

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

August 13, 2026

Sow Winter Green, Spinach Day, Edit the Garden

With harvesting and preserving vegetables and fruit in full swing now, don't forget to sow more seeds to keep the harvest going all winter. And also remember that seedbeds need careful attention to watering and shading at this time of year as well as protection from birds scratching up the seeds. Leafy greens that grow quickly can still be sown this month (hardy lettuce, arugula, namenia, mizuna, komatsuna, leaf mustard, leaf radish, corn salad, spinach, bok choy, joi choi). If you can find kale and Swiss chard seedlings, they can still be planted out now, but it is getting too late to start from seed outdoors. Turnips sown this late should have enough time to make small roots before winter. You have a couple of extra weeks to sow seeds if you are growing winter crops in tunnels, large cold frames or unheated greenhouses.

Spinach Day was celebrated yesterday at my house: August 12 is the date I like to sow spinach for fall and spring harvests. I have one space in a bed under the overhang of a roof that is perfect for spinach—it has protection from rain, rain, rain, and is probably a few degrees warmer than the main garden. This summer, I grew out winter lettuce plants for seed in that bed so undoubtedly the bed will come up to both spinach and lettuce and require some transplanting to sort thing out later. This timing for seeding spinach works surprisingly well, despite the hot days left in the growing season, because the days now are noticeably shorter. Spinach bolts mainly in response to the longest daylengths of June and not so much because of heat. This late in the summer the odd spinach seedling might still bolt, but most won't. You should be able to harvest spinach leaves this fall and through the winter if the weather isn't too cold (with the intense El Nino weather pattern building now we are forecast to have warmer than average temperatures this winter). There could still be cold snaps, but no matter how beat up the plants are by winter weather, don't clear them out. Even spinach that has been frosted to the ground will come back from the roots to provide a big harvest in March and April next year.



Overwintered spinach sends up a new crop in March

Under-planting: If you are short on space to sow winter greens, try underplanting some of your summer crops at the end of August. Sow the smallest leafy greens (arugula, corn salad, winter lettuce) under warm weather vegetables (tomatoes, pepper, squash, pole beans) while they are still growing in the garden or greenhouse. Move back the mulch in places where you can do it without damaging the established plants and broadcast seeds on the soil surface. Sprinkle a little soil on top of the seeds, trying not to disturb the soil around the growing plants in the process. By the time tomatoes and other summer crops are finished in October the soil should be covered with greens. Cut the summer plants off at the soil line when they are finished, leaving their roots in the soil, to avoid disturbing roots of the new seedlings. Under-planting this late works particularly well with corn salad because it is so hardy that it can grow [slowly] during the winter when it is too cold for other plants to grow.



Corn salad growing under a squash plant in September →

Thinning and editing time: Check carrots beds and other mid-summer plantings to make sure plants are well thinned so they aren't slowing each other's growth. Go through now and 'edit' the whole garden, removing any plants that are past their best or are surplus or that no one wants to eat. That frees up space for remaining plants to be more productive and you may find space to sow to winter lettuce and other leafy greens. While you are at it, check winter squash plants and pick off any small, new fruit so the plants concentrate on maturing the squash that started to develop in July. Squash fruit that sets after August 1st won't have time to mature (this doesn't apply to zucchini and other summer squash, which can continue flowering and fruiting until late September). We only have about a month of good growing weather left in the season before growth slows markedly about mid-September. Any crops you are counting on for harvests over the winter need to reach a harvestable size by late October, but they won't grow much in that last month.

If some plants are looking a bit small now (especially cabbages, Brussels sprouts, root crops), make sure they are getting enough water and give them a boost of liquid fertilizer to provide soluble nutrients. If your vegetables are growing well, then this isn't necessary, but if growth seems slow or leaves are looking a lighter green or even yellowish colour, that usually indicates they are running out of available nutrients. Plants most likely to be in need of supplementary fertilizing at this time of year are those in new gardens that haven't yet had a few years of compost additions to build up soil organic matter. Also plants with limited root space, such as those in containers, or in shallow soils, such as in beds built on top of rock or hard surfaces. Water plants with fish fertilizer or other organic liquid fertilizer, mixed according to the label, or make a homemade fertilizer by soaking a shovelful of good compost in a 5-gallon bucket of water for a day or two. Dilute the liquid in the bucket to a pale brown colour before watering plants with it.

Recycling corner: Rather than rewriting information from previous newsletters, I refer you to the archive on my website: https://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

- For tips on summer pruning of fruit trees, which should be done now, see my August 11, 2024 newsletter.