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Garden Calendar October ~ Brian Crumblehulme

Who peascods delighteth to have with the first, if now ye do sow them, I think it not worst.

—Thomas Tusser, 1557

This is the month to sow and plant hardy fruit and vegetables, and as Tusser says, winter peas sown now will provide an early spring crop. This is especially true of snow peas, so named because they can be seen pushing their shoots through a late February snowfall. The same philosophy applies to broad beans (favas) and sweet peas which grow much better than if left until March. Unless you have a greenhouse it is too late to sow most other vegetables, but while the earth is still warm you can still get a continuous crop of rapini, mesclun, winter lettuce and many collard greens. Otherwise, if you hurry you can buy plants of commercially grown winter broccoli, celery and other temperate vegetables for a late winter dinner. October is also garlic month but it may be better to wait until the days are cool before planting these bulbs. Like many grasses, garlic grows fast in cool damp weather and if you plant it early it may get too tall and become subject to frost damage.

Summer-sown broccoli, rapini and Chinese cabbage (Bok choy, Sui choy and so on) are ready for harvesting now through December. Similarly root vegetables grown during the summer can generally be left in the ground until needed. Carrots and beets especially taste far sweeter than those that are dug up and stored. Carrots, parsnips and beets all have thin skins and tend to dry out quickly when stored. This is particularly true if they are kept in the fridge which is a very dry environment. Much better to take a garden fork and dig them fresh while the water is coming to a boil.

The warm September sun has prolonged the season for many summer vegetables and a bed of peas, that I dug in a couple of weeks ago and planted with broccoli, is now sprouting again so I may get a double crop through November and December. This has been a very good year for many fruit trees and we have seen bumper crops of apples and plums. This means that the trees and the ground they stand in will be tired. After the leaves have fallen this is the time to prune them back and re-shape them for a sturdier growth next year. Rake up the leaves and top dress the ground with a dusting of lime, wood ash and bone meal to encourage root growth through the

winter. A good mulch of manure or well rotted compost will also provide nutrient and protect the ground from freezing.

October is also the ideal month for planting fruit trees and bushes. Buy from local growers those varieties best suited to this climate. They will not require much watering or attention over the winter but always provide a deep, wide trench with lots of compost. Many fruit trees grow well in clays soils but if this is what you have you must dig an open ended trench to allow water to drain away otherwise the trees may stand the risk of drowning after a heavy rain.

Late fall is clean-up time in the garden and after that final killing frost most leaves and dead plant material can and should be composted. If you are like me, planning new garden beds for next year, you can simply dig out the ground and bury the leaves where they are to stay. Or they can be raked into a pile and mixed with a little top-soil and lime to encourage decomposition.

Do not burn leaves, they are usually wet and will only produce a lot of smoke. And do not pile them up against a tree as this will keep the tree trunk damp and may cause rot damage to the bark. The exception to composting are any diseased leaves and branches such as black spot on apples or roses, and these should be burnt to kill the fungal spores.

In the flower garden geraniums and any other tender perennials must be moved indoors before it gets too cold. If you have time, the best way to 'harden' them off is to take them in at night and place them out again during the day, similar to what you do in spring. This way the plant is gradually introduced to the warm dry climate of your home.

Still in the flower garden, this is the time to plant bulbs. Dig and fertilize the ground thoroughly before planting and firmly press the earth around the bulb to give the developing roots good contact with the soil as it is the roots that grow before the shoots appear in January and February.

As with bulbs, so with winter and spring biennials. Wallflowers, alyssum, forget-me-nots, pansies and primulas are in the garden stores now. The first three named will usually naturalize if left through the summer and the ground beneath our roses is green with seedlings that simply need to be thinned out a bit and perhaps introduced to other areas of the garden where a splash of winter and spring colour will be welcome.

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A Dish of Beets

This amazing dish was created about four hundred years ago when the domestic oven was invented and home-baking became a fad. Typical of the times it combines sweet and savory flavours such as we find in traditional thanksgiving dinners.

Prep time about 20 minutes

Baking time about 30 minutes

Serves 4 (unless you are hungry)

Preheat the oven to around 350

½ kilo of fresh beets, boiled, peeled and chopped

A hand full of breadcrumbs

A hand full of currants

2 Tbls fresh grated ginger

2 Tbls light brown sugar

2 Tbls butter

2 cups grated Cheddar

The beets can be precooked anytime beforehand—please don't use canned ones! Excepting the cheese, place all the ingredients in a bowl and mix well. The easiest way is with your fingers. Place in a casserole dish, top with the grated cheese and bake until the cheese is brown and bubbly. For variety I sometimes throw in a chopped crisp apple and add a dash of pepper and/or nutmeg. This dish can be used as a side vegetable with chicken or pork, or it can be used as a main course with fresh bread and a salad.

Deep Fried Pears

This recipe goes back about seven hundred years is probably French in origin and is ideal if you have a fist-full of left-over pastry from making pies.

Prep time about 30 minutes

Frying time 10 minutes

Serves 4

A large fist-full of short pastry. Flaky pastry also does very well

1 large ripe pear

4 Tbls Seville orange marmalade

Granulated sugar & cinnamon

Preheat a fryer or place about 2 inches of clean oil in a skillet and heat to medium hotness. Peel and chop the pear and mix with the marmalade in a bowl. Pull the pastry into four portions about the size of golf balls. Roll into circles and place a couple of spoonfuls of the mix on each round. Wet the edges of the circle and draw the sides into the centre. Pinch together to make a pouch. Or, fold in half and crimp the edges together to make a 'pasty.' The pastries can be set aside on a floured board until needed. When your company is seated and the oil is hot, gently drop each pastry into the oil and deep fry, or fry on each side until golden. Remove, drain and dust with sugar and cinnamon to taste. These are really tasty but beware the fruit inside will remain very hot for some time. Serve with a glass of cider (cyder), hot or cold. ☞