

## **February in the Garden on Salt Spring Island for Driftwood, Feb.7 Patti and Brandon Bauer**

The opportunities and delight associated with year-round food growing even through the fall and winter months cannot be overestimated. Here are some tips for activities throughout the month of February. This is the time of year, with the large amount of rain we experience, that all the pore space within the soil becomes saturated with water. Because the structure of saturated soil can be damaged with cultivation, laying a cloche (garden fabric) over a garden bed two to three weeks prior to planting will warm the soil and reduce moisture content.

A simple way to test the workability of your soil is to gather a handful six to eight inches deep, gently compress it into a ball, and toss it into the air. If the ball falls apart into crumbs when you catch it, the soil is ready to work; otherwise it needs more time to dry.

In late February, it is not too early to sow early spring greens such as beets, spinach, cilantro, radishes, arugula, and mustard greens in shallow soil under a cloche. Just when other folks are thinking about planting their garden you will ensure an early crop of food for your bellies and your souls. Late February and March is the time to sow leeks and onions indoors to transplant.

Seedy Saturday at the Farmer's Institute on Feb .10 is the perfect time to pick up your seed supply. Make up your list and visit the many seed booths, learn about new varieties, and get new ideas. Plan to participate in the workshop, "***An Introduction to Winter Gardening***" presented by Linda Gilkeson who promises that "after the workshop you will be ready for next winter with beds of full grown greens that will produce all winter..."

Brandon Bauer, another workshop presenter, gives these tips about February gardening activities. "From a permaculture perspective, February is a very important and active month with Valentine's Day marking the first 10 hour day since winter solstice. This is an excellent time to finish cleaning up by deadheading perennials, and pruning shrubs, hedges and fruit trees. Planting perennials and new trees in February gives them the entire spring season to acclimate to their new homes and get established, which will reduce the maintenance and water they will need later during the dry summer months.

Brandon finishes by saying, "Keep your eyes peeled, the flowers are coming."

This is the first in a regular series of columns about ***Gardening on Salt Spring Island*** sponsored by the Salt Spring Energy Strategy. Written by authorities in their field, the columns will complement the series of workshops and tours on winter gardening being launched at Seedy Saturday on February 10. Check out [www.saltspringenergystrategy.org](http://www.saltspringenergystrategy.org) for info about the workshops and columns postings.