

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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More Sowing for Winter Harvests

Here we are, with what actually looks like summer weather kicking off this week—and we are starting the main planting season for winter harvest vegetables. Veggies for winter harvests have to do their growing in the growing season, which means sowing them early enough to mature to a good size before the shorter, colder days of October put an end to growth. You can print out a planting chart showing when to plant what this summer at:

<http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/pdf/Linda%20Gilkeson%20Planting%20Schedule.pdf> Stick the list on your fridge as a reminder.

Right now, from mid- to late June is the time to sow seeds of winter broccoli and winter cauliflower, also cabbage varieties that take less than 80-90 days to mature (check the days-to-harvest information in the cabbage description). The overwintering broccolis and cauliflowers are very hardy biennial varieties. They are not the same ones grown for summer and fall harvests, which are less hardy annuals (some of these do survive milder winters).

Purple sprouting broccoli is the most common type of winter broccoli ('Red Spear' is an excellent variety) and there are also a few white sprouting broccoli varieties that are hard to find. Be aware, however, that a few purple sprouting broccoli varieties are summer annuals (e.g., 'Summer Purple', 'Santee'). These produce a crop the same summer they are planted and may or may not survive the winter. A note about "sprouting broccoli": Whether it is a summer or winter variety or a rapini type, don't expect sprouting varieties to produce a big head like grocery store broccoli. The sprouting broccoli become very large plants, but the shoots are small and numerous, with shoots produced continuously for months. Pick the shoots before the little buds open up to show yellow flower petals.

As for cauliflower, the only white overwintering variety left in local seed houses last year was 'Galleon'; West Coast Seeds still had a small supply this spring but are sold out now. The loss of 'Galleon' is a blow and a small group of growers on Salt Spring are now growing out seeds, hoping to prevent the loss of this variety entirely. If you can find 'Purple Cape' (some US seed houses had it) it is an excellent variety, but also now scarce.

If you are not growing your own seedlings, watch for starts of Brussels sprouts, cabbage, winter broccoli and (maybe, if you are lucky) winter cauliflower to start appearing at garden centres in a few weeks. Chorus Frog (Rainbow Road on Salt Spring) always carries a good selection of the right varieties for winter. Don't bother buying summer varieties of broccoli and especially cauliflower (such as Snow Crown, Snowball, Romanesco, etc.) for late summer planting. They often just make a little button head in response to cold weather and most are not hardy enough to over winter in the garden.

The next important planting window is coming up in early July. Carrot day is July 1st at my house as long-time readers know well! I always celebrate by sowing a big bed of carrots for harvest from November through next April. Planting in the first week of July gives the roots enough time to reach full size by October. In early July, you can also sow beets, rutabagas, kohlrabi, as well as endive and radicchio (a surprisingly hardy vegetable). Even if you have already planted Swiss chard this spring, you may still want to sow more seeds in July for additional overwintering plants. Chard, kale and other hardy greens won't grow more leaves during the winter (they do grow lots of new leaves in the spring), therefore you need quite a few more plants for winter picking than for summer harvests. Remember to shade the seed beds of these summer sown seeds to keep them evenly moist during germination. This is especially important for carrots, which won't germinate well in soil that is too warm. Use anything to shade beds: burlap, old towels or sheets, opaque white plastic (e.g., cut open bags that compost came in).

Mystery! Gold variegated squash leaves: Every spring some varieties of squash show bright yellow spots, streaks, splashes or specks on some of their oldest leaves. It is pretty, but puzzling, and I get questions about this every spring. Don't worry, the plants are fine and those leaves are healthy. It seems to me to mainly occur in varieties that have yellow fruit or are crosses of Delicata or other varieties with striped fruit. It is not a nitrogen or other nutrient deficiency, so just enjoy the variegations.

