

March in the Garden on Salt Spring Wendi Gilson and Patti Bauer Rev. March 1/07

Rain today. Lately, I've had time to do nothing but lounge in the brief blessing of early spring sun. After a too short while the chilly winter returns as well as the need to get things done. Now is a good time to get out and get warm by preparing for next year's wood store so that it has all summer to cure and then burn more efficiently.

One way we can gain back some of our lost food sovereignty is by eating nettles. They are starting to grow in profusion around this time of year when the choice of other fresh local greens is limited. Saci Spindler, Community herbalist and herbal educator of Seabrook Medicinals suggests that nettles are a good spring-time blood purifier, very nutritious as a great source of protein & iron, and a good natural antihistamine. For you allergy sufferers, now is the time to boost your system by pounding back the nettles.

Watch, also, for the first signs of burdock. Dig and enjoy this wonderful spring tonic and blood purifier - Enjoy as tea or chopped into soup or a stir fry. Keep your eyes open for the season's first tender wild greens to add to a salad like chickweed and dandelion leaves. These are important weeds to nourish, activate and enliven your system after a long winter.

Laying a cloche (garden fabric) over your bed to warm and dry the soil a couple of weeks before planting also helps weed seeds to germinate, then you can clear the weeds away (or chop them in) before planting. Layering is also a good technique – cut some nettles without their roots and lay onto your bed, next, sprinkle any decomposed organic matter (a bit of compost or composted manure) on top of the nettles. Cover with a thin layer of straw to prevent soil erosion. This will allow for weed seeds to germinate and then die under your thin organic mulch. March is a good time to amend your soil in preparation for this year's garden with compost and composted manures

Seeding hardy leafy greens gives the chance for the plants to establish themselves before the slugs come out to munch tender starts. Patrol for slugs, and if you see tiny clusters of pearl shaped slug eggs in your soil, now is the time to squish them – humans can be beneficial predators as well!

There are a whole host of plants to seed this time of year, including slo-bolt cilantro, radishes, oriental greens, miner's lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard and in late March sow snow and snap peas, favas and even your spuds. In March, you risk sowing tender plants, or those not hardy, by the slightest frost.

Clean your green house, propagation boxes or even your bright and sunny windowsill this month to make room for your busy month of starting many of your seeds in April. Prepare your seedling mixture for starts. Many folks use peat moss. Although peat moss is a great sterile mixture, many consider peat moss a non-renewable resource. Extraction of peat also results in specialized habitat destruction and release of carbon stores. Now is a good time to fill your greenhouse seedling flats or pots with a moist 50-50 mix of compost and sand. Let them stand a few weeks to allow any weed seeds to germinate. You can then weed them out in April to start your seedlings.

For winter gardens, there is still time to start your leeks, onions, and celeriac from seed indoors to transplant. In late March one can direct sow turnips and perennial food such as Jerusalem Artichoke (sun chokes) for some soul winter food in soups and roasts.

Garlic's up! – Early weeding of your garlic patch now reduces heavy weeding later

Appreciate the extra minutes of light every day as we move toward the balancing influence of the equinox later on in March.

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For more information on Gardening on Salt Spring check out the website
www.saltspringenergystrategy.org

This column is contributed monthly as a part of the salt Spring Energy Strategy with contributions from seasoned gardeners. Contact: Marion Pape 537-4567