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## **Good Life Garden Calendar ~ Brian Crumblehulme**

**Because of the lack of farmyard manure, and because men and women have seen the disastrous results all over the world of not adding organic matter to the soil, people are turning to composting vegetable refuse. No wise man today burns his rubbish.**

W E Shelwell-Cooper, 1952, Principal of Royal Horticultural College London

**It may be doubted whether there are any other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world as these lowly organized creatures.**

A Short Paper on Earthworms—Charles Darwin, 1837

**W**hen I was growing up our family garden compost was a motley heap hidden in a corner behind the lilacs. With little attention given to its composition and no mixing it worked okay and returned a small quantity of darkened humus to be scattered around the roses each spring. Now for the past thirty years I have had a two-bin composter which works better.

Garden, kitchen and chicken-house waste are deposited on one side, with an occasional dusting of lime and handfuls of earth. When bin one is nearly full the contents are forked into bin two, in more or less reverse order, the last addition on the bottom and some rich black stuff on top.

This regular mixing speeds up decomposition, reduces the potential for anaerobic bacterial action that can cause bad smells, and means less waiting time to use compost.

I have read about people who store their composting material in black garbage bags or barrels and roll them around every week which seems like a lot of work to me. And nowadays garden centers are selling fancy rotary models with cranks and handles on the side all molded out of what else—green plastic! These urban devices look impressive but the capacity is actually quite small given

that you still need an air space in which to tumble your garden 'gold' and they retail for about \$500. I reckon I would need at least four of the things to contain my load.

Next week I will build a permanent three-bin compost container out of concrete blocks on a pad and with air spaces and drains. Bin one gets the raw material; when that is full the stuff is tipped into bin two. Then from time to time, bin two is tossed back and forth with bin three. Low tech, low effort, low cost and the lilacs on either side will love it.

In preparing beds for spring and summer use, remove any aggressive weeds, nettles, thistles and such, dig the bed over and spread several inches of black compost over the top. Lightly dust with lime and bone meal and let it rest for a couple of weeks. When you are ready to plant or sow, gently fork the bed over to keep the compost near the surface, and away you go.

April is the month to plant out all the hardy vegetables that you have raised in pots and flats under glass. Celery, broccoli, cauliflower, and so on. Sow peas, carrots, parsnips, and a small quantity of salad greens. Never sow all your greens at once unless you are planning a salad orgy. A small amount every three or four weeks is usually ample. April is a wonderful time to be outside but do not be tricked into thinking summer has arrived after a couple of warm days. It is still far too early for hot weather plants such as beans and corn. But it is not too early to sow squash, melons, and cucumber two to a pot in the greenhouse for planting out in May.

Most of the fruit trees are in bud now so it's too late for pruning except perhaps to thin-out any tangled or broken branches being very careful not to damage the fruiting buds or you will lose your crop.

It is not too late, though, to spray trees and bushes. On a dry day with no wind you can spray apples, plums and peaches with lime-sulfur or dormant oil to deter bugs and mildew. The ingredients are naturally occurring minerals that will improve the condition of the soil— but

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do not spray trees in bloom because you can kill bees that way.

Mid-April is usually a good time to sow hardy annual flowers, either in a flower garden or between rows of vegetables. I like to encourage some of these annuals to naturalize. This year, after a mild winter, the California poppies, calendulas and nasturtiums are already shooting up. Last year I saved some seed of *dimorphotheca* and cosmos to which I add red flax (*linum*) and marigolds (*Tagetes tenuifolia* 'Lemon Gem' looks pretty, is reasonably drought resistant and has a wonderful fragrance).

A note of ecology: when they are damaged many vegetables and bedding flowers give off an aroma that attracts slugs and these mollusks can clean out an entire bed in one night, with or without ketchup. It is always better to sow seeds directly in the ground they are to grow in.

### April Recipes

April is egg season and our chickens are laying like there's no tomorrow. Free-range, weed-fed chickens produce low cholesterol eggs that are a meal in themselves. For stove-top cooking I prefer to use a good quality heavy iron pan. The thick iron distributes the heat evenly and because it is porous it soaks up the butter and olive oil to create a non-stick surface so you don't have to fret about scraping off and eating the Teflon coating.

Escoffier has a hundred recipes for eggs in the French tradition including such gems as poached with truffles and cream, poached in port, with chestnut puree, and truffle omelet with foie gras. Mrs Beeton on the other hand has a mere 32 recipes for soufflés including chocolate, oyster, rabbit, and smoked haddock!

#### Basic Omelets:

butter or olive oil  
2 eggs per serving, fresh or, even better, 48 hours-old  
a spoon full of milk or light cream  
your favourite cheese  
Chopped tomatoes, mushrooms, whatever  
fresh chopped herbs (chives, chervil, fennel, basil...)  
salt & pepper

Heat the pan to medium high, punch down the toast. Crack the eggs and cream into a narrow bowl and beat until just blended, do not over-beat. Put a dab of butter in the pan. It should sizzle but not turn brown. Pour in the egg mix and wait for about one minute until the edges are cooked. Gently add the filling to one side, cover and turn the heat down to medium. Pour the tea and

butter the toast. After about three minutes gently insert a spatula under the omelet and slide it onto a warm plate folding it as you go. Never promise more omelets than you have omelet pans or yours will be cold before you can sit down.

#### Soufflés:

2 separated eggs per person  
butter  
some smoked haddock, salmon, kippers—what have you  
cayenne, black pepper to taste

Turn the oven on to 425°F. Mash the fish into a paste with a dash of butter then beat in the yolks and pepper. Whisk the whites until stiff. Fold the fish paste into the whites and gently pour into a mold. Bake hot for about 20 minutes then lower the temperature to 375 for another 10 minutes. Make your guests sit down and pour the wine before you serve with hot buttered toast and asparagus tips.

#### Chocolate Crepes:

A Tbsp butter  
1 oz unsweetened chocolate  
1 ½ cups milk  
2 eggs  
1 cup flour

In a double boiler or heavy pan melt the butter and chocolate stirring constantly. Add half the milk and stir well. Pour into a blender with the remaining milk and eggs. Blend and gradually add enough flour until light and creamy.

Heat an egg pan until fairly hot, add a dab of butter and pour in about ¼ cup of batter. Immediately tilt the pan to spread the batter around to all sides. Cook for two minutes or until just set on the top. Turn and cook for one more minute. Slide onto a warm plate, cover and repeat the process.

The Sauce:  
2 Tbsp butter  
grated rind of 2 oranges  
Juice of 2 oranges  
¼ cup sugar  
pinch of cornstarch  
¼ cup brandy

Place all the ingredients except the brandy in a saucepan, heat and stir until smooth. Add the brandy (Hennessy if you will). Pour the sauce over the crepes and serve with lashings of whipped cream and espresso. ☞

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