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Reprint from Volume 22 Number 10

May 27, 2010

June Garden Calendar

Brian Crumblehulme

A powerful spirit of organization breathed through the household: good food was impossible without a kitchen garden.

In this respect, the kitchen garden was a work of art, of which Monet was justifiably proud. In his mind, this vegetable garden was inseparable from the other things that to Monet were part of the good life.

—Claire Joyes, Monet's great grand-daughter, 1990

Island gardens bordering the Salish Sea can provide fresh produce all year long and sufficient seasonal produce to supply any family throughout the winter. The question is how. A reasonable plot of land with some sun and water is a good start. Deep earth is also useful; otherwise raised beds will suffice. A small greenhouse helps too but failing that some glass cloches and plastic sheeting will extend the growing seasons at both ends. The kitchen garden is part technology and part fine art and it is the latter half of the equation that is the greater challenge.

Different types of plants have different needs. Green salads, lettuce and mesclun mixes, for example, only have to produce leaves before you can eat them. Corn, by contrast, has to grow two meters high under a hot sun, flower, pollinate, fill the kernels and ripen before the cobs can be eaten. In other words you can have three or four crops of lettuce for one picking of corn. Roots crops also generally require a longer growing time than leafy vegetables.

As with planning a meal, my approach is to organize those plants that require the longest growing time first: potatoes, winter carrots, cauliflower, tomatoes and squash. Potatoes and tomatoes can be started indoors in January. The former can then be planted out on any mild day in February which is also a good time to sow early carrots and fava beans and peas. Tomatoes need heat and grow slowly for the first couple of months so they can be transplanted into ever larger pots on a window ledge or greenhouse. This year my first sowings were planted into

an unheated greenhouse in early April and were flowering by May 1st. The cauliflower, broccoli, zucchini, summer squash, etc were sown indoors in early April so they were ready for planting out in mid-May. Meanwhile, other leafy salads and vegetables, spinach, rapini, lettuce, Chinese greens and so on, are sown in small, sometimes tiny pinches at intervals beginning indoors and, by late March, directly outside where they are to grow.

Most commercial growers raise crops in a monoculture where the entire farm, field or greenhouse is dedicated to a single crop. The domestic grower by contrast cannot use a semi-trailer of zucchini at any one time so small crops are the norm. This also implies multiple sowings and in my case, interplanting to optimize my time and land available. This is where gardening becomes a fine art. I sow or transplant salad greens between rows of broccoli and later squash knowing they will be gathered before the major crop has taken over the whole space. Likewise I grow early basil and spring carrots between the tomatoes. This process saves time, space and allows me to monitor the progress of each crop quickly on a daily basis. The best tasting basil is that which is grown outside under the sun where it grows quickly and produces dark green aromatic leaves. But a pinch sown in January and grown between the tomatoes is ready for picking in early April.

Crops needed for winter have to be planned and sown in early summer. Late potatoes, carrots, leeks, parsnips, etc, need time so they should be sown in May and June. Likewise winter storage squash and pumpkins need the summer heat to grow and then can be left to mature through the cooler nights of fall. Broccoli, cauliflower, kale and cabbage can grow very fast in summer and slow down as fall approaches. Again, a pinch of seed sown every six weeks or so will ensure a continuous supply. Frost hardy winter varieties should be sown from August on as they

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This article was published (May 27, 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.

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will begin to mature in early winter for eating around Christmas time. Fall sown winter vegetables will continue to grow until frost after which they will sit the cold weather out and begin growing rapidly again in the first bright days of spring. So cauliflower sown in late August will be ready for harvest in October or November. Those sown in late September will mature in time for Easter. September is a busy time because as you are picking the late summer crops you need to be sowing winter and spring ones. Winter greens are generally hardy in our climate. Two winters ago I had to harvest lettuce, radish, rapini and broccoli from under the snow.

One final note. The vicissitudes of nature just happen. The weather and creatures with more or less than two feet have no respect. Never sow all your seeds at once. Traditionally most gardeners in temperate climes would sow and plant three times, early, main crop, and late. The early and late will work if spring and fall happen to be mild. In other words you extend the season weather permitting. Last year, for example, spring was late, summer hot and dry and fall was mild so the early sowings of heat-loving plants were lost and so were the main crops if you ran out of water. But we had lots of spring salads and leafy greens, a good crop of tomatoes, and a huge crop of fall and winter vegetables that we are still eating in early May.

Recipes

If you start with good ingredients traditional peasant food is generally excellent. Potatoes and cheese, rice and lentils, corn and beans, and so on. Contemporary peasant food by contrast, a hamburger with fries & a coke, is well...?

Bread & Beans

Prep time 20 minutes, Serves 2 for dinner 4 for lunch
4 hot fresh dinner buns

1/2 Kilo fresh Broad Beans, also called Fava and Egyptian Beans

1/2 a leek and/or 2 sticks of celery

Olive oil

Rosemary, cumin, honey, fennel, black pepper, cider vinegar

Chives, pine nuts or almonds

Chop the leek and celery and gently fry in oil for about 5 minutes. Shell the fresh beans and toss in with the vegetables. Add a sprig of chopped fresh rosemary and fennel, some cumin, a spoonful of honey, and pepper to taste. Mix well, just cover with water and steam for 10-12 minutes until cooked but still firm. Turn off the heat and add a dash of vinegar, stir and cover for 1 minute.

Garnish with a drift of chopped chives (or chive flowers), pine nuts or toasted almonds and serve hot or cold with a glass of white wine. For a more substantial dinner substitute stock for the water and chop in a few slices of Bratwurst or Kielbasa.

Dal Bhat (Lentils with Rice)

Prep time 45 minutes, Serves 2

2 cups Basmati rice

vegetable oil

1 1/2 cups green lentils

salt & pepper

ginger, chillies

Wash and cover the lentils with cold water, bring to a boil and simmer for 30 minutes until nearly cooked. Fry the rice in 2 Tbsp oil until crisp, remove from the heat, add a pinch of salt, cover with water and steam for 20 minutes until fluffy. Pour 2 Tbsp oil into a saucepan, grate some ginger in and crunch in enough chillies plus one. Fry gently until the air makes your eyes water. When the lentils are nearly cooked stir in the spice mix and cook for a further 5-10 minutes until tender.

Serve hot with beer or tea. For dinner sprinkle with toasted coconut, add a couple of eggs and crisp green apple.



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