

# Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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As the summer days get shorter and the nights cooler, we are running out of time to start winter greens from seed. The last two weeks of August is a good time to seed winter lettuces and other fast growing greens: arugula, cresses and cilantro (which is surprisingly hardy). Unless they are in a greenhouse or tunnel, or we have an amazingly warm fall, plants from seeds sown after Sept. 1st won't grow big enough to be harvestable during the winter. They usually do survive, however, to provide an early crop in the spring.

## Corn Salad

If you have never grown corn salad (AKA 'mache' or 'bird lettuce'), I urge you to give it a try. Foxglove currently has seeds in stock. It is an excellent substitute for lettuce in winter salads. It is much hardier than lettuce and doesn't need any winter protection even when we have a cold blast. It grows in a flat rosette of small, shiny green leaves and survives deep, wet snow without being crushed. Oddly, slugs don't bother it. The vitamin content is higher than lettuce, but the best part is that, in winter, the leaves have a lettuce-like texture and a mild, baby-corn flavour. Sold on it yet?

In early September, I broadcast corn salad seeds under winter squash vines, tomatoes and other warm season crops that will soon vacate the garden bed. When the vines are done, I cut them off at the ground to avoid disturbing the green carpet of corn salad. To harvest corn salad, I cut the largest plants off at the soil line, so that the rosette of leaves stays together. I find it easier to rinse and handle the whole rosette than individual small leaves. When making salad, I snip off the base of the plant and drop the bite-sized leaves into the bowl. Corn salad is one of the few plants hardy enough to grow in winter and you will find that plants quickly fill in the spaces left from harvesting. Next spring, allow some plants to go to seed so that you will have plenty of seed on hand.

## Plant Sales

For a variety of started winter vegetables, try these sources:

Stowell Lake Farm is advertizing their winter vegetable plant sale for next Sunday, August 24. Sale starts at 10:00 and goes to 2:00. (Contact: 653-4308).

Fulford Valley Organics, 2161 Fulford-Ganges Road (Contact: fulfordvalleyorganics@shaw.ca; 250-653-0041) may still have started seedlings.

In Victoria, Carolyn Herriott will be holding her annual sale of winter vegetable starts from August 25th to Sept.2nd. Garden Path Nursery, 395 Conway Road. 10-5:30.(Contact: thegardenpath@shaw.ca ; 250-881-1555)