

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Last planting:

Garlic: October is the ideal month for planting garlic. If you are looking for seed stock, Salt Spring Seeds has a great selection of varieties: <http://www.saltspringseeds.com/> Click on 'Garlic' on the top right side of the page for varieties, ordering and lots on information on garlic culture.

Last Harvest:

Some low lying gardens have already had light frost overnight and with the onset of fall rains it is time to get in the last of the summer crops.

Winter Squash: Harvest the rest of the mature squash and bring them indoors to cure. The skin of mature squash is so hard that you can't dent it with a finger-nail and the stem is hard, dry and corky. Mark S. recommends wiping each squash with non-toxic bleach solution (a tablespoon of hydrogen peroxide in litre of water) to prevent mould. Curing for a couple of weeks in warm, dry conditions with good air circulation hardens the skin so that rot organisms cannot get in. Once cured, squash can be stored in a cooler spot, but it must be dry. I range my winter squash along the top of my kitchen cabinets where they keep perfectly all winter.

Tomatoes: Mature green tomatoes can continue to ripen for a month or two after picking. There is less decay in fruit picked while the vines are still in good condition, but in any case, fruit must be picked before a killing frost. Some people pull the whole vine and hang it up in a shed or other indoor spot to allow fruit to ripen. Others pick the fruit, remove stems and wash the fruit in a bleach solution (1 teaspoon hydrogen peroxide per gallon of water). When the tomatoes are perfectly dry store them in shallow boxes or trays. Whatever the method, check often to remove ripening or rotting fruit.

Potted tomato plants can be brought indoors to a sun porch or greenhouse to extend the season. Thinking ahead for next year's tomatoes, Audrey W. brought her 'Tumbler' tomato plants indoors until spring. She cut them right back and kept them as house plants for the winter, then set them back out to crop again this season with excellent results.

Potatoes: If you haven't dug the last of your spuds, it is time to get on it. Try to harvest on a dry day so that you can leave them in the sun for a couple of hours to dry off. Lacking dry weather, you can spread them on newspapers on the floor of the garage, garden shed, covered porch, etc. When dry, brush off the soil and store them in cool (10 degrees C is ideal), completely dark conditions. Burlap bags or heavy cardboard boxes are good for keeping out light. Potatoes have several months of natural dormancy so won't sprout no matter what the storage conditions. Some people also just leave the potatoes in the garden and dig them through the winter as needed.

You can read all of my previous messages on the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website:
www.saltspringenergystrategy.org