

July in the Garden on Salt Spring

Patti Bauer

Ahhh, The summer garden. It is a wonder how many bugs and birds and colors and fragrances and food we are blessed with. The FOOD the food! Yum. My friend and neighbour resurrected a lost strawberry bed in our garden this year and described the results by saying “This is the most delectable strawberry I have ever eaten!” Goes to show that there is nothing better than homegrown food. We live like kings!

The trouble with growing food is after all the work, just when you’re about to jump in the lake, it is time to harvest. Harvesting is in itself an art – and you have to do it! For many summer vegetables, it is important to harvest frequently to maximize your yields. If you leave the veggies on the plant without frequently harvesting, the plant will begin to die back. This is true with beans, cucumbers, lettuces, and summer squash.

This time of year I like to give my garden a boost with a foliar feed or a nutritional compost tea for root feeding. The tea is diluted and applied to the leaves or roots and controls all sorts of plant diseases such as blights and molds. It also repels and controls pests, and promotes the growth of beneficial soil bacteria resulting in healthier and more stress-tolerant plants. The fancy greenhouse-gas-producing organic and non-organic fertilizers from far-away lands are not sustainable. There are many recipes for a compost tea, or foliar feed, with ingredients found right at your doorstep – all you will need is compost, or green matter such as comfrey or horsetail. Check on the Internet for directions. Here is a low-tech tip – you do not need a sprayer – you can dip a leafy branch into your bucket of compost tea and wave it over your plants or pour the tea directly at the base of the plants. For those who want to aerate their compost tea, an aquarium bubbler will work. Use rechargeable batteries. A solar battery charger can be purchased from Energy Options on Salt Spring to recharge the batteries in your bubbler.

There is still time to plant vegetables. In late July there are many quicker growing vegetables you can sow for a fall harvest – radishes, daikon, turnips, oriental greens, collards, kohlrabi, endives, arugula, spinach, snow peas and lettuces. I like to plant daikon around the garden and leave it – it sends a deep taproot into the soil and breaks up any hardpan. Before it goes to seed I chop it in; the taproots form ‘nutrient plugs’ all over the garden.

For your winter garden, Linda Gilkenson explains that in early July, you can get another crop of chard, carrots and beets in the ground. Starting winter broccoli and winter cauliflower in early July is a must. Ensure they are well watered so that they do not dry out in the hot weather.

Plan to get your winter starts and seeds in the ground for early August. Many of your summer beds that are now going to seed are perfect to prep. Chop them in, add your favorite green manure such as comfrey, add a bit of compost, mulch and wait for the bed to settle. Any weeds will have germinated by the time you are ready to put your winter veggies in. In early August you can direct sow kale, chard, collards, asian greens such as

komatsuma, corn salad and varieties of winter lettuces. They may take a beating this winter, however you will be blessed with an abundance of food early next year. Goodbye California food!

This summer fellow farmers Karen & Kimmy are preparing organic winter broccoli and cauliflower starts and others to be sold at Foxglove in early August. Watch for notices.

On August the 26th the Salt Spring Energy Strategy continues with its popular Winter Gardening Workshop Series, this time hosted at the Salt Spring Centre. Dan Jason will discuss the art of seed saving and curing winter squash, followed by a Permaculture hands on workshop with Brandon Bauer on building cloches and covers for your winter garden. Check our website for details – www.saltspringenergystrategy.org

Enjoy your healthy, glowing bodies!