

# Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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The main message today is that it time to get your seed for winter lettuce, spinach and other quick growing greens and sow them in the next week or two. I have had good luck growing most spinach varieties over winter, but the same is not true of lettuce as summer varieties are not suitable. Winter lettuce varieties from West Coast Seeds: 'Rouge d'hiver', 'Continuity', 'Winter Density'. Foxglove has more WCS seeds in now, including a couple of these lettuces, spinach and other greens. If you have the following lettuce varieties on hand from Salt Spring Seeds grow them as they also do well in winter: 'Goose', 'Italian Red Perella', 'Hilde', 'Bakito'.

In choosing where to plant, keep in mind that both spinach and lettuce survive in better conditions if they are protected from the worst of the winter rains. Their leaves are more easily damaged than leafy greens from the cabbage family, which have thicker, waxy cuticles. If you can, grow spinach and lettuce where they can be covered with cold frames, cloches or tunnels or plant them in beds that are sheltered under the overhang of a roof or deck. You can also transplant them into an unheated greenhouse at the end of season after tomatoes or other crops are finished.

If you get at it in the next couple of days, there is still time to sow kales, mustards, mustard spinach (Komatsuna), endives, arugula and chinese cabbage and other Asian greens. While these crops will germinate and grow if sown later in the month, plants started after mid-August in this climate just don't have time to grow large enough to provide much in the way of a harvest during the winter. They won't grow much during the winter and they do need to be quite well grown before the cold weather arrives to have enough leaves to support a couple of months of picking. If you plant too late, all is not lost, as the small plants usually do survive the winter. Once they start to grow in late February they will give you early harvests from March onwards. SS Natureworks still has seeds for some of these crops that are well worth trying out.

Several people have asked about sowing winter broccoli, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts now, but despite what some seed packets say, in my experience it is too late to get plants big enough to provide a crop (unless they will be grown in a greenhouse).