



# *Spruce Cottage Farm's*

## *Periodic Newsletter*

*March 13th, 2013*

*Greetings Gardeners!*

It's a sunny, blustery March day - perfect for sitting inside and dreaming about the garden to come. I've seen a few snow buntings around, a sure sign that spring really is on its way. Mid-March is seed-starting time, so I thought I'd write a little blurb about timing and a few things to think about when choosing varieties for our area. Thanks to all of you who attended the seeding workshop on March 3 - I had a great time and I hope you all did too (and also learned something!).

So, let's talk timing. I've observed in the past few years that mid-March is the best time to seed most annuals. Seeding too early results in seedlings that can be leggy and weak; this happens because the seedlings are reaching for light. Sometimes the seedlings are ready to plant, but the garden is still too cool, so they sit inside too long. The May long weekend is the traditional planting weekend (although we may transplant a bit later up here, depending on the season), so I usually count backwards from there to figure out the timing to start plants. Seed packages and catalogue descriptions will give the number of

weeks needed before transplanting outdoors - this can be a handy guide. There are a few general rules of thumb one can use:

Plants that need 8 weeks to transplanting outdoors can be started mid- to end of March. Some examples are broccoli, cabbage, tomatoes, cauliflower, kohlrabi, leeks, celery, kohlrabi, peppers, swiss chard, scallions, thyme, oregano, parsley, cilantro and sweet peas.

Plants that need 4-6 weeks to transplanting outdoors can be started in the beginning of April. Some examples are peas and beans (if you are not direct seeding these), cucumbers, squash, zucchini, lettuce (again, if you are not direct seeding this), dill, basil, calendula, alyssum, cosmos, marigolds and nasturtium.

Plants that need 10 weeks to transplanting outdoors can be started at the beginning to middle of March. Examples are artichokes, brussels sprouts, petunia, lobelia, larkspur, pansy and snapdragon.

Timing will be slightly different for everyone, depending on the microclimate of your garden. You may be transplanting outdoors on May 20th and your neighbour is planting a week later! Here is where a seeding log comes in handy - it is easy to reference for the next year and the guesswork stops when it comes to the timing. Examples of information to keep track of in the log are: type and variety of plant, date seeded, date germinated and comments. I like to use a blue ledger - the columns are easily defined and there is plenty of room for

comments. Here is where I'd jot down if a plant was seeded too early, if germination was poor or any other bit I think might be relevant for the following season. Keeping the same log year after year allows one to easily reference past seasons.

When choosing varieties to grow, here are a couple of points to keep in mind:

Days to maturity - this is usually listed in the seed catalogue and is a good guide on how long it will take a particular plant to grow until it is harvestable. Choosing varieties that take less days is usually the way to go up here.

Hybrid and open-pollinated - open pollinated (OP) seeds are produced by crossing two parent plants of the same variety to produce offspring (seeds) just like the parent plants. As a seed saver, these are the seeds I look for first, as I know that the seed I collect and save to grow the following season will be the same as the plants I was growing this season. Hybrid (F1) seeds are produced by crossing two parent plants of different varieties from the same species. The resulting offspring (seeds) will have characteristics from both parents and these offspring may be bred to have a higher yield or a shorter growing season or resistance to disease. The downside of hybrid plants is that seed saved and grown from these plants will revert back to one of its parents, resulting in unreliable results in terms of production and characteristics; hybrid seed must be purchased from a seed company every year. Some open pollinated varieties are also Heirloom or Heritage seed varieties. These are the tried and true

varieties that have been around for hundreds of years -  
sometimes it's hard to argue with that!

The middle of March is also cold-frame seeding time!  
Seeding lettuce or other cold tolerant greens now means they are ready to eat in April, just when we start to crave fresh spring greens. Seeding a cold-frame (or a corner of the greenhouse) is a very simple process and I encourage you all to try it. To that end, I will be offering a cold-frame seeding workshop on Sunday March 24 from 10am-1pm, location to be announced. The cost is \$24, which includes the gst. Simply reply to this email to register or call me at 335-9769.

Happy spring thoughts everyone!

Bye for now,

Jolene Billwiller

~ Gardening Maven ~



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