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July Garden Calendar ~ Brian Crumblehulme

I have grafted all the trees in my garden with the fairest grafts I have seen in a long while, and they are beginning to put forth green; also I have dug another garden and I have very carefully planted cabbages, beets, parsley and sage and other goodly herbs; and furthermore I have pulled up and cleared away from it all the nettles, brambles and wicked weeds, and I have sown it full well with many good seeds; and in it I have likewise many fair trees bearing divers fruits, such as apples, pears, plums, cherries and nuts, and everywhere I have very well looked after them, and yet all I have earned this week is 3 pence.

—14thC French garden manual

This long wet spring has been a kind of slug fest around here though I've been told they make a great tempura after a lot of Saki. Most of my flowers and vegetables have survived with some leaf damage but the bugs really cleared out the early carrots. Crazy really, they eat the carrots and leave the beets. Never mind, I just keep sowing and will eat carrots later. If you lose a crop to pests sow again in another area. And it's still okay to sow many of the warm weather vegetables in early July. Both bush and climbing beans will grow fast and produce from August on.

Don't let a garden bed go dormant. After harvesting spring vegetables or garlic for example, dig it over, add some lime and compost and sow it again. If you do not need the space for now then broadcast a green mulch such as buckwheat or peas. They will improve the soil and reduce weeds.

If you have not already started your winter garden do it now. Sow carrots and parsnips, beets, onions and scallions in any reasonable ground that does not flood or get marshy in November. These plants will grow fast in the warm days providing they have some water, then as the nights become cooler they will slow down and harden for fall and winter. In our climate most plants will be safe

through December. I leave mine in the ground after that but I try to remember to cover them in the event of a hard frost.

Space is often at a premium in summer when you are growing large plants such as potatoes and squash. But this is also a fine time to sow green vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale and oriental greens, and salad greens like arugula and rapini for eating in the fall. Later in the month you can also sow hardy varieties of broccoli, cabbage, kale and cauliflower for eating in spring. All these vegetables can be planted in a cooler back corner or on the north side of the house and transplanted in September. The really hardy varieties of winter vegetables taste better after a frost because they store extra sugar in their cells as an antifreeze. This sugar will revert to starch within a few hours of picking so don't pick more than you can eat at any one time.

The flower garden is a riot of colour at this season and I like to extend the kaleidoscope through the spring garden as well. When the poppies, iris and other early flowers have faded, prune back the dead stalks, add a little compost and scatter a few seeds of schizanthus, Nigella or night-scented stock for a drift of colour and fragrance in those long August nights when the BBQ is on.

Recipes

In summer there are (he said hopefully) some of those days when it's too darned hot to want to cook a meal. That is the time for a chilled soup. Gazpacho is great when you have a cornucopia of sun ripened tomatoes usually in August. And you can always throw together a salad dressed up with a few flowers for colour. Try Nasturtiums, marigolds, roses, geraniums, day lilies and pansies. Your guests will be delighted with the curious flower salads and then politely push them to the side of the plate like an overlooked plastic label. My guests eat their flowers because I chop the petals into small pieces like confetti and scatter them all over the dish.

Meanwhile:

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Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada.
Email: islandtides@islandtides.com.

Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.
Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>

Salad Soup

I was served this bizarre dish one hot day in Kazakhstan and it really works.

A bowl of salad stuff such as lettuce, green onions, red onions, arugula, cucumber and snow peas chopped fine. Grate in a couple of carrots and a fistful of radishes.

Blend together one or two cups of sour cream and a bottle of club soda. Add a dash of salt & pepper. Pour the liquid over the salad and place it in the fridge to macerate for an hour. Then serve. Goes well with rye bread and vodka.

Tomato Bread Soup - from Italy

- 1 Tbsp Olive oil
- 3-4 sweet pickling onions
- 1-2 cloves Garlic
- 4 Cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1/2 Kilo really ripe tomatoes, chopped
- 2 sprigs chopped basil
- 1 Crusty French loaf broken into small pieces
- Some cayenne or chillies to taste
- Salt & Pepper

Blend the oil, onions and garlic with the stock until smooth. Add all the remaining ingredients and stir well. The mixture should have the consistency of oatmeal. Chill until needed. Serve with crackers or corn chips and homemade red wine.

And for the morning after a really good party:

Bull Shot Soup

- 2 parts beef consommé
- 1 part vodka or rum
- A squeeze of lime juice
- Tabasco if necessary

Gently stir all the ingredients together and serve in a tall glass at room temperature. Take before a shower on a hot morning. You'll need the coffee later. ☞