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August Garden Calendar ~ Brian Crumblehulme

Gardens represent perhaps the most optimistic example of a negotiated plenty in which we can do some things but not others.

—Steven Stoll, 2010

Part of the fine art of gardening is narrowing the dissonance between what we want to grow, when we want it to grow, the inherent nature of the plant, the land, the seasons, the variations in the seasons—and the freeloaders with teeth, mandibles, beaks and slime.

Last November it froze hard for ten days, then we had six months of spring, and now as I write there has been no rain for several weeks and acres of the province are burning.

Last year we had an excellent crop of apples, pears and plums; this year very little, but then many of these trees are biennial fruiterers.

This year for the first time, my kiwi vines had flowers but no fruit. Then my early grapes produced super-sweet bunches in June (see photo right), and we are inundated with raspberries. And so it goes...

We have barrowloads of salads this year too and the tomatoes and peppers are loaded but it has taken three sowings to finally get the beans and carrots to grow. It looks like we'll get a good crop but not until late August.

The best cultivated thing on the Islands this year is patience: if not this year then next.

The earth on our garden is either clay or rock so I have taken to planting in two or more locations at the same time and the results are amazing. Basil set in planters grows like a weed. The same crop planted in clay gets eaten by bugs. Garlic grown in planters is a waste of time but the same cloves shoved into clay and forgotten have produced in abundance.

So. What do we do for winter? I have just planted out two dozen fall cauliflower and broccoli in various mixtures of clay and compost—and a similar number in raised beds, where the lettuce were just pulled. Next week I will transplant more brassicas for late winter/spring into pots

to be planted out in September. It is still not too late to sow for winter.

Greenhouses in summer can get too hot and harbour a host of unwelcome guests so good ventilation is essential but that does not mean leaving all the windows and doors open all night. A little gadget on the roof of my greenhouse (pictured) is a vent that operates without power to automatically regulate the airflow and allow hot air to escape. Well worth the \$50 it cost me (available from Mayne Island's Steele Greenhouses). Besides water and fresh air, greenhouses should always be clean. Remove all dead leaves and any weeds as they appear and removing a few of the lower leaves on tomatoes vines will improve the air circulation and allow more light to reach the ripening fruit.

At this season the flower garden can often look disheveled after the spring plants have died down and many summer ones are feeling heat-stressed; this is a good opportunity to do some summer tidying. On a cool morning or evening find the pruners, get the wheelbarrow and remove all the dead stuff from plants and bushes.

Lightly prune back roses that have finished flowering, taking care not to clip off young shoots with buds on them, pull out a few weeds and gently break-up the hard ground between plants with a garden fork. That done, give all your plants a good soaking and they will respond with a mass of new flowers possibly until frost.

I have encouraged a number of biennials to naturalize around our land by allowing them to self-seed in the summer and then transplanting the young seedlings in September. Foxgloves are indigenous to the islands and if you sow a garden variety it will flourish with little effort and produce prodigious blooms for weeks at time. California poppy, forget-me-not and wall flowers will all naturalize with minimal attention and no watering.

Ratatouille (by any other name)

The eggplant or aubergine is native to India and in the post-Roman spice trade was taken east to China and by

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the Arabs west to Africa and the Mediterranean. It reached Sicily about the 9th Century. Originally white, modern eggplants are usually purple or both and vary in size from tiny Japanese varieties to melon-size from North Africa.

Eggplants are the basis of Ratatouille, which is the French word derived from *touiller*—to stir. Since tomatoes and sweet peppers are New World derivatives, these vegetables did not feature in early recipes, only in recent modern versions.

Melanzane (eggplant)

This Sicilian recipe is probably a thousand years old, a blend of Roman and Arabic. Prep time about 20 minutes, cooking time 25 minutes, serves about 4.

- 1 large eggplant, peeled & chopped
- olive oil
- 2-3 celery sticks, chopped
- 1 large onion, chopped
- some garlic, minced
- salt, sugar, black pepper
- red wine vinegar
- raisins
- several sprigs of fresh chopped mint and parsley

Early varieties of eggplants had a bitter taste just under the skin and were frequently salted before cooking. Most modern varieties are relatively bland and do not require degorging. Salt at your leisure. Heat the oil in a skillet until hot and fry the eggplant quickly until browned. Remove from the oil and drain. Reduce the heat and fry the celery, onion and garlic until soft and transparent, then return the eggplant and add the remaining ingredients. Cook for another 2-3 minutes stirring occasionally. Allow to cool for a few minutes, dust with fresh mint and a handful of raisins. Serve with a glass of sweet Marsala.

Ajlouke

This Tunisian spread is spicy. Prep time 10 minutes, cook for 15 minutes, serves 4-6

- 2 medium eggplant thinly sliced
- olive oil
- several shakes of harrisa (hot sauce) or Tabasco
- juice of 1 lemon
- some minced garlic
- a few sprigs of cilantro
- about a cup plain yogurt
- salt & pepper

Brush the eggplant slices with a little oil and BBQ until cooked and somewhat charred. Cool and peel off the skin. Place in a food processor with the hot sauce, lemon juice,

garlic, cilantro and blend until well mashed. Fold in the yogurt and add salt & pepper to taste. The yogurt cuts the bite of the hot sauce but it will creep up on you later. Serve at room temperature or chilled with pita bread, a baguette, or on toast with a glass of iced sangria.

Chachichouka

Huevos Rancheros African-style. Prep time 10 minutes, cook for 1/2 hour, serves maybe 4.

- 1 medium eggplant, peeled & cubed
- olive oil
- 1 onion chopped
- 2 sweet peppers, chopped
- some garlic, minced
- 2 large tomatoes, chopped
- a small bunch of fresh basil, chopped
- 1 or 2 crushed whole chillies to taste
- 8 eggs

Heat some oil and fry the eggplant until golden. Remove and dry the eggplant. Reduce the heat and add the onion, peppers and garlic and cook for 5 minutes or so. Add the tomatoes and cook for a further 5 minutes. Add the eggplant, basil and chillies and cook for a final 5 minutes stirring from time to time. Check for taste and hotness, carefully break in the eggs and poach for 3 minutes or so. Makes a good brunch with a glass of beer.

The Ultimate Ratatouille Nicoise

Prep time 20 minutes, cook for 30 minutes, serves 6.

- 2 eggplants, peeled & sliced
- olive oil
- 4-6 zucchini sliced
- 2 onions chopped
- 3 peppers sliced
- 6 tomatoes chopped
- 3 cloves crushed garlic
- salt, pepper & fresh thyme

Heat the oil and brown the eggplant. Add everything else and simmer for 20 minutes stirring occasionally. Serve hot with BBQ'd chicken or beef, with fresh-baked cod fillets or a dish of scallops. Serve with Chianti and pretend you're in Nice or Genoa. 🍴

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