

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Edit the Garden, August Planting

If your tomatoes are slow to ripen, you are not alone! Many people are wondering about it, but this cooler summer is the way our 'normal' summers used to be: for those that have forgotten how long it used to take tomatoes to ripen outdoors, this is a reminder. On the other hand, many other crops are doing particularly well this year with more rainfall and fewer hours of high temperatures that slow the growth of cool season crops.

With the summer going quickly it is time to take stock of the garden and make more room for winter crops. If plants are producing so much that you can't use all of the produce (e.g., zucchini...) take some out. If plants are not growing well enough to justify keeping them—off with their heads! Among the new varieties I tried this year there was a pea I didn't like at all and a long-season bean that was never going to mature a crop in this cool season—so they are outta here. Look for plants past their prime, such as lettuce going to seed; plants failing to produce, such as cauliflower that isn't making a head; plants that have been so set back by pests (rabbits, aphids, etc.) that they aren't likely to yield much. Don't feel bad about editing these out of the garden--it frees up space for more successful crops. I usually just "chop and drop" the edited plants to turn them into mulch on the spot, but you can also compost them.

To decide whether you need to incorporate nutrients in the soil before you plant the next crop, go by how well the previous crop was growing. After beans and peas (which make their own nitrogen) and in gardens that have had several years of enrichment with compost, organic fertilizers and lots of mulch, you can usually plant again without adding anything. For the first couple of years in a new garden, and certainly if the previous crop was growing poorly, the soil nitrogen often needs a boost between plantings. This can be supplied by mixing in blood meal, alfalfa meal, fish meal or composts with a higher nitrogen content such as the fish/wood waste composts (e.g., SeaSoil, Earthbank, Oly Mountain brands) or poultry manure composts.

Spinach day is nigh: I sow spinach at the end of the first week of August for harvests from fall through next spring. Sowing after Aug. 7th seems to work well because the days are short enough to avoid stimulating seedlings to go to seed (the long days of May-July cause spinach to bolt). Spinach can be kept over winter to produce a big crop in the early spring. For best results, plant spinach where it will be protected from heavy winter rain: ideally, under the overhang of a roof or where the bed can be covered with a coldframe or tunnel in November. I expect most varieties will do, but I know for sure that 'Bloomsdale'/'Long Standing Bloomsdale'; 'Giant Winter' and 'Tye'e' overwinter well. Note that a plant called 'Perpetual Spinach' by seed suppliers is actually a very hardy, fine-stemmed type of chard and not a true "spinach". It is an excellent leafy green for winter, however, and doesn't need protection from rain or cold weather.

What else to plant now: Up to early August you can sow kale, collards, daikon & other winter radishes, broccoli raab and the many hardy leafy greens (mizuna, leaf mustard, leaf radish, mustard spinach/Komatsuna, arugula) and Chinese cabbage (Joi choi, bok choy, Napa cabbage, etc.). These are all in the cabbage family and are susceptible to attack by cabbage root maggots, which are more numerous in late summer. If these are a problem in your garden, cover the root crops with insect netting or floating row cover from sowing until late October to prevent attack (root maggots are particularly

damaging to root crops). It is a good idea to cover the leafy greens as well to avoid having stunted plants. By the end of August, sow lots of winter hardy lettuce and scatter corn salad seed under tomatoes, pepper, squash, pole beans. These sprout in the shade under the plants and cover the soil surface by the time the tender crops are finished and composted. The soil is very warm right now and dries out quickly so remember to cover seedbeds until germination (with burlap, opaque white plastic, old beach towels, etc.). Continue to shade the seedlings for week or two after they come up, using 50% shade cloth or any kind of latticework to cover them.

Veggie starts for fall and overwintering crops have been for sale in local garden centres all month so if you need starts of kales, chard and other leafy greens, get them now. On that note, the Victoria Compost Education Centre, 1216 North Park St., is having a sale on August 17th of organically grown winter veggie starts. 10:00 am to 1:00 pm: See <https://www.compost.bc.ca/>

Liquid feeding: By now tomatoes, peppers and other plants in pots are likely running out of readily available nutrients, both because of the limited root space and because frequent watering leaches out nutrients. Weekly watering with liquid fertilizer from now on should keep them growing well. You can use commercial fish fertilizer or other liquid fertilizer products or make a nutrient-rich extract by soaking a shovelful of compost in a bucket of water for a day or two (dilute the resulting “tea” until is the colour of weak tea before applying). This also applies to plants growing in the ground if they seem to have run out of available nitrogen as shown by slow growth and light green or yellowing leaves.