



VOL 3 | JULY 2023

# Tips + Tricks

for our garden picks



# RADISHES

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Consistent, moisture is key. Don't let it dry out, or you'll get pithy, pungent roots but don't let it get waterlogged, or the roots will rot.

Weed often; weeds will quickly crowd out radishes.

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## THINNING

"Thinning" is probably the most important step in growing radishes. Once the seedlings are 2 inches tall or about a week old, it's important to thin radishes to three-inch spacings. Crowded radishes do not grow well, and you'll end up getting small, shriveled, inedible roots.

To thin, just snip the greens at the soil line. The thinnings are edible, so add them to a salad! Or, if thinnings have been carefully extracted with roots, leaves, and stem intact, replant them. Transplants might be a bit stressed, but they should recover.

## HARVESTING

A good sign that your radish root is doing well is that the green growth above the soil is 6 to 8 inches tall.

You should see or feel the "shoulder" or top part of the radish pushing up against the topsoil. Radishes are ready to pick when the round, red roots are slightly smaller than a ping-pong ball. Pull one out as a test.

You can also harvest slightly smaller radishes, which are still tender and delicious. As the radishes get larger, they become woody and eventually inedible.

**Guilty! I did not thin and mine bolted and started flowering. Lesson learned, but I keep them growing because we are here to save seeds after all! More on this next month...**

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### Description:

Large colourful winter radish. Cut open the light green 10-15cm radish and you'll be wowed by the bright reddish pink flesh within. The taste is a bit like a sweet turnip with a bit of radish mixed in and they make some pretty tasty winter salads. If you are a kimchi fan, try making some with Misato Rose. Colourful and delicious.

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# BLACK CHERRY TOMATOES

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Water the soil around the base of the plant. Avoid getting water on the foliage of the plants.

Stop watering around the end of July to encourage the fruit to ripen.

## GROWING

Black Cherry is an indeterminate tomato variety. This means the vines grow longer and longer throughout the growing season, producing more clusters of tomatoes as they grow. This leads to a long harvest season. The vines commonly grow to 6'-10' long and must be supported by some sort of trellis. The best option is a proper tomato cage, but these plants can also be supported with a tomato stake.

Remove any suckers (stems growing from the crotch of leaves) to keep the foliage under control, and they will set a later crop of larger fruit.

## HARVESTING

Harvest when the fruit is the desired colour.

Green tomatoes can be ripened indoors at a cool temperature when they are blemish free.

Very dark green tomatoes are unlikely to ripen fully.

Indeterminate tomatoes continue to grow and produce fruit until they are killed by frost.

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### Description:

All the sweet, complex taste of a black tomato in a perfect little cherry. Prolific indeterminate plants produce loads of these dusky, juicy little tomatoes. Easy to pick and no cracking make these a favourite of market gardeners.

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## PATTY PAN SUMMER SQUASH

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Summer squash grows best and sets the most fruit in full sun.

Give them plenty of room to grow like any squash; their vines spread 4 to 6 feet (1-2 m).

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### GROWING

Keep the plants well watered with 1 inch of water a week (including rain), especially when producing blooms and squash. If they experience too much drought, patty pans will drop their flowers and fruits.

Mulching helps keep the shallow root system cool and moist. Straw is great to use as a mulch to keep the fruits dry and clean, but any mulch will do.

### HARVESTING

Patty Pan Squash can be picked when the fruits are about 2 inches in diameter and as large as 4 inches in diameter. At this stage, they are tender and the skin is still soft. There is no need to peel or remove the skin before cooking or preparing.

If you happen to grow them larger, they are excellent stuffed.

Unlike pumpkins and tougher skinned relatives patty pan squash don't store well - so they are best picked and eaten the same day.

Harvest patty pan squash using a knife to carefully cut them from the plant. Be careful to avoid pulling them by hand, as this can cause vines to break.

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### Description:

Heavy producers of bright yellow, saucer shaped summer squash with scalloped edges. Pick often and the plants will keep producing. For tender, tasty fruit I prefer to pick when fruit are small, 10cm in diameter or less. Brush them with garlicky olive oil and grill on the BBQ for a summerlicious treat.

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# SPINACH

Common spinach cannot grow in midsummer.

**(I found this to be true, my plants are very thin). Never fear, there's still time to start again!**

For a fall crop, re-sow in late summer when the soil is no warmer than 21°C



## **BOLTING :(**

If spinach starts to bolt- bolting refers to a vegetable plant's sudden growth of a flower stalk. Fear not, for seed formation follows the flowers, and that's kind of what we're here for is it not fellow seed savers!

The 3 most common causes behind bolting spinach are:

1. Increased temperature
2. Increased light exposure
3. Plant stress

**Personally, I think the hot temperatures early on in the season really affected my crop.**

Increased Temperature:

Spinach is a cool-season vegetable that survives by rapidly developing seed heads during hot weather. Temperatures over 21°C will signal the plant to bolt and grow flowers instead of leaves.

This plant thrives in cool weather. When temperatures become too high, however, it is natural for spinach to develop flower stalks and begin bolting.

