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Parochial Gardeners—*Brian Crumblebulme*

We all have our lists of pet peeves—minor irritants that could be resolved if only someone else would do something. I try to keep mine short, if for no other reason than that we all share the same planet. One such irritant is that continental mind-set that declares there are only two seasons, while here on the Salish Sea we celebrate four.

In this minority region of some four hundred square kilometres, (as large as some countries) we are blessed with four glorious seasons and the ability to grow crops all year round. That means three crops for sure and more if you inter-crop. Spring implies sowing and planting for summer where summer has come to mean attempting to coax tropical and semi-tropical plants into bloom: petunias, tomatoes, canna lilies, and corn. Thus, we nurse our tender seedlings along under glass through March and April, patiently waiting for the first warm days of early summer when we can plant them out beyond the danger of frost.

It doesn't take much knowledge or imagination, however, to discover that the native species are primarily biennial and perennial, germinating in late summer and fall into small plants that will sit quietly through the rainy season and burst into growth and bloom the following spring and summer. So it is with most of the flowers and vegetables we can grow best in this west coast climate. Consequently, the most important time for sowing seeds is when the ground and the sun is warm, in other words, July, August, and September. Beginning with the slow-growing varieties (delphiniums, aquilegia, onions, broccoli, carrots, or what have you), we move on to the

intermediate biennials (foxglove, wallflowers, kale, and spinach), until in the last warm days of September we plant collards and Chinese cabbages, lettuce, sweet peas, broad beans, and garlic. The list goes on. Without the need for glass, much less a greenhouse heated to tropical temperatures in January, these plants will thrive in rain and the occasional snow for months to provide us with a constant supply of winter vegetables and flowers for spring, all for the price of a packet of seed.

Alas, that is where the peeve comes in, because if you go to the garden store in August looking for winter vegetables or summer perennials, you will usually find the shelves empty because the packets have been returned to the supplier to make room for a few pots of artificially dwarfed chrysanthemums and later, the ubiquitous poinsettias. One garden advisor actually told me last week that you should never sow anything later than July! This is not Alberta, we live in a totally different climate where we do not try to grow prize-winning corn or giant pumpkins in 35° summer sun.

Alas, the majority will always have its way and I will have to anticipate next year's needs this spring and hoard my packages carefully until needed. Then, I get the last laugh as I walk out to gather salads, vegetables, and bouquets of flowers from my garden all year round. ☺

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