

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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What to Plant Now, Garlic Harvesting, Veggie Start Suppliers

With garlic, onions, early peas and spring-sown lettuce, greens and radishes, etc. finished, you should now have space to plant more winter crops. My winter broccoli and cauliflower seedlings are about big enough to parachute into the garlic space next week (see below for a list of nurseries that sell winter starts). Now is the perfect time to edit your garden to open up more planting space: pull out anything that is overmature, surplus to requirements, wasn't as tasty as you hoped, or not performing up to expectations. With 4 kinds of zucchini planted this spring (no one needs that many zucchini!), I have now frozen, pickled and dehydrated enough and am removing some plants to make room for winter crops.

From now to early August, you can sow seeds of arugula and other hardy greens such as mizuna, collards, kale, Chinese cabbages/Napa cabbage, leaf mustards, mustard spinach, broccoli raab, winter radishes/daikon. Given how hot and dry it has been, I would wait to sow your fall crop of spinach and winter lettuce until after the first week of August—that still gives them plenty of time to grow. As always, remember summer seedlings are very vulnerable to heat injury so make sure they have plenty of water and keep them covered with 50% shade cloth or lath screens until they are deeply rooted. As soon as possible, work a fine mulch around the little plants to protect their roots from frying on hot days and keep adding mulch as they get bigger. [For that matter, try to increase the layer of mulch around all of the plants in your garden—it really makes a difference in how well plants grow to protect their roots from high temperatures and it also conserves soil moisture].

Garlic: I am still receiving questions about how to know when garlic is ready to harvest. If you haven't harvested yet, check how many totally dried up and brown lower leaves the plants have. If 4 or 5 completely dry leaves are present, the plants are ready (about half the leaves should still be green). There will likely just be a shred of the lowest leaf or two left at the base of the stem so be sure to count those too. OR, pull up one and see if the skin feels like damp paper rather than being spongy. The timing of harvest of mature bulbs is not critical: if you harvested a bit early, the bulbs won't be as big as they could have been; if you harvest a week or two late, no problem. If you harvest really late (all the leaves are turning brown) the bulbs will be more prone to infection from soil-borne pathogens and could rot in storage.

There also seems to be some anxiety about whether it is necessary to stop watering garlic for 2 weeks before harvest. Drying soil helps the bulbs mature, but in the dry summer climate of this region bulbs get the message anyway. It does save a bit of water, but if you can't stop watering the bed because of the way your irrigation system is designed, don't worry. Just give the bulbs plenty of time to cure after they are dug up. If your garlic is close to harvest and it looks like a drenching rainstorm is coming (ha! as if...), once you stop dancing for joy, it would be a good idea to immediately pull the bulbs so they don't sit in wet soil.



Cure the bulbs in warm, dry, well-ventilated conditions for 3-4 weeks. Outdoors is fine but not where the sun can shine directly on bulbs as they can be damaged by the heat. Hardneck garlic can be tied by the scapes into bundles and the tops of softneck garlic can be braided together so they can be hung up; bulbs can also be laid out one layer deep in flats or trays to cure. Clean the bulbs (brush off soil, loose skins, trim roots if desired) after the bulbs are cured.

Sources of winter veggie starts: As promised last month, here is a list of local sources for winter vegetable starts. These folks grow their starts organically and I know they carry a good selection of the right varieties for winter:

- Chorus Frog Organic Plant Nursery (Quarry Farm) 190 Jasper Road, Salt Spring. chorusfrog@thequarryfarm.ca 250 537 6380. Open daily 10-5.
- Russell Nursery, 1370 Wain Rd, North Saanich, BC. [near Sidney] (250) 656-0384 <https://russellnursery.com/> Veggie starts available in early August.
- Victoria Compost Education Centre, 1216 N Park St, Victoria, has an annual sale of organically grown winter veggie starts: Saturday, August 12, 10:00 am (250) 386 9676 <https://compost.bc.ca/>
- Nanaimo Community Gardens Society greenhouse - Beban Learning Garden in Beban Park, Nanaimo. greenhouse@nanaimocommunitygardens.ca 250-816-4769 Open: Monday 3:30-6pm, Wednesday and Saturday 10-12

The following are new sources that readers have sent in (so I can't vouch for them personally) or are vendors that I listed last year, but I didn't get a reply from this year, so they may or may not be selling winter veggie starts this summer:

- Mason Street Farm & Victoria Edible Nursery, 1015 Balmoral Rd, Thursday to Saturday, 10am – 5 pm
- Naturally Grown Garden Varieties and Spring Hill Soil Laboratory <https://springhillsoil-lab.ca/> in the Cowichan Valley sell their winter veggies starts through the Cow-op <https://shop.cow-op.ca/Producer/deedac0f-9a4f-486e-9352-747cfe3ffaa0> or direct sales: info@naturallygrowingv.ca
- Saanich Organics, 7900 West Saanich Rd (Three Oaks Farm of Saanich Organics). rachel@saanichorganics.com
- Michell Valley Plants, 2451 Island View Road, Saanichton, behind the Michell Farm stand <https://michell-valley-plants.business.site/> (250) 886-0494
- Local Roots Farm Market, 41015 Government Rd North Entrance, Brackendale <https://localrootsbc.ca/>

Other garden centres also bring in late season veggie starts, but buyer beware because they buy from wholesalers that are not well informed about the timing of planting or the best varieties for winter culture in this region. While any varieties of kale, chard, spinach, cabbage, purple sprouting broccoli should be hardy enough, if you are looking for winter cauliflower, look for only these varieties: Purple Cape, Galleon, Prestige or Walcheren. Any other cauliflowers, such as Snowcrown, Snowball, Amazing, etc. are not winter varieties. Unlike winter broccoli and cauliflower, which don't mature until next spring, Brussels sprouts seedlings for sale this late in the season are unlikely to produce a crop as there just isn't enough growing time left for these long-season plants (unless we have another long, warm fall like last year....).