## **HARVESTING**

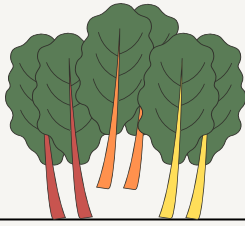
Harvest a few outer leaves from each plant (so that inner leaves can develop) when leaves reach the desired size, or harvest the entire plant, cutting the stem at the base.

Don't wait too long to harvest or wait for larger leaves. Bitterness will set in quickly after maturity. Be aware of day length and heat: Increasing daylight (about 14 hours or longer) and warmer seasonal temperatures can cause spinach to bolt (develop a large stalk with narrower leaves and buds/flowers/seeds), which turns the leaf taste bitter.

## **LET'S TRY THIS AGAIN...**

Sow seeds 1/2 of an inch deep every 2 inches and cover with 1/2 inch of soil.

Plant in rows 12 to 18 inches apart or sprinkle over a wide row or bed.



# RAINBOW CHARD

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When plants are 3 to 4 inches tall, thin to 4 to 6 inches apart or 6 to 12 inches if plants are large.

When plants are about 1 foot tall, cut leaves back to 3 to 5 inches to encourage new tender growth, if chard plants become overgrown, they become less flavourful. Eat what you cut back.

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## NOTES

Typically grown as a cool-season crop because it grows quickly and easily during the cooler temperatures of spring and fall, chard is quite tolerant of hotter temperatures, too. Its growth will slow down in summer, but chard's higher heat tolerance makes it a great salad green to grow when it gets too hot out for the others.

Water evenly and consistently to help it grow better. Water plants often during dry spells in the summer.

Mulch the plants to help conserve moisture and suppress weeds.

## HARVESTING

Begin to harvest when the plants are 6 to 8 inches tall, depending on which size leaves you desire.

Cut off outer leaves 1-1/2 inches above the ground with a sharp knife. Avoid damaging the plant's center. Eat what you cut.

Harvest regularly, and the plants will produce continually. Take the largest, oldest leaves and leaving the young ones to continue growing.

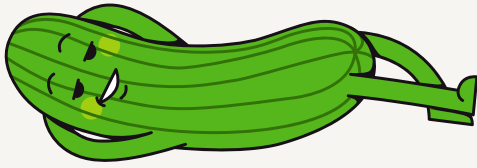
To extend the harvest, lift the plant, with roots in the soil, and transfer to a container in a greenhouse.

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### Description:

A rainbow of colourful stems topped with dark leafy greens. Plant this chard in the flower garden or ornamental kitchen garden and enjoy the mix of orange, yellow, white, red and pink. Colours are most pronounced when full size. Cook leaves like spinach and stalks like asparagus or celery. An easy-to-grow nutritional storehouse. Great in containers.

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# CUCUMBERS

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Pinch out the growing points after six leaves have formed to encourage plants to produce fruiting side shoots.

Climbing cucumbers may need tying to vertical supports, particularly as the heavy fruits start to develop.

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## NOTES

The main care requirement for cucumbers is consistent watering! Inconsistent watering leads to bitter-tasting fruit.

Water slowly in the morning or early afternoon, and avoid getting the leaves wet, as that may encourage leaf diseases that can ruin the plant.

Mulch around plants to retain soil moisture.

When seedlings reach 4 inches tall, thin the plants so that they are about 18 inches apart.

## HARVESTING

Harvest cucumbers while they're still small and tender.

Cut them off plants using a sharp knife or pruners.

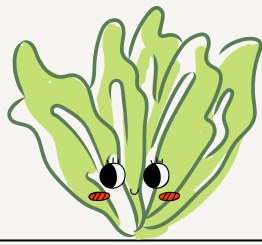
Pick often to encourage more fruits and, if you can, harvest in the morning while it's still cool.

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### Description:

Slender, dark green fruits set the standard for slicing cucumbers. Productive plants produce all season long even under stress from poor weather.

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# LETTUCE

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## HARVESTING

Time to harvest generally averages between four and six weeks from when you see the first signs of sprouts. It all depends on the varieties in the mix, how warm it is, and if other factors are suitable. The further you get into spring and summer, the quicker crops will grow outdoors. Lettuce is ready to harvest when the plants are three to six inches in height and look like the leaves you see in bagged salad mixes.

The plants will grow new leaves and subsequent crops will be ready within weeks. Then you repeat the process and take another harvest.

I just cut as I need, and enjoy fresh lettuce for salads most of the season!

When you can see that the greens are tiring and not producing as much, or they begin to bolt, it's time to re-sow. Take your last harvest by cutting the greens all the way down to the compost level. Fill the container with fresh compost and begin again.

## CONT'D

Two ways to harvest:

Pick one to two outer leaves from each plant, with your fingers. Choose the developed leaves from the outside only and make sure you don't take all the leaves from a single baby plant or it could die. Harvesting this way encourages the center leaves to continue growing and you can easily get four or more good harvests from each plant before it tires. This method is better suited for plants grown individually.

