

# Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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## Honey figs, tea bushes and other fruit

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The spring weather is coming along nicely now and gardeners are planting peas, potatoes, onion sets and transplanting seedlings of hardy greens: lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard, etc. I find spinach a disappointing plant when sown at this time of year as it goes to seed after only producing leaves for a month or so. They can't help it--it is the way the plant responds to our rapidly lengthening days this far north. This summer make a note to sow more spinach in August. August sown plants give you a moderate harvest of leaves over the fall and winter and then shoot up lots of big, tender leaves from late February/early March onward. These plants go to seed at the same time that spring-sown spinach does, but after a much longer harvest.

### Notes on some interesting food plants:

Foxglove Farm and Garden nursery (Salt Spring), and other local nurseries (try Cannor Nursery in Victoria, Parksville, Abbotsford) are bringing in some interesting food plants:

**Lattarula/Italian honey figs:** Anyone that has tasted this fig will be delighted to hear that Foxglove now has good looking plants in stock (cultivar is 'Peter's Honey Fig') along with a variety of other figs. It tastes like it was injected with honey in the centre and I have never tasted a finer fig. This cultivar gives a reliable first crop so you will get ripe figs from the end of July through August depending on how warm a site you have.

**Tea (*Camellia sinensis*):** The plant from which green, oolong and black tea is harvested. Needs a warm and very protected site, but some people I know of on Salt Spring have been growing it outdoors for several years and it has survived the winters.

**Olives:** The 'Arbequina' variety has been reported hardy outdoors by several people. Mine got through last winter fine at 800 ft. elevation (it's first winter outdoors). The olives are small, but it is supposed to be a good quality oil olive and is widely grown in northern Spain and colder olive growing regions. Mine has been bearing fruit since I got it three years ago, but at the moment the crop is too small to do anything with. Beautiful leaves though.

**Lemons & limes:** Not in stock right now, but coming soon to nurseries are dwarf 'Improved Meyer' lemon; also 'Bearss' lime. Very productive little trees! Since I bought 2 small lemons and a lime tree in spring 2007 I have not had to buy a single lemon or lime. They can take a few degrees of frost, but in most of this region they have to be kept in pots and moved under glass for the winter (an unheated greenhouse is perfect). They both set more fruit than should stay on the plant so regularly thin out the fruit.

**Goji berries:** A crop that is becoming all the rage for health benefits and plants are now widely available. Apparently there is a nursery in Saskatchewan that grows nothing but goji berries for the nursery trade. These are very hardy. I have not tasted the fruit as they are in the nightshade family which doesn't like me much, but people who have seem to like them.

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**Some housekeeping details:** I am getting a lot of rejected e-mail addresses and last month it seems that few people actually received the March 25th message until I resent it in April. I suspect these messages are still landing in junk/spam folders. I have 3 mailing lists now and will try sending only one group out each day in

order to keep the total number of messages below the 300 message threshold that service providers identify as spam, which is why the message date may not match the day you receive the message.

If you think you are missing messages, check the Salt Spring Energy website [[www.saltspringenergystrategy.org](http://www.saltspringenergystrategy.org)] where Terri Bibby is kindly archiving them for the benefit of everyone.

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