



Spruce Cottage Farm's

Periodic Newsletter

December 2nd, 2014

Greetings Gardeners,

Winter is upon us and the shorter, darker days encourage sitting by the fire with a cup of tea and ruminating on the gardening season past. The weather this past summer was not ideal (those cool nights really set plants back), but I was happy with how most of my crops turned out. I had a great crop of lettuce, carrots, potatoes, kale and Swiss chard. The beets were not quite so successful and the cabbage was really late (but delicious once ready!). I was able to harvest food for the market from June to August and put enough in storage to see me through until the next harvest. I have a wonderful feeling of bounty and gratefulness whenever I look in the root cellar or at my dill pickles (I was able to grow enough pickling cucumbers to make pickles - a first for me in the Yukon!).

This past summer, I tried saving seed from two biennial crops: carrot and celery. Biennials complete their life-cycle in two years: foliage and roots the first year; flowering, seed formation and death the second year. The celery I had overwintered in the root cellar and then planted in the greenhouse in the spring. The plants then proceeded to flower, form seed and

ripen that seed. I'm looking forward to planting my celery seed in the spring, knowing the plant's genes have already adapted to one Yukon growing season. The carrots were also over-wintered in the root cellar and planted outside in the spring. They were much slower to flower and form seed. By the time I had to harvest what seed was there (because of danger of frost), there was no ripe seed - only green. I'm hoping that the seed was mature enough to ripen off the plant, but I will need to do a germination test to know for sure. The conclusion I've come to is that our season is not quite long enough to ripen some seed, unless the plants are under cover. Next year I will try carrots again, only this time I will plant them in the hoop-house, so they have some frost protection and a little more warmth, to encourage them to grow faster.

I am looking forward to another growing season in the greenhouse. A rock wall in the greenhouse was built, thanks to the help of wonderful friends. The wall was built to act as a thermal mass in the spring: capturing the sun's heat during the day and releasing it at night, in order to keep the greenhouse from freezing. Along with the insulating we did in the early spring, I'm hoping this will allow me to use the greenhouse in April (without having to pay for any heat!).

I'll be spending the next few months thinking about what the season ahead will bring: what to grow?; what to do differently?; what will the crop rotations be?; how can I make the most of our season and sunshine?

Have a wonderful Solstice everyone and we'll see you in the New Year!

In growing harmony,

Jolene Billwiller

~ Gardening Maven ~



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