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Good Life Gardening ~ Brian Crumblehulme

The Lord spake unto the bee, saying provide thee houses in the mountains, and in the trees, and of those materials that men build for thee. Then eat of every kind of fruit, and fly in the beaten pathways.

—Koran

This year may have been hard to raise small plants but the signs are it will be a really good fruit year. There are many more bees this year and they seemed to have heeded the injunction to fly forth. Apple and plum trees are loaded this season and the branches are beginning to bend under the weight so a few days ago I propped up many of these branches with lightweight poles secured with electrical tape. I also took the opportunity to tie on bags of mothballs to discourage any night cruising deer and raccoon. For small and juvenile trees it is also a good idea to thin out the fruit or you may get a crop of very small apples. This is common practice with grapes and small trees will be weakened if they have to carry a superabundant crop.

One day many years ago, I was intrigued by an article in the Ontario publication *Harrowsmith*, wherein the author waxed lyrical about the abundance of nature on his small farm. In late June after sowing and planting his seasonal crops this farmer in a fit of exuberance ploughed up a strip of field and scattered miscellaneous seeds like a proverbial patriarch. He did not return to that patch again until September when to his delight, the ground was blessed with ripe peas, beans, pumpkin and squash enough for a neighbourhood. There was in addition a fine collection of annual rye, buttercup, vetch, clover and other assorted natives all thriving and growing happily side by side with his select vegetables. Soon after in an equally impulsive fit of madness I repeated the experiment; the damp ground was ploughed and seeded and though I searched diligently many times that summer I did not discover so much as a cotyledon even wanting to become a squash, much less the mature plant itself. Which is a round about way of saying this is not southern Ontario, this is the arid zone of BC and unless you are a precocious broom seed, you will not germinate this side of October after the second rain.

As I write we are into the forth week of hot dry weather that

is characteristic of some summers in the Islands. The ground is dry and dusty, the forest is fragrant and fragile, and sun is too hot. All the larger native plants are green and prolific. The lesser flora have finished flowering for the season and are rapidly curling into the ground until fall when once again they will flourish. All that is except the introduced species I have planted in an annual determination to recreate Eden on the rocks.

Although not always possible, I still try to plant trees and bushes in the fall when the ground is damp and they have six months for the roots to grow before the dry season. Last November I did plant a dozen or so fruit trees, and now even after an extended winter all but one are growing like weeds with masses of strong new growth. Then in April, Mary and I received a gift of one more tree similar in size and age to the ones planted earlier. That tree is handsome and green but lacks any of the vigour and growth of its cousins down the row. That four-month delay in planting has set the tree back by a whole year.

The challenge as always are the summer annuals, veggies and salads. Shallow-rooted and fast-growing they respond to the heat by wilting no matter how much water you pour on the ground. This is when the watering can and a walk around help immeasurably. I am a great believer in getting to know each plant in the garden, learn its likes & dislikes, its growth characteristics, and its personality (or is it plantality?) This is not a good year for spinach or even parsley as they like cool weather. The peas and beans are doing okay though and the potatoes have been planted deep enough to escape the heat. I am experimenting again this year since I have a new second garden. One garden is light with all raised beds filled with sandy loam that heats up very quickly. It also dries out very quickly and requires twice the water of the new lower garden planted in clay which is characteristically cool and damp. At this time the tomatoes are about equal, the basil prefers the planter as do the all the salad greens. Seedlings also germinate better in the planters but root crops are slower and happier in clay.

In northern Europe many crops are sown in succession to provide a continuance of produce and to act as a back-up in the case of failure. Potatoes planted in early February are now

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ready for digging. However, I have just been given a box of old potatoes saved from last year that still show signs of life. I could give them to the chickens but this is an opportunity for another experiment with a late planting while the earth is warm. By my reckoning, they will sprout and grow through July and August and begin to mature as the September rain falls. They should be ready in October. I'll let you know.

If you are enjoying that abundant crop of heat-induced lettuce remember to sow more for later in the season. I generally sow supplemental salads every three to four weeks through September; and don't forget to sow carrots, beans and peas as well. Cut the tops off February sown broad beans as soon as the pods are set. This will promote maturation and discourage infestations of black-fly. Whenever you transplant flowers or vegetables for fall and winter be sure to tread the ground firmly around the roots. The idea is to promote strong sturdy growth before fall and to protect the roots from drying out. Tomatoes are growing fast at this season and most varieties will produce better if they are kept to a single stem with all the side shoots removed. A few of the cherry varieties can be left to grow where they please but larger fruited vines will produce a lot of leaves if left to their own devices and tomatoes will rapidly rot if they rest on the ground.

After roses have completed their first glorious show, cut back the shoots by about one third of their length. This will give the plant a rest and encourage a healthy new growth to blossom in the next few weeks. If you have ambitions to add perennial flowers to your garden, now is the time to sow seeds for next year. When established many varieties are relatively drought resistant and most of the classic perennial and biennials can be sown now in shady nursery beds or large pots. Think of poppies, foxglove, delphinium, peonies, hollyhock, even pansies and primroses for spring, and don't let them fry in the sun.

Classic Summer Recipes:

Linguine al pesto

Prep time 10 minutes, Cook for 5 minutes, Serves 4
About 500g fresh Linguine
4 sprigs fresh basil
2 sprigs fresh parsley

2 Tbsp pine nuts
2 cloves new garlic
1/3 cup grated Parmesan
1/3 cup grated Romano
dash extra virgin olive oil
pinch of salt

Cook the pasta in boiling salted water for 4-5 minutes.

Meanwhile: blend all the sauce ingredients and warm gently in a skillet. If this is for dinner you might want to add a little chicken consomme. Drain the pasta and toss with the warmed sauce. Serve with a drift of pine nuts and fresh snow peas.

Tomato Salad

3 sun warmed tomatoes or a handful of cherry toms
2 sprigs fresh basil
Olive oil & red wine vinegar
salt & pepper

Slice the tomatoes and very lightly dress them with salt & pepper. Shred and scattered basil leaves over the fruit. Sprinkle with oil & vinegar and toss lightly. Serve with...

Fettuccine Alla Crema

Prep time 5 minutes, Cooking time 4-5 minutes, Serves 4
500g Fresh Fettuccine
2 Tbls butter
1 1/2 cups whipping cream
salt & pepper
2 cups grated Parmesan

Cook the Fettuccine in salted boiling water for 4-5 minutes. Meanwhile: melt the butter in a skillet, add the cream, salt & pepper and cook gently stirring constantly as it bubbles. When the fettuccine is cooked, drain and toss with the cream. Add the Parmesan and keep tossing in the skillet until the cheese begins to melt. Sprinkle with oregano flowers and serve immediately with the salad and a glass of Procecco. 🍷