

# Reprint **Island Tides**

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Reprint from Volume 22 Number 20

Oct 28, 2010

## **November Garden Calendar**

**Brian Crumblehulme**

The man in the street imagines that food comes from a can, and that a can of peas for purchase is merely a matter of going to the grocer. The fact that peas have to be grown in soil, have to be sown, manured and cultivated, never enters his head. The result is that to vast numbers of town dwellers there is no connection between food and the soil. —Sherwell Cooper, 1952

**T**his is the month of rain and wind. Water will soak into the earth and leaves will fall. For many people this is not a comfortable season. But for those with roots into the culture of the Salish Sea this is the time of replenishment. Rain is good, without it we cannot live here all-year-long. And leaves on the ground are good too. For those fortunate enough to have a few deciduous trees on their land, those leaves are invaluable for composting and making soil, and the finest tree in the forest is the maple.

Maple trees (leaf and wood) contain about four times the mineral content of most other trees, which is why plants grow better under maples. So sometime late in the month when it's not raining or blowing, go outside, enjoy the fall, and start raking. The simplest way to deal with leaves is to pile them up and wait until spring before using the black reduced compost. You can also heap them directly around fruit trees, roses and perennial plants as winter protection and spring fertilizer. Or you can mix them into your compost heap with a little top soil and kitchen waste and create a wonderful black loam for use next spring. Then:

For those with a lawn freshly uncovered, this is also the time to renovate grass. Assuming you have been truly urban and kept the grass reasonably cut the next best exercise is to rake it clean of moss. Maintaining large lawns in this region is questionable because to do them justice they demand a lot of work in spring and early summer, and frequently require watering which given that we live in a dry zone is profligate to say the least. I

maintain a fescue grass cover around my fruit trees that does not require summer watering, is tough, naturally short and provides an attractive cover for spring bulbs. So maybe this is the time to ask yourself, do I really need a lawn? If yes, then clean it up, cut it short before winter, sprinkle with lime and bone meal, or better yet, blood & bone meal, and over-seed any areas that look tatty or worn thin. If the sod is uneven now is the time to dig up and lower hummocks and to add fill to the hollows. This will not give you a bowling green but if playing with the grandchildren on soft green grass in the summer is a desideratum, then plan for it now. The majority of our grasses, native and introduced, like cool wet weather, and every day spent improving a lawn before Christmas is worth a week in spring.

Earlier this year I was amused to read that the Yorkshire Forced Rhubarb Growers had successfully petitioned the EU for exclusive rights to their rhubarb-growing technique, much like the celebrated wine vintners of Champagne. I cannot say I have the specific Yorkshire secret but the principle is hundreds of years old and consists basically of digging up a few mature rhubarb roots in November, dump them on the floor of a garage or shed, and provide a low-level heat to about 12–15°C. Do not expose them to daylight, and with an occasional sprinkling of water you can harvest perfect red, sweet rhubarb for Christmas. If you make continual harvests you will kill the plant which is what they do in Yorkshire.

However, if you only have one picking and then quickly replant the roots outside in the cold, they will survive and produce for many years to come.

Still on the subject of salvaging plants, lily-of-the-valley bulbs lifted and potted now can be tricked into flowering for Christmas and provide a fragrant spring air to your dining room. By contrast, withered dwarf chrysanthemums bought, full of bloom and promise, in

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This article was published (Oct 28 2010) in 'Island Tides'. 'Island Tides' is an independent, regional newspaper distributing 18,000 print copies throughout the Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island from Victoria to Campbell River.

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September can be cut down to an inch or so and planted out in the garden on any frost-free day. If you haven't killed them they will send up new shoots and flower again next fall. But unless you spray them with growth retardants they will most likely grow to their proper height of three feet so remember to place them at the back of the flower bed.

### Carrot Recipes

The carrot is an abused root. Ever since the Romans introduced them to Europe the sad things have been dried, mashed, baked and boiled to death. Real carrots, the ones picked fresh from the garden, are naturally frost hardy, sweet, tender, tasty and contain most of the food groups and abundant quantities of carotene. Like many of us they also have thin skins and so need to be treated carefully so I leave mine in the garden until desired. Left on the pantry shelf or the fridge they will rapidly dry into obscene rubbery things. Fresh organic carrots do not need peeling and as most of the vitamins are located in or under the skin, wash and brush them gently under water. So to paraphrase Mrs. Beeton, first pick your carrots.

#### Moroccan Carrot Salad:

Prep time about 10 minutes, Macerating time, a couple of hours, Serves 4-6

About 1/2 kilo carrots, 1 large tart apple such as Granny Smith or Gravenstein, 1 stick celery, all grated; A handful of dates and 2 sprigs parsley and cilantro, chopped; Juice of 1 lemon, 1 Tbsp honey, A little olive oil, A sprinkle of orange flower water, Black pepper, cumin and cayenne to taste

Combine everything in a large bowl and mix well. Cover and allow to macerate at room temperature for at least an hour while you prepare the rest of the meal. Mix again and serve in a wooden bowl. This dish has a kaleidoscope of flavours so serve it with something simple like lemon sole or baked potato.

#### Carrot Soup:

Prep & cooking time about 40 mins, Serves 4

2 tbsp butter, 1 onion and 1/2 kilo carrots, chopped; a dusting of flour; 1 litre chicken stock (duck stock if you can get it); salt, bay leaf, thyme, parsley, sugar, black pepper to taste; 1 cup heavy cream

Fry the onions in the butter until transparent, add the carrots and cook for 15 minutes until tender. Add the flour and stir well, add the stock, herbs & spices, stir and cook for another 10 minutes. Blend until smooth and adjust the flavours to taste. Serve in bowls with a swirl of heavy cream and a sprinkling of chives. Goes well with hot

biscuits and a glass of sherry.

For variety substitute orange juice for some of the stock and grate a spoonful of fresh ginger in just before blending.

#### Glazed Carrots:

Slice some carrots and boil them in slightly salted water for about 8-10 minutes or until 75% done. Drain immediately and toss with butter, then add:

a slosh of orange juice and a teaspoon of cornstarch. Mix to dissolve the starch, return to the heat and cook for 5 minutes until it glistens, stirring regularly. Or:


a slosh of white wine, a pinch of sugar and a generous dusting of cinnamon. Cook as above.

For festive occasions glaze with Kahlua or Southern Comfort. I like to add half the liquor plus cornstarch and make a stiff glaze first, *Then* dilute with the rest of the liquor so you do not have to boil it. Serve immediately.

#### Carrot Halwa:

Prep time about 10 minutes, Serves 4

1/2 cup ghee (or melted butter); 1/4 cup semolina or wheat flour; 1/2-1 cup raw sugar; 1/2 cup ricotta cheese, 1 cup grated carrots; At least 1/2 cup of (chopped almonds, pistachios, seedless raisins), Cardamom and salt to taste

Heat the ghee, stir in the semolina and cook gently until it begins to turn golden. Add the sugar and stir again. Cook and add a little water to make a syrup. Add the remaining ingredients and cook gently stirring frequently for 10 minutes. Serve hot with strong black coffee. Or leave until cool and serve at room temperature with a little heavy cream or ice cream. 

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