

FALL SEEDING 2006

WILLAMETTE VALLEY FOOD CROPS

The seeding window for overwintering crops begins surprisingly early in the year - in March, for leeks, for example - then picks up in earnest in the June-July timeframe, when it is necessary to seed most members of the brassica family in order to have them mature enough going into the refrigerator months of winter. Members of the brassica family (which include, among others: kale, cabbage, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, collards, kohlrabi and rutabagas) possess a unique combination of cold-hardiness, size and edibility, making them a mainstay of local winter diets. (For information on timing, varieties and sources of brassicas and other crops seeded prior to August, please check out our complete listing on the *EW* website.)

August and September mark the closing of the major seeding push for mid- and over-wintering crops, with the emphasis on fast-growing greens. As with brassicas, the choice not only of type but variety is critical. Where possible, secure seed from local growers. Locally bred and/or grown varieties, well-stewarded, will acclimatize over time to our soils and climate, making them healthier and more productive than seed sourced elsewhere. The following list emphasizes locally-grown, open-pollinated, organic varieties.

Arugula

Even Star (FC), Sylvetta (FC). One of the easiest crops to grow and consistently one of the most popular greens in the winter garden.

Sow: Aug 15- Sept 15. Harvest: F, W, ES

Asian Greens and Vegetables

Scores of winter hardy Asian vegetables and greens remain unknown/untested hereabouts. PNW Asian gardeners have a story to tell. Sow Joi Choi Pac Choi (Terr) beg-August; Tatsoi/Tah Tsai (AL) mid-Aug; Kyoto Mizuna (Terr) end-August. Openapa (PS) is a locally-bred OP chinese cabbage. Kitazawa Seed Company (KT), with a remarkably well-designed website, specializes. Harvest: F, W, ES

Corn Salad

Vit (AL), Verte de Cambrai (FC) (KP), Coquille de Louviers (KP), d'Etampes (KP), Large-leaf Round (FC). Takes a long time to germ and appears to enjoy the shade of a nurse crop. Succession sowings late August through April will gift a harvest winter through spring.

Sow: Sept. Harvest: W

Chicory

Early Treviso (WG), Palla Rossa (WG),

Wild Garden (WG). Chicories are generally not bothered by the cold. Many varieties will bolt if seeded on the early side. Not these.

Sow: Jul – Aug. Harvest: F, W, ES

Cilantro

Standby (PSR). A contribution to the winter diet that is enthusiastically praised by those who've tried it.

Sow: Jul – Aug. Harvest: W

Cress - Upland

Belle Isle Upland Cress (WG). Not water-cress, but upland cress. Never freezes and a super-nutritious self-sower.

Sow: Jul – Aug. Harvest: W

Favas

Aprovecho Select (PGS), Aquadulce (Terr), Sweet Lorane (Terr), Broad Windsor (Terr). Favas may be one of the finest, locally-suited winter food crops in our midst. Eat the greens through the winter, and the beans in the spring. The plant fixes nitrogen, too, and is commonly used as a cover-crop. The plants get tall in the spring, so allow for the shade that dense plantings cast on nearby beds. This bioregion, until recently a world center for fava breeding and research, has lost all major commercial lines it was stewarding. The UK has

'broad bean' material in depth (OC) (ST). Sow: Oct. Harvest: LS

Garlic

Ideally sown in October. If you miss the window, sow Jan - Feb

Sow: Sep 15 - Nov 15. Harvest: July

Kale – Siberian/Russian

No greater concentration of OG kale breeding expertise exists in the English-speaking world than in Oregon. We are particularly strong around Siberian and Russian lines (Brassica napus). This most space-efficient of food crops, highly nutritious and allowing repeated harvests, is the backbone of most winter gardens. It is the easiest winter brassica to grow, far more forgiving of fertility requirements than cabbage and cauliflower, for example - and better suited to montane soils off the valley floor than any other brassica. Western Front (PSR) (BG), White Russian (WG), Red Russian (PS), Winter Red (Terr), True Siberian (PS), Red Ursa (WG), Gulag Stars (PSR), Budget Cuts (PSR), Improved Dwarf Siberian (Terr), Wild Garden Mix (WG) together rank as some of the finest food crops, of any type, in the world. The taste of kale sweetens markedly as the weather gets colder. Sow earlier where possible.

Sow: Jun – Aug 15. Harvest: W, S

Kale – European

Brassica oleracea kales, a different species than Russian/Siberian kales, include: Lacinato Rainbow (WG), Lacinato/Dinosaur/Nero Di Toscana/Palm Tree (Terr) (WG), Pentland Brig (BG), Oregreen Curled (PS), Grunkohl (GS), Squire (HM), Cottagers (OC), Westland Winter (OC). Pentland Brig, especially, has a tendency to perennialize. Kales can be started later than the other brassicas but won't get big from an August sowing. Err on an earlier seeding, especially because kale does not like early setbacks such as heavy slug pressure not unknown in home gardens on planting out. Remember to 'overplant' numbers so that you have plenty to eat during the refrigerator months of Nov-Jan when growth slows/stops. Expect a

bonanza in the spring. Try sowing a variety of kales: there exist a whole range of tastes/colors/textures/bolting times etc. Eat the feast of flowering sprouts (kale raab) as the plants bolt in the spring.

Lettuce:

Contrary to received opinion, growing lettuce outside through winters can work very well hereabouts. But varietal choice is critical. The darkest red lettuces seem to fend off the cold and disease better than other varieties (the anthocyanins covering both bases?). Lettuces fall to disease more than the cold, it seems. Experiment with different varieties and timing, making succession sowings early August through November, then January onwards (growth stops by Thanksgiving). A beginner's rule: for outdoor varieties, sow early August; for greenhouses, late August to beginning October. Merlot aka Galactic (WG), Hyper Red Rumples Waved (WG), Outredgeous (WG), Reine de Glaces (WG), Redder Ruffles Oak (WG), Winter Density (WG), North Pole (TT), Red Tinged Winter (TT) Brune d'Hiver (FC) (KP), Rouge d'Hiver (FC), Continuity aka Merveille des 4 Saisons (Terr). For greenhouses: Kweik (WG)

Sow: Aug – Nov depending on variety and harvest timing. Harvest: F, W, S

Miner's Lettuce

(AL) A North-American native. Very cold tolerant. Regrows for repeated harvest.

Sow: Aug. Harvest: W, S

Mustards (Brassica juncea)

Although seed catalogs differ confusingly in their classifications of mustards and greens, there is no doubt that much winter hardiness is to be found here. In the winter, mustards lose much of the 'heat' that typifies their summer taste and, of course, lose it with cooking, too. Sow at the beginning of August for a Fall crop, then every two weeks through the Equinox and you'll have food October through March. With a little protection, even the tender mustards will make it through. Mild Kingdom (BG), Osaka Purple (AL), Giant Red (Terr), Green-in-Snow (KT), Southern Giant Curled (BG), Purple Wave (SOC). Green Wave (WG) is

very hardy but occasionally, unpredictably, bolts with an August sowing. Sow: Aug. Harvest: F, W, S

Mustards (Brassica rapa)

Great Wave Miike (WG), Mizspoon (SOC), Mizspoon Salad Select (WG), Pink Petiole (WG), Mizspoon Salad Select (WG).

Sow: Aug. Harvest: F, W, S

Radish

China Rose (GS), Black Spanish Round (GS), Hilds Blauer (GS), Rex (GS), Neckarruhn Red (GS), Daikon types (KT), Mantanghong (ST), Mino Early (ST)

Sow: Jul - Sept 15. Harvest: F, W

Spinach

Giant Winter Spinach (AL) aka Giant Invierno (GS), Winter Bloomsdale Spinach (WP). Perhaps no OP winter crop has suffered so greatly at the hands of commercial breeding trends in recent years as spinach. Spinach does very well as a fall crop but getting it through to the other side of winter, outside, hereabouts, unsmashed, is difficult. For now, this crop does better under cover. More research into European varieties is urgently needed. Sow: Aug - Sept 15. Harvest: F, W, S

Swiss Chard

Red chards seem hardest, with white, then golden types more susceptible to the ravages of winter. However, red types have a greater tendency to bolt from an April/May/June sowing. Chards and beet greens will, in general, struggle with the summer heat. Geneva, a smooth-leaved variety (which doesn't collect mud) out of Switzerland is particularly winter hardy and is very difficult to find. Fordhook Giant (Terr), Dorat (HB) (GG), Magenta Sunrise (J), Rhubarb Supreme (KG). We are low in red chard diversity to work with. If you want big plants for the winter, sow in spring/summer, not in the fall.

Sow: Jun - Aug 15. Harvest: W, S

Turnip

Purple Top White Globe (AL) (PSR), Golden Ball (Terr), Manchester Market, Noir d'Hiver (OC). A traditional mainstay of northern European winter cropping, but we have very little local experience with this crop. A crop like cabbage that has traditionally been grown and 'lifted' for winter storage in climates colder than ours. Sowing in August will give you large turnips from mid-winter on (Europeans may sow earlier to lift, but large turnips going into the fall have a tendency to rot). The Asians have done much work with turnips to make them milder in taste (KT), though all are mild when grown into fall weather. We know very little about the wealth of varieties still available in Europe.

Sow: Aug. Harvest: W, S

Weeds and others

Dandelion, wild and cultivated (Terr), Nettles, Bittercress, and Chickweed (WG) especially are primary constituents in the very early spring-and-onwards diets of local deep gardeners. The best monograph on Chickweed is to be found in Susun Weed's 'Healing Wise'. Harvest the tops of baby nettles; they will regrow. Bittercress (Cardamine oligosperma) is a small plant, but grows in clusters, allowing harvest in edible quantities.

Key

F = Fall, W = Mid-winter, ES = Early Spring, S = Spring, LS = thru Late Spring

Sources: Securing winter hardy varieties can demand a treasure hunt - and purchasing earlier in the year, before some of the more specialized seed companies close their seasonal sales efforts. Where possible, order from the U.S., not least because many offshore seed companies carrying key varieties unavailable Stateside - including several major Canadian sources - will refuse to ship to the U.S. given difficulties with U.S. customs. Some, however, will. The Seed Savers Exchange is a ready source of material not commercially available.

Ordering in the U.S.: AL = Abundant Life, BC = Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, BG = Bountiful Gardens, GG = Gourmet Gardener, GS = Gourmet Seed International, HM = High Mowing, HB = Horus Botanicals, J = Johnny's, KT = Kitazawa Seed Company, KG = Kitchen Garden Seeds, PS = Peace Seeds Corvallis, PSR = Peters Seed & Research, PGS = Prairie Garden Seeds, SPC = Sandhill Preservation Center, SOC = Seeds of Change, Terr = Territorial Seed, TT = Turtle Tree Seed, WG = Wild Garden Seed (much WG seed is carried by Territorial), WP = Wood Prairie Farm.

Ordering from the U.K.: ST = Suttons Seeds, OC = The Organic Gardening Catalog, TM = Thomson & Morgan, DB = Dobie's Garden, ET = Edwin Tucker, NN = Nicky's Seeds. Ordering from France: Seeds of Kokopelli (KP)

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