

Reprint Island Tides

Visit www.islandtides.com to read the current edition and more find more interesting articles on other BC, national & international topics in our extensive archive of newspapers and articles.

Reprint from Volume 22 Number 3

Feb 18, 2010

February Goodlife Garden Calendar

Brian Crumblehulme

I knew an old man once, who occupied an acre or two that no-one wanted, a patch not worth ploughing, unrewarding for flocks, unfit for vineyards; he however by planting here and there among the scrub, cabbages or white lilies and verbena and flimsy poppies, fancied himself a king in wealth, and coming home late in the evening loaded his board with unbought delicacies. He was the first in spring to gather roses, in autumn to pick apples, and when winter was gloomily still cracking rocks with cold and choking streams with ice, he was already sheering the locks of the tender hyacinth and his again were the first bees to breed, the first to swarm abundantly and have their foaming honey squeezed from combs. Plenty of limes had he; and all the fruit a tree promised in blossom time, matured in autumn.
—Vergil 29 BC

Has spring come early to the Salish Sea? Maybe. The early flowers certainly think so and my grape vines have three inch shoots already. It's a good idea to take advantage of the early start, especially if we are to have another dry summer. Temperate crops thrive on the warm days and cool nights of spring, but beware of late season frosts.

About twenty years ago, one day near Valentines, a cold wind from the Fraser Valley drove temperatures down to -12°C in one night. But if you're an optimist this is a good time to sow early vegetables such as fava beans, peas, leeks and what have you. A bit of frost or snow will not hurt them and if we do get some of the white stuff the snow peas can live up to their name. The same goes for some of the root crops, carrots, parsnips and potatoes. If you have a greenhouse and a heating pad or maybe an east-facing window, you can sow a few cherry tomatoes and some basil for a spring treat. Grown in five-gallon containers cherry toms grow and ripen faster than their larger cousins and it's fun to be the first on the block to gather sun-warmed tomatoes for the May long weekend.

Many early crops can be started now and if there is a threat of frost or snow simply throw a plastic sheet or a tarp over

them. And, if you have some tempered glass panes behind the garage, they are ideal for those old-fashioned cloches so popular in the eighteenth century. On any bright day a tent made by leaning two panes of glass together will raise the temperature underneath by twenty degrees. For centuries keen gardeners in England without the capital to build a greenhouse still produced melons, peppers and cucumbers under a few sheets of salvaged glass. If you set a couple of glass cloches over your strawberries you could be picking by late April—if the slugs don't get there first.

Remember, a greenhouse or cold frame will heat up very fast on sunny days and if you leave the door closed it will also become humid and promote the growth of a mold called botrytis which can cause havoc among seedlings. Since the spores are in the air around us, the best insurance is cleanliness and good ventilation.

The winter rains will have washed away some of the nutrients from the soil so dig in lots of compost sprinkled with bone meal and some woodash from the stove. Potassium is one of the essential minerals for plant life. Photosynthesis slows down when a plant is deficient in this metal and stems and leaves become softer, subject to fungi, and insects attach. In medieval times in late summer farmers would borrow the family stew pot, stuff it with dried twigs and set fire to it. As the fire waned more twigs and dried leaves were added until the vessel was half full of ash. Water was poured onto the ashes and a fire was lit under the vessel. Any unburnt bits of wood and charcoal were skimmed off and the remaining ash was boiled down to a gray porridge which bought a good price from the local apothecary who used it for making soap. The stuff was called 'potash' a name that was later refined to potassium. Ash from deciduous trees may have as much as 10% potassium, with the evergreens following at around 6%.

Still on the subject of fertilizers, the heaviest croppers such as tomatoes and corn need a rich diet while root crops such as carrots and potatoes will grow big tops or produce 'hairy' roots if their earth is too rich. Plant these on last year's tomato and corn bed.

© Island Tides Publishing Ltd. This article may be reproduced with this attribution, in its entirety, with notification to Island Tides Publishing Ltd.

This article was published (Feb 18, 2010) in 'Island Tides'. 'Island Tides' is an independent, regional newspaper distributing 17,500 print copies throughout the Gulf Islands and the Canadian Strait of Georgia from Victoria to Campbell River to Howe Sound.

Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada.
Email: islandtides@islandtides.com.

Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.
Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>

Recipes For Late Winter

There's a certain irony to this season in the garden. The young shoots are pushing up all around but we are still dependent on the last of the winter crops for vegetables. Here are two recipes that can take advantage of both.

Roman spiced winter greens

Prep time: 10 minutes, Cooking time: 10 minutes, Serves 4

½ cup chicken or veggie stock

2 Tbsp Olive Oil

2 Tbsp white wine or water

1 tsp ground cumin

1 tsp ground pepper

A handful of raisins or dried chopped apricots (or a tsp of honey)

Large bunch chopped mixed greens: cabbage, kale, chard, rapini, nettles

A bunch of chopped chives

A sprinkle of roasted almonds

Put the stock, oil, wine, spices and dried fruit in a large pot and simmer for about five minutes. Add the greens and gently toss for 5 minutes until barely cooked and coated with the sauce. Serve immediately topped with chives and nuts.

This makes an ideal vegetable dish for any traditional dinner, or if you pre-cook some lentils and add a little more stock it also doubles as a soup for a winter lunch.

Winter green satay

Prep time: 10 minutes, Cooking time: 11 minutes, Serves 4

2 Tbsp corn oil

1 Tbsp cumin seed

1 Tbsp mustard seed

½ cup chopped onion

2 cloves chopped garlic

chilli peppers to taste

½ cup chopped tomato

2 Tbsp crunchy peanut butter

A bunch of mixed chopped winter greens

Juice of 1 lime

Place all the ingredients except the greens and lime juice in a large skillet and cook gently for 10 minutes stirring frequently. Add the greens and lime juice and toss while cooking for about one minute. Serve immediately with rice or couscous. 🍴

© Island Tides Publishing Ltd. This article may be reproduced with this attribution, in its entirety, with notification to Island Tides Publishing Ltd.

This article was published (Feb 18, 2010) in 'Island Tides'. 'Island Tides' is an independent, regional newspaper distributing 17,500 print copies throughout the Gulf Islands and the Canadian Strait of Georgia from Victoria to Campbell River to Howe Sound.

Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada. Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.

Email: islandtides@islandtides.com Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>
