade, never let them dry out, and apply a light mulch of manure or compost to shade the roots and provide additional nutrients. Roses are like athletes in the garden, they produce lots of flowers and require lots of food.

Curiously, some plants will respond better to being slightly stressed. Tomatoes need a very rich earth to grow well but they will often produce more fruit if they are allowed to dry out a little between watering. Old fashioned nasturtiums by contrast will only produce leaves if sown on rich ground, they perform better on poor quality soil. Mine have naturalized around the periphery of the garden and compete quite well with the Oregon grape (Mahonia). All plants have their preferred loam/water wish list so it is often useful to discover where and under what conditions they grow wild.

Many of the herbs we use in the European tradition originate near the Mediterranean growing under relatively arid summers and mild, damp winters. Consequently herbs such as rosemary, lavender, thyme and sage will often thrive on the Islands and develop strong fragrances but don’t expect them to produce luxuriant growth. Too much water and too much feed will cause them to grow excessively and die. Basil which comes from the rich valleys of the upper Nile is an exception.

We all know to pick fruit just as it reaches its peak warmed by the sun. Many herbs by contrast are selected for the fragrance and flavour in their leaves and shoots. The optimum time for this is when the oils and acids are at their most concentrated which happens just before the flowers are due to open. Choose a warm dry day and gather them in the morning before they get too hot. Herbs can be dried in an electric or solar drier or simply hung in bunches in a light airy room. The spare bedroom is good for this. Then after a few days simply rub the dried leaves into a bowl, pick out the twiggy bits and store in a clean jar. Sage, thyme and oregano will often be half-dry before you pick them; basil, dill and parsley, by contrast are ‘wetter’ herbs that may require a gentle heat to dry properly. If

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you really like basil, dill or chives, try gathering them at their peak and blending them into a puree in oil: olive oil for basil, Canola for dill, and melted butter for chives. These can then be frozen in sour cream tubs for use throughout the year where they will retain all their colour and flavour and some of their aroma. When needed simply shave off the quantity desired; much better than dried and a different league from anything commercial.

Rose Petal Salad

Prep time 15 minutes, Serves about 4.

- 2 cups fresh rose petals (*not* from a florist!)
- 1 small bunch chives
- 1 sprig of peppermint
- 1 sprig lemon balm
- 1 sprig basil
- 1 orange peeled and sectioned
- 1 cup fresh raspberries
- 1 tsp grated orange rind
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 Tbsp cider vinegar
- A pinch each of sugar, salt and pepper
- A few leaves of red lettuce if you must

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If the fresh ingredients are home grown you will not have to wash them. But if you don't know where they were last night...

Tear the herbs into small pieces, leaving the petals whole. Blend the oil, vinegar and spices and gently toss the salad without bruising the petals. Makes an ideal brunch with...

Cold Sour Cream and Dill Soup

Prep time 10 minutes, Cooking time 30 minutes, Cooling time 1 hour, Serves 4 if you're not hungry.

- ¼ cup butter
- 1 leek
- 2 medium potatoes
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 1 cup water
- salt & pepper
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 bunch fresh dill

Wash, slice and chop the leek, fry gently in butter until soft. Add the potatoes, stock, water and spices, bring to a boil and simmer for 25 minutes or until soft. Cool then puree the soup in a blender gradually adding the sour cream and dill. Adjust the seasoning for taste and chill for an hour. Serve creamy smooth with the salad and hot biscuits. ✍

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