

THE NATURAL GARDENER NEWSLETTER

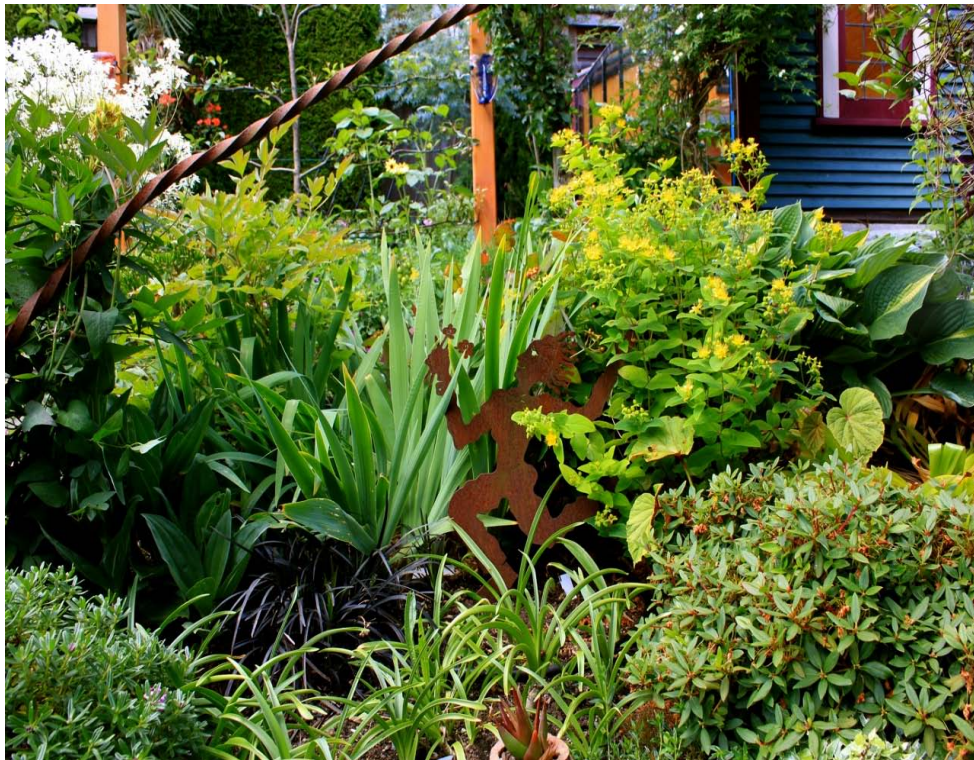
Well, July certainly wasn't that great a month weather wise was it. Not so much rainy as just cool and grey. Now that August is here summer seems to have arrived as well, so enjoy the warm, summer days. I may not have liked the summer so far but my garden has and I hope yours has too. All my plants, even the more tender ones have done very well this season. My Hakonechloa aureola is really nice this year, my Cimicifuga 'Brunette' (I refuse to call it Actia) is actually going to bloom this year, something it didn't do last year, my hostas are big, bold and beautiful and all my dwarf rhododendrons have put on lots of growth.

Now that the warm weather has arrived don't forget to water. We really haven't had to do much watering so it's hard to get back in the habit. Remember to water in the morning and that a long, deep watering 2 or 3 times a week is much better for your plants than a 5 minute watering every other day. Speaking of watering, don't forget the boulevard trees, especially the newly planted ones. They will greatly appreciate a good watering.

In this issue I will be talking about Fall Vegetable Gardening, Plant of the Month, Spring Bulbs, Preserving Herbs and of course the To Do List.

Enjoy!

Bob



A section of the Claude Ledoux & Adrian Michelsen Garden
Photo courtesy of Elaine Peterson

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Fritillaria imperialis rubra

This really is one of the most amazing varieties of fritillaria possible. It will display spectacular orange-red pendants in spring/early summer and like all imperialis varieties, it will have a very unusual group of pineapple looking bracts on top of each flower. They naturalise very well if left undisturbed in well drained soil.

Fritillaria Imperialis bulbs can be planted at 15-20cm deep and 20cm apart in well drained/light and moist soil. When planting handle the bulbs carefully as fritillaria bulbs are renowned for being fragile. Because the bulbs have depressions and openings on the top of the bulb plant them on their sides so water can't collect and rot the bulb. They can be planted in areas with full sun access or preferably with partial shade, and can be left to naturalise in grass, borders or even cold greenhouses. For something so beautiful they do have a bit of a skunky smell to them, but you only notice it if you get up close.

For a touch of the exotic in your garden do try *Fritillaria imperialis rubra*, you'll be glad you did.

Zone: 5

Light: Full sun to part shade

Soil: Well drained, moist

Height: 3 feet

Spread: 1 foot



FALL/WINTER VEGETABLE GARDENING

Vegetable gardening has definitely enjoyed a resurgence in the last couple of years and now that renewed interest is moving into the fall and winter gardening season. When considering fall & winter gardening there are two things to look at. First off you want to look at winter crop protection for your vegetables and what are the best vegetables to grow in the fall & winter. Here is some useful information for you and your garden.

Winter Crop Protection

Some protection from cold, wind, and snow will certainly increase success for winter gardeners. We recommend the use of raised beds whenever possible, as they provide extra drainage, and will warm faster in brief winter sunny periods. Raised beds are easy to modify for use with cloche greenhouses, wind protection, and heavy row cover. Used in combination, these methods can ensure a bountiful harvest of fresh vegetables all winter long.

Even just planting against a south-facing wall can offer enough reflected/radiant heat and wind protection for many winter vegetables. Our customers have spoken of brushing snow off of unprotected Mizuna and finding it completely healthy and ready to eat. Imagine showing up at Christmas dinner with a fresh salad that you harvested that afternoon!

When growing carrots and other root vegetables over winter, consider planting in raised beds and adding a bit of straw around them for further insulation from hard frosts. Beneath a heavy row cover, their green tops will continue grow quite happily, and their roots will become sweeter with the cold – all with no threat from pests.

Heavy row cover acts like a blanket – storing heat in the air and soil beneath – and can add up to 5° Celsius to planted rows. Its benefits will increase if it is used in combination with a dark mulch – black plastic or landscape fabric will absorb more of the sun's energy during the day, so it will take longer for the ground to cool down at night. It can also be folded or used in two layers for further protection, although light penetration will be reduced.

Even in the short days of winter, you can Eat Local and Grow Food!

BEST WINTER GARDEN VEGETABLES

Some vegetable varieties thrive in the cool conditions of fall and early winter, and offered a bit of protection from extreme cold, they can be harvested right through until spring. Many varieties actually improve in flavour, texture, and sweetness once the cold weather arrives.

As you would start many vegetables in late winter and early spring for summer harvests, winter gardening requires sowing seeds in mid- to late summer. This allows the plants to gain a little growth before the days begin to get shorter and the sunlight becomes less intense. The secret is choosing the right vegetables and thinking ahead.

Varieties for winter harvest:

Arugula: Sow from June to the end of August for harvests in fall, winter, and spring. High in Vitamin A and potassium, with a tangy, nutty flavour. Winter-grown arugula has a very different, milder flavour than the same plant grown in hot weather

Beets: Sow beets every three weeks from early spring to the end of July. Late sown beets can be harvested as beetroot or leafy greens from fall to winter. All beets have cold-hardiness, but Red Ace and Winterkeeper are particularly suited to winter gardening. Use crop protection for a longer harvest.

Broccoli: Sow some indoors in midsummer to transplant out before the end of August, and harvest in fall and early winter. Raab varieties can be harvested quite late without protection.

Brussels sprouts: Sow indoors in early June, and transplant seedlings outside in early August. These can be harvested over the winter and into spring. Frost adds to the sweetness of the edible buds.

Cabbage: Sow winter varieties in June and July to harvest in fall and winter – try Danish Ballhead, Embassy, January King, and Ermosa.

Carrots: Sow every three weeks from early spring to around July 7 for mature winter carrots, and sow again in the first two weeks of August for winter harvests. Carrots become very sweet in the cold, and all varieties are suited to winter gardening, or – try Campestra, Bolero, and Scarlet Nantes for the best hardiness. Use crop protection for a longer harvest.

Cilantro: Sow this tangy herb every three weeks right up to the end of August, and harvest young plants in fall and winter. Cilantro grows best in cold weather, and tends to bolt in heat. Grown under cover, it should survive all winter.

Collards: Sow this under-exploited, cold-hardy, leafy vegetable to the middle of July, and harvest from fall to spring for steamed greens and stir-fries. Collards can grow without any protection.

Corn salad: Sometimes called Mâche, this is the hardiest winter salad green, and can be sown as late as mid-September for harvests right into spring. Use the leaves as you would lettuce – the mild, nutty taste makes a fine background for stronger flavours from arugula, scallions, and other winter vegetables. Use crop protection for a longer harvest.

Endive & Radicchio: Sow from late June to early August, and add great texture and colour to salads from early fall right through winter. Endives can be sown as late as mid-September. Use crop protection for a longer harvest.

Kale: Sow this workhorse of a vegetable until mid-July for fall and winter harvests. All varieties grow sweeter after frost and can be grown without cover. Kale has the highest levels of beta-carotene of any vegetable and is also rich in Vitamin C and calcium.

Kohlrabi: Sow from late July to mid-August, and harvest in the fall and winter. The variety called Superschmeltz can be harvested right through until April. The swollen stems of kohlrabi contain high levels of Vitamin C, and grow sweeter after frost. No winter protection is required.

Leeks: Sow the Dutch variety Bandit from March to the end of June to harvest as late as April the following spring. Harvest any time once the stems are over 1 inch thick – great in soups, stews, and gravies.

Lettuce: With protection, all lettuces can be grown over winter, but varieties like Continuity, Winter Density, Cimmaron, and Rouge d'Hiver are particularly hardy. Sow every three weeks from March to September, but provide frost protection beneath heavy row cover or a cloche greenhouse. Surprise your friends with fresh salads at holiday dinners!

Mibuna, Mizuna, & Komatsuna: Sow these tasty Asian greens to the end of August or early September for harvests in fall to late winter. These are very hardy plants, and may survive without winter protection. Great in salads and stir-fries.

Parsley: Sow to the end of July, and parsley will produce all winter with a bit of crop protection. It is rich in both Vitamin C and iron. The conventional curly variety, Forest Green, may do better than the flat leaf Italian over winter.

Parsnips: Sow to mid-July and treat like carrots once the cold weather arrives. Parsnips are sweeter after frost, and hold particularly well in the ground. Try mulching with a bit of straw to keep hard frosts from damaging the plants in late winter.

Rutabagas: Sow mid-June to late July and harvest these cold hardy “winter turnips” from fall through spring. No protection is needed!

Scallions: Call them what you will – spring onions, salad onions, green onions – these can be sown indoors in early spring and direct sown from March right to early August outdoors. Late sown scallions will be ready for harvest right through to the following spring. Use crop protection for a longer harvest.

Sorrel: Sow this perennial from May to June, and harvest the lemony leaves at 4 to 6 inches long. Expect sorrel to bolt in hot weather, but it keeps growing and growing all year. With some minor protection, leaves can be picked all winter long – they will re-grow. Once established, sorrel is easy to propagate by division.

Spinach: Treat all varieties as a salad crop beneath cloche tunnels from first to last frost. Sow freely right to the end of October. Spinach thrives in cold weather, but requires some protection.

Swiss Chard: Sow until late July, and enjoy the leaves and stems of this colourful plant until mid-winter. Chard is full of iron, calcium, Vitamin C, and beta-carotene. Younger plants may benefit from some crop protection.

Turnips: Sow from spring to the end of August for a succession of harvests from fall through spring. Grown under cover, the greens are a delightful winter treat, but the roots hold well in cold soil with no protection.

Varieties to try for late fall harvest:

Broccoli – set out transplants in mid-August.

Cauliflower – set out transplants in early August.

Peas – direct sow in early July for a fall harvest.

Radish – some varieties handle cold very well and can be harvested well after first frost.

Overwintering varieties for spring/summer harvest:

Broad beans – sow in October/November for summer eating.

Broccoli, sprouting – set out transplants by mid-August for early/mid-spring harvests.

Cabbage – choose overwintering varieties for spring harvests.

Garlic – plant bulbs in September and October for masses of fresh garlic the following July.

Onions – overwintering varieties need no protection and will be ready to harvest in June from direct sowing the previous August.

The above article is courtesy of West Coast Seeds.

A perfect summer day is when the sun is shining, the breeze is blowing, the birds are singing, and the lawn mower is broken. ~James Dent

AUGUST TO DO LIST

- Sow seeds of fall veggies and annuals
- Plan perennial beds for fall and winter colour with ornamental grasses, fall-blooming bulbs, heucheras and hardy heaths and heathers
- Divide and transplant bearded iris
- Harvest vegetables continuously to stretch their season
- Prune summer-blooming shrubs (hydrangea, clethra, caryopteris) after flowers finish
- Plant garlic now for spring harvests
- Look forward to something different next spring: try alliums in your bulb garden
- Sow seeds of cool-weather herbs (chives, parsley)
- Harvest vegetables continuously to stretch their season
- Sprinkle compost starter to speed up composting for fall soil building
- Dig gently to harvest potatoes a few plants at a time
- Sow seeds of cool-weather herbs (chives, parsley, garlic chives, cilantro and dill)
- Keep cool during summer's dog days with a shade garden embroidered with hostas and hardy ferns
- Colour up your bulb garden with fall bloomers (fall crocus)

When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant. ~Author Unknown

BOTANICAL LATIN

On our continuing quest to understand what the heck the latin names of our favourite plants mean here is the next word of the month:

Fastigiata – It means having nearly vertical, close together branches. Example: Taxus baccata fastigiata – Columnar Yew Tree.

I have been writing a garden blog and wanted to remind you to check it out at blog.thenatural-gardener.com



We are also on www.thenatural-gardener.com. You can find us at The Natural Gardener Garden Store.

Would you like to see The Natural Gardener on Twitter. Let me know what you think.

PRESERVING HERBS

In the last couple of years I have noticed a marked interest in growing herbs in the garden, either in their own little area, incorporated into the garden bed or in containers. This is an excellent development as there really is nothing quite like being able to go out into your garden or onto your patio and snip some rosemary or chives to add to your dinner.

Most herbs are easy to grow, in fact some can be downright invasive. Mint comes to mind. However with some careful thought you can have fresh herbs nearly all year round.

Most herbs like a sunny, well-drained site in the garden. Since many of our commonest herbs come from around the Mediterranean area they do best in poor soil in full sun. In fact I don't recommend fertilizing most of your herbs more than once a year. If they get too much fertilizer they tend to be overgrown and the flavour is not as good. The exception to this is mint and chives which do like to be fed several times a season with a good organic fertilizer. Most herbs will also do very well in containers, in particular thyme, mint (which should only ever be grown in a container I think), parsley, bay, basil, rosemary and French tarragon.

Now that you have all your herbs growing wonderfully what are you going to do with them all. After all you can only eat so much at any one time and it would be nice to enjoy your herbs throughout the year not just in the summer. That's where preserving your herbs comes in. There are several different ways to preserve your herbs. You can preserve them in vinegar, dry them, preserve them in alcohol or in honey.

Preserving in Vinegar

This is an easy way to preserve herbs. Fennel, parsley, garlic, rosemary, basil, Greek oregano, coriander tarragon, bay and savory are suitable.

Crush your herbs then place in a jar with the vinegar. I like to use a white wine vinegar. Leave for two weeks, shaking daily then strain the contents. The herbs strength of flavour dictates how much should be used. For example, in red wine vinegar a single bruised rosemary stem the height of the bottle makes an exceptional herb vinegar. Two or three cloves of garlic will flavour up to 500ml.

Making Bay or Tarragon Vinegar

You will need: A 500ml bottle of white wine vinegar, four leaves of bay or 6 to 8 sprigs of tarragon.

Method: Set aside 10-15ml of vinegar. Pick herbs on a dry day choosing the undamaged leaves. Wash free of insects and pat dry between tea towels. Tear the leaves and push them into the bottle of vinegar, allowing air bubbles to reach the surface, until the bottle is full. Set the tightly closed bottle on a sunny windowsill. Gently shake the bottle each day and after two weeks test for fragrance and flavour. If it is to your liking, strain out the herbs and top up with vinegar then label and date the contents. Use in salad dressings and marinades.

Drying

Drying is perhaps the most widespread way of preserving herbs but it is important to harvest the herbs at their peak. Cut on a dry day discarding poor quality leaves. Hang stems in bunches of six to eight stems in an airy room away from direct heat or the sun. Thick leaves such as bay can be laid on cheesecloth stretched over a frame. Once dried store in airtight dark glass jars or tins.

Some herbs are better preserved by simple freezing such as mint, chives and basil. What I like to do is chop the leaves, place them in icecube trays and fill the trays with water. When you want to

use them just pop one or two out of the tray and add to your sauce or dressing. You can also freeze them in ziplock freezer bags.

Preserving with Honey

Herbs such as rosemary, sage and thyme can be added to honey infusing flavour and in some cases antibacterial qualities. Put the herb in the honey and warm over a low heat for 20 minutes. Remove the herbs after cooking and pour the honey in labelled jars.



Gardening is a way of showing that you believe in tomorrow

SPRING BULBS 2011 PART ONE

I know it's hard to believe but spring bulb planting time is just around the corner. I've ordered some beautiful bulbs, some unusual bulbs and some old favourites for your planting pleasure. Here's a sampling of what is coming at the end of this month.

Tulip 'Ice Cream'

Truly one of the most distinctive tulips you'll ever see. White petals are closely mounded against one another and form a central cone that resembles vanilla ice cream. Strawberry-pink petals, tinged with green, encircle this lush delight.



Tulip 'Chrysantha'

Chrysantha is a species tulip and is perfect for rock gardens, planters and small groupings in the garden. They are less vulnerable to stormy spring weather, and their generally short stems don't bend in strong winds. Their flowers usually remain closed through the morning or on cloudy days, showing only the outside color of the petals. When warmed by the sun, they open to reveal another petal color on the inside. It's like having two different flowers in the same space at once.



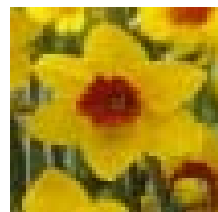
Tulip 'Innuendo'

This gorgeous tulip is whisper-pink with spreading, luminous magenta petal edges. Its flower is large, its stem quite strong and its foliage the most beautiful blue-green color, intensifying the brilliance of its flower.



Narcissus 'Missouri'

'Missouri' is a large-cupped daffodil. The solitary blooms have broad petals of shining gold and orange-scarlet. It grows to a height of about 16 inches.



Sorry about the photo but there isn't much on this daffodil.

Narcissus 'Pacific Coast'

'Pacific Coast' is a precious little miniature that is perfect for rock gardens, containers and in small clumps in the garden.



Colchicum 'Waterlily'

Colchicum's are an interesting bulb that sends up it's flowers in September then dies back until spring when it's leaves appear. Then they die back until the flowers once again appear in September. 'Waterlily' is an exquisite cultivar of Colchicum that adds interest to the late summer/early fall garden.



You can see why it's called Waterlily.

Fritillaria acmopetala

This species is found in fields in the Eastern Mediterranean region. It is olive green and reddish-brown. This is probably the easiest of the fritillaria to grow and spreads by offsets.



Allium Schubertii

I call this the fireworks allium and it will stop people in their tracks. Huge globes with star shaped lilac-pink flowers that shoot out of the centre stem. It is an excellent fresh cut flower or dried in arrangements.



That's everything for the August newsletter. I hope you enjoyed it and were inspired by some of the featured plants. Don't forget to water but most importantly don't forget to take some time to enjoy your garden. I know I love having breakfast and dinner out in my garden because it is so peaceful and beautiful so do take the time to enjoy yours.

Happy Gardening!

Bob



Monarda 'Jacob Cline'