Gently take a bunch of leaves in your hand and cut them off one to two inches from the soil/potting mix. This method is quicker but try not to cut too close to the ground or the plants may not grow back. A good rule of thumb is to leave each plant with at least two visible green leaves. They can be partial (cut) growth but the plant needs leaves to be able to regrow.

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### Description:

A mix of flavours, colours and textures that includes the deepest reds through bright lime greens as well as a mix of curly, frilly, oak shaped crunchy and buttery leaves. It is quite addictive.

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For a continued harvest, plant carrots every 4 weeks through mid-summer.

***How do you know when your carrots are ready?*** Have a little root around and check the approximate width of the roots by looking at the neck of the root. The first roots should be ready as soon as two months from sowing.

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## GROWING

Gently mulch carrots to retain moisture, speed germination, and block the sun from hitting the roots directly.

Weed diligently as carrots do not like struggling against weeds, but be careful not to disturb the young carrots' roots while doing so.

### FUN FACT

Did you know that prior to the 1500s purple carrots were the norm? Orange carrots made an appearance only after The Dutch Royal Family (the House of Orange) had Dutch plant breeders develop them.

## HARVESTING

Generally, the smaller the carrot, the better the taste. Carrots should be about as wide as your thumb or at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  of an inch in diameter.

If you're growing carrots in the spring and early summer, harvest before daily temperatures get too hot, as the heat can cause carrot roots to grow fibrous.

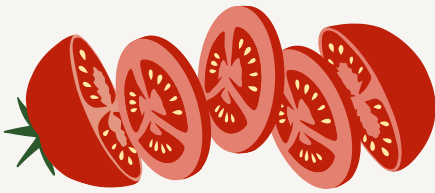
If you are harvesting in the fall, carrots taste much better after one or more frosts. (A frost encourages the plant to start storing energy—sugars—in its root for later use.) Following the first hard frost in the fall, cover carrot tops with an 18-inch layer of shredded leaves to preserve them for harvesting later.

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### Description:

Yellow core, orange flesh and deep purple skin make this carrot a favourite with kids and adults alike. Danvers type roots are 15-20 cm. long, with crunchy flesh and a sweet/spicy flavour.

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# SAN MARZANO TOMATOES

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Tomato plants like to be consistently moist. Don't let their soil dry out completely.

When the plant grows to about 2 or 3 feet tall, begin pruning suckers. This will signal to the plant to send sugars and nutrients where they are most needed.

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## SUPPORT

Place plants near a wall or fence or offer them a stake or strong cage for extra support.

Most San Marzano tomatoes are indeterminate and will grow rather large, so typical tomato cages may be too small or not supportive enough. If you do choose to go the route of a tomato cage, choose one that is extra tall and made of thick gauge wire to support the abundant crop the plant will produce.

## HARVESTING

When a fruit is big and still a bit green and yellowish, they are already ready for harvest. As with other tomatoes, they can continue to ripen even after they have been picked, or they can fully ripen on the vine. Gently twist the stem or use clippers to harvest. If you do harvest a tomato too early while it is still very green, store it in a paper bag and let it ripen for a few days.

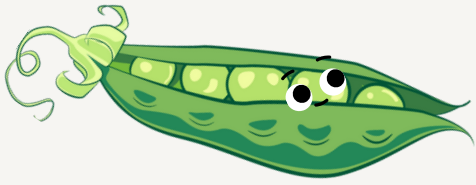
Most strains of this heirloom are indeterminate, which means they set fruit over the entire summer, rather than in concentrated two- or three-week windows the way determinate varieties do.

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### Description:

This Italian heirloom is the classic paste tomato. Fruits are long with a pointed tip and thick meaty flesh with very few seeds. Said to be the best tasting paste tomato and we agree— if it gets lots of heat.

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# SUGAR SNAP PEAS

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Snap peas are vines of varying lengths that need trellising or support to grow upwards of some kind.

Adequate moisture is crucial when growing snap peas. Make sure that the soil never fully dries out.

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## HARVESTING

Harvest pods when they swell up. Depending on the variety, snap peas are 2 to 3 1/2 inches long when they're ready to pick. Clip peas from the vines with garden snips or use two hands to harvest. Don't tug peas from the plants as this can damage the vines.

The pods should be plump and glossy and make the typical snap sound when broken in two.

## CONT'D

Once the harvest begins, pick pods daily to encourage new flower and pea production. Pick just before you want to eat them as this is when they have the best quality and flavour.

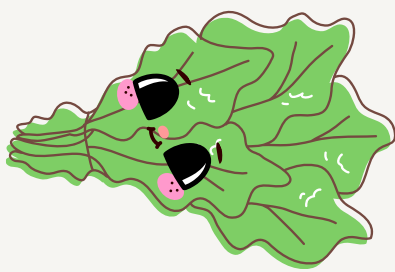
Sugar snap peas become stringy and tough if left too long. Leaving over mature pods on the plants signals that it's time to switch from flowering to seed maturing- more on that next month!

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### Description:

Sweet, crunchy pods and a long picking season make this snap pea a grower favourite