



# *Spruce Cottage Farm's*

## *Periodic Newsletter*

*April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014*

*Greetings Gardeners,*

It is a snowy spring day out there - hard to imagine the spring and summer to come on a day like today! But one look in my seeding room, full of little green seedlings (plus the purple crocus I saw the other day), and the promise of spring is back. Here's looking forward to a lovely summer; sunny days, warm nights and the perfect amount of rain!

I'm happy to report that the LED tape lights I acquired to start seeds under are working well. They are so much easier to work with than fluorescent lights! They are not grow lights however, so if you are considering them, they would be for starting seeds only. I would recommend using the 120 lights per metre tapes. This is where the importance of timing your seeding comes in: 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: count backwards from the May long weekend the number of weeks to transplanting, and start your seeds then. If you are transplanting everything into a heated greenhouse - no problem! Seed whenever you want!

I've also been working on the greenhouse, incorporating some passive solar design ideas in order to capture the sun's heat (in a thermal mass) during the day. That heat will then be released at night, as the greenhouse cools down. The first step was to insulate the north wall and roof, which we did using recycled rigid insulation. Over the summer, we'll be working on building a rock wall in the greenhouse to act as the thermal mass - the idea being that in March and April, as the days lengthen and the sun's rays starting becoming warm again, the rock wall will start absorbing the sun's heat during the day and release it at night. I considered both water and rocks as the thermal mass and came to the conclusion that rocks would be much easier to deal with!

My seedlings are ready to start pricking out and I'm sure there are a few of you with seedlings in the same state. Remember to give your transplanted seedlings a chance to go through transplant shock: after transplanting, place them in the shade for anywhere from two to five days. This shady time allows the seedlings to establish roots in their new home, without having to try to photosynthesize. You will know when the plants are ready to move back into the sun because they will start to grow towards the brightest point in the room.

I've had a few inquiries about doing a right plant, right place workshop (as in, Where do I plant that spinach, anyway?).

Figuring out the best possible place for a plant gives that plant a little bit of an easier time growing: a plant that likes the shade is not going to thrive in full sun! We'll look at vegetables and flowers and the best places to plant your favourites. The date for the workshop is Saturday May 17, 10am to 1pm. The cost is \$25, which includes the gst. The location is to be announced. Simply reply to this email or call me at 335-9769 to register. If there are any other gardening topics that people are interested in, please let me know. I'll do my best to host a workshop for it.

I'm going to try to write a little blurb (over the next few months!) about some of the annuals, perennials, herbs, shrubs and trees I think gardeners should know more about. Sometimes, one comes across a plant that resonates on a different level. As gardener's, we grow a variety of plants, from vegetables to flowers to herbs to trees. Throughout the seasons some plants stand out more than others. An herbalist I knew in Victoria had a special affinity for stinging nettles (an amazingly healing plant): she never felt the nettle's sting. For me, one of these plants is Artemisia, a wonderfully diverse group of plants: from bitter medicinal (Wormwood) to delicate culinary (French Tarragon) to striking (and drought tolerant!) ornamentals (*Artemisia ludoviciana* 'Silver King'), Artemisia's are amazing! Many of the ornamental varieties are hardy in our area and our own wild sage is *Artemisia frigida*. This family of plants is one of my absolute favourites - I usually grow *Artemisia annua* 'Sweet Annie' every

year - a wonderfully sweetly-scented, ferny-foliaged plant - great in potpourri and as fresh cut foliage in your summer flower arrangements. The strong tangy scent and the beautiful foliage of this family of plants resonate with me whenever I come across it.

It is not too late to order plants and seeds! If you wish to receive a copy of my plant and seed lists and order forms, let me know. I'll also have plants and seeds available at the Junction Community Market, which is starting up Wednesday May 21, from 3pm-6pm on the lawn of the log church. I also hope to offer retail hours at the greenhouse. Once I've got the details sorted out, I'll let everyone know when I'll be open.

In growing harmony,

Jolene Billwiller

~ Gardening Maven ~



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