

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Increase Your Harvest; Gardening Resources

With climbing prices for produce and the pressure of inflation on household budgets, harvesting the maximum amount from our gardens is more important than ever. For most of us, garden space is limited by the size of our yards or community garden plots. Even where people have access to a larger area, garden size may still be limited by the expense of investing in deer fencing and irrigation systems. I have seen many gardens, however (even very small ones), that have lots of potential for increasing the total harvest without using more land. In fact, gardeners that can increase the amount they harvest per square metre might find that they can grow as much as they need on less land than before. This could free up space to plant flowers for beneficial insects, restore native vegetation and plant shrubs and trees to help mitigate global warming by capturing and holding carbon in their deep roots.

While we are waiting for the weather to warm up and the soil to dry out enough to work, here are some suggestions to aid in garden planning (these are not new to long-time subscribers, but there are so many new subscribers I thought it would be worth reviewing these):

Use more area for plants and less for paths: For gardens with planting beds surrounded by wide pathways, consider converting some of the path area to crop space. For beds without rigid sides, this could be as easy as just widening the growing space on each side of the bed so there are narrower paths. Where beds have been built with sides, it might be possible to fill in cross paths between the beds, leaving access on two sides of beds, but not on all 4 sides. The more space there is for pathways, the more space there is where weeds have to be managed. By the end of the summer, as vegetation spills into the narrow paths between my beds, it doesn't look like I have any pathways at all, which is a bit extreme, but does make use every bit of my limited space.

Store more produce: Learn how to cure and store crops such as onions, squash and potatoes that can be kept without processing and how to preserve more of your surplus summer harvest in other way. Freezing is very easy as is using a food dehydrator (great for all kinds of fruit and for zucchini slices for soup). Pickling and canning methods take investments in equipment and more complicated recipes—their utility depends on what you and your family like to eat.

Below are other suggestions for increasing the density of your plantings. First, however, I should note that many garden crops do not need to be rotated because they have a very low risk of disease caused by soil-borne pathogens. This includes lettuce and endives, Amaranth family (chard, spinach, beets), legumes (beans, peas), corn, cucurbits (squash, cucumbers, pumpkins). They can be interplanted without worrying about how they fit into a crop rotation scheme. [But do be sure to use at least a 4-year rotation for vegetables that have a high risk of root diseases: onion family (garlic, onions, leeks) and potatoes; try for 2-4 year rotation of cabbage family crops—the longer, the better, but it is difficult because we grow so many crops from this family].

Tighten up succession planting schedules: Plan to sow next crops immediately (same day?) after a bed is harvested. Crops such as garlic and storage onions are harvested at the same time, leaving an open bed that can be immediately planted. Early peas, salad greens and other early plantings are generally done, or eaten up, by early July, which is a good time to sow many other crops for winter harvest. If you don't already have a copy of my winter harvest planting schedule, here is a pdf you can print out:

<http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/pdf/Linda%20Gilkeson%20Planting%20Schedule.pdf> Use the chart to figure out what to plant in any beds that become open during the summer months.

Keep gaps and spaces filled as they arise: Use crops that don't need to be rotated to fill in unexpected openings or gaps that occur as crops are harvested. For example, when a cauliflower head is harvested there is an open space. Although the rest of the cauliflowers might not be ready, go ahead and plant something in the gap. Even late in the

season it can work to grow quick veggies (e.g., radishes) and those that can be picked at any size, such as lettuce and other salad greens or 'baby' roots (beets and turnips).

Interplant compatible crops: Compatibility depends on timing of the crops, the size of plants and their root systems. Lettuce is one of the best for interplanting between other vegetables because it has a small root system and tolerates a bit of shade; it also can be picked any time if plantings are looking too crowded. I use lettuce early in the season to fill spaces between plants that eventually grow quite large, such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage; by the time the larger plants need the space, the lettuce has been harvested. Spinach, other salad greens, radishes also work well. With care other crops can be interplanted for the season, such as winter Brussels sprouts or purple sprouting broccoli in beds of cucumbers. In late August, mature plants that will be done in the fall can be underplanted with hardy salad greens (corn salad, frost-hardy lettuce, arugula). Move back the mulch and scatter seeds on the soil under tomatoes, peppers, corn, pole beans, squash, etc. By the time the old plants are ready to cut down, the soil will be covered with the new crop.



Forget cover cropping: The role of green manures or cover crops in agriculture is essential for building soil fertility and organic matter and suppressing weeds—but gardens are not little farms! In a veggie garden, cover crops take land out of production that could be producing food. You can replace the role cover crops, while continuing to harvest food, by using lots of leaves and other organic matter as mulch year round. At harvest time, leave the roots of healthy crops in the soil where they will decompose and feed the soil. Another problem with fall rye and winter wheat cover crops is that click beetles lay their eggs on grasses in early spring before people have turned the crop into the soil. Those eggs hatch into larvae, called wireworms, that live in the soil and attack roots—so the cover crops perpetuate a serious pest problem [for photos of adults, larvae and potato traps for wireworms: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/root_feeders.html#83]

I sent out this list of resources for gardeners last year and thought it would be worth providing again because there is so much good information and help available through them:

Victoria: The Growing Together initiative of the CRD Food and Agriculture Initiative Roundtable has grown into a comprehensive information hub for organizations, services and information on anything to do with food gardening, from mentoring and contacts for community projects, to seed sharing, how-to-videos, information on where to find supplies, youth projects and lots more. See: <https://www.growingfood-together.com>

Victoria Master Gardeners are again offering free Virtual Gardening Mentoring for reliable and environmentally responsible gardening information on home gardening, landscape maintenance, integrated pest management and other gardening topics at no charge. They offer their services answering gardening questions through info@msvmga.org See their website at www.victoriasterngardeners.org

Master Gardeners Association of BC: In addition to the Victoria MGs mentioned above, other regions of BC have well-informed, experienced volunteers available to provide gardening information, whether it is for a food garden or landscape. Check the provincial web site for chapters near you: <http://mgabc.org/>
Vancouver gardeners, contact: <http://mgabc.org/content/101-garden-questions-ask-us-here>
Vancouver Island (north of Duncan) gardeners, contact: GardeningAdvice.MilnerGardens@shaw.ca

San Juan Master Gardeners: These well-trained volunteers are also ready and willing to help local gardeners identify problems and answer questions about food and landscape gardening: <https://extension.wsu.edu/sanjuan/master-gardeners/>