

## **May in the Garden on Salt Spring**

### **Patti Bauer**

Traditionally, May long weekend is the time to plant your garden. We are blessed with such an extended season - flowers are blooming and our bodies can already be nourished from such an abundance of food and medicinal plants from the garden. My father way up in Northern Manitoba laughs as he tells me the 'snow' worms are doing the work for him. Not anymore! Time to get digging.

There are some important seeds to scatter – calendula, borage & nasturtium. These plants produce edible flowers all summer long, are fantastic companion plants, are medicinal and excellent soil conditioners. They produce an extraordinary amount of biomass to use as mulch or chop into your garden beds as a green manure.

Chickens will work your garden for you and now is the time to get some chicks. 3-6 chickens will do an incredible amount of work. Once grown, chickens can be placed in a chicken tractor—a moveable pen— over your garden bed and they will weed for you, eat earwigs, slugs, cutworms, wireworms, sow bugs, and they will fertilize your beds. 3-4 days later they are ready to move on and your garden bed is happily taken care of, and so is your back. Remember to put the chickens in at night, raccoons eat them.

As for infrastructure, check your irrigation system for leaks and ensure optimal performance. Clean and oil your tools. Check your fence and gates for repairs. The season gets busy and you do not want to be tinkering with your infrastructure if your plants are in need of attention.

Saci Spindler, Community herbalist, tells us that this is a beautiful month to begin harvesting the aerial parts of plants for medicine. As the eye can see the vital life force is moving upwards, unfurling new foliage. This is the time to gather spring's tender leaves. Hawthorn leaves are unfolding, a wonderful herb for giving tone and strength to the heart. Energetically Hawthorn allows the heart to open, be healed and blossom. While walking, we notice the wild roses budding. As we are gifted with some warm days this cool spring, these buds will begin to blossom. Harvest the rose petals as a lovely addition to salads, tea blends and herbal baths. One thing to keep in mind, if harvesting any plant to dry for future use, it is important to gather them on a dry day. Drying wet material will compromise the quality.

In May you can sow many seeds—carrots, dill, cilantro, onion sets, radishes, beets, spinach, chard, beans—directly into the garden, Plant some more potatoes now too. Allowing them to sprout slightly will get your spuds off to a good start, careful not to break the tender shoots. Potatoes like an acidic soil so if you have any woody berms, this is a great place to plant them.

Start corn, melons, cucumbers, pumpkins, summer and winter squash indoors. Although they can be directly sown into your beds, Cabbage, Broccoli, and Brussel Sprouts are much easier to transplant out later, saving much weeding.

Preparing beds for the fall and winter garden can be achieved by planting summer cover crops that condition, add nutrients and attract beneficial insects. Buckwheat, berseem clover, bush beans, phacelia, and calendula are all great cover crops.

For your winter garden, now is the time to sow Celeriac, Parsnip, Turnips, Carrots, Beets, and Chard. Sow Winter Squash, Broccoli, Cauliflower and Cabbage under a cloche or indoors.

May is an incredible month in the garden. The colors are arriving day by day and activity is brimming with earth's life force. May you find yourself in its center.