

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

May 30, 2012

Planning for Winter's Harvest

Yes, if you can believe it--it's time to think about what will be filling your garden next winter. I have included a list of seeds to have on hand at the end of this message with links to particular seed suppliers mentioned in this message.

Brussels sprouts: This week is a good time to start Brussels sprouts from seed. I like to sow them this late so that plants sprouts in late Sept-early October. By that time the late summer infestation of cabbage aphids has died down for the winter, so they don't damage the sprouts. If you have already planted B sprouts plants, that's fine (they will just be taller than mine will be), but do keep a sharp eye out for aphids as the sprouts grow. Blast the aphids off with water if you find them. Note that sowing B sprouts later than mid-June usually results in a crop failure (gardeners further south can push it to the end of June) because the plants don't have enough growing time left in the season to make sprouts at all. If the sprouts don't form on the plant before winter, they won't form properly in the spring. After the chill of winter, the plants change their growth pattern and send up a seed stalk from where each sprout would have been.

Winter Cabbage: This is also time to start the hardy cabbages for winter harvests. Check your cabbage seed packages for the 'days to harvest' information. Some take as little as 65 days (summer cultivars) and others as long as 120 days. The latter are usually the long-standing, winter hardy types, such as the beautiful 'January King' and good old 'Danish Ballhead'. These take all season to mature a good-sized head and should be sown now. I find Savoy cabbages particularly easy to grow, frost hardy and quick (80-95 days) and there are also some beautiful red winter cabbages (my decades long fave has been: 'Langedijker Red' from William Dam Seeds).

Coming Soon: Mid- to late June is good timing to sow purple sprouting broccoli and winter cauliflower. These need time to grow to a medium height before winter so that they can produce good sized heads next spring. I have tried all the PSB varieties I could find over the last few years and my favourites for productivity and hardiness are West Coast Seed's generic PSB (which I was told is the cultivar 'Red Spear') and 'Cardinal Late'. 'Early Rudolph' is earliest by a couple of weeks, but I find it peters out quickly, while the two I just mentioned are still producing side shoots in my garden right now. Among winter cauliflower, 'Galleon' is the only one in this year's WCS catalogue; it is excellent and reliable. If you can get seeds of 'Purple Cape', it is also very hardy and good quality (for US readers, it is still available at Territorial Seeds).

If you don't have the space or time to start these cabbage family plants now, you should be able to buy plants in late July onward from local growers (now would be a good time to put a bug in the ear of your local nurseries to make sure they have the right varieties of these plants available--there are still too many places plants of summer broccoli and cauliflower being sold to unwitting gardeners in late summer, with predictable crop failures ensuing).

Parsnips: If you like them, now's the time to sow them. Apparently they germinate best in cooler soil so if we get another sudden heat spell, shade the seedbed with newspaper, burlap, etc. and keep it moist until the seeds germinate.

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Winter Harvest Shopping List

If you don't have seeds for your winter crops, better get on it! Some years it is hard to find desired varieties as seed suppliers run short. Here is a list of things to plant this summer for next winter's harvest:

- Spinach: I especially like Longstanding Bloomsdale; also Giant Winter (Full Circle Seeds)
- Corn salad: 'Jade' from William Dam Seed is my current fave, but all are good; same plant sold as 'Mache' at Full Circle Seeds
- Hardy lettuce: Winter Density, Conquistador, Rouge d'Hiver, Continuity, Esmerelda, Hilde, Italian Red Perella and others
- Swiss chards (all kinds), perpetual spinach/leaf beet, 'Bietina' (the latter from Salt Spring Seeds, Eagleridge)
- Arugula (annual & perennial/Sylvetta)
- Radicchio, hardy endives
- Collards, kales (there are lots of cultivars), broccoli raab, rapini, Tah Tsai
- Leaf mustards (Giant Red, Osaka Purple, Tendergreen, etc.), leaf turnip (namenia, mizuna), leaf radish ('Hong Vit'--a new fave for me, from Omega Blue Farms)
- Kohlrabi
- Carrots, rutabaga, daikon, beets: so far I haven't seen any great differences in hardiness between varieties in these root crops--so grow your favourites.
- Komatsuna: the green-leaved cultivar (West Coast Sees) is outstanding in hardiness and productivity; Red Komatsuna is not (though it IS pretty...)
- Chinese Cabbage: for harvests into late fall; winters in warmer, more protected gardens

Links to seeds suppliers, in no particular order:

West Coast Seeds: www.westcoastseeds.com/

William Dam Seeds: www.damseeds.ca/

Salt Spring Seeds: www.saltspringseeds.com/

Full Circle Seeds: www.fullcircleseeds.com/

Eagleridge: www.eagleridgeseeds.com/

Omega Blue Farms: www.OmegaBlueFarms.webs.com [no online seed catalogue, but you can try contacting them via e-mail]

Territorial Seeds: www.territorialseed.com/

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June 3: If you are attending the Mother Earth News Fair in Puyallup, Washington this coming weekend, stop by and say hello. I am giving 2 talks on Sunday followed by a book signing and will be hanging around the New Society Publishers booth between times. Info:

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/fair/ws-pu-gilkeson-planting.aspx>

To order books or to check my schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area see:

www.lindagilkeson.ca

You can read my previous messages archived on the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website:

www.saltspringenergystrategy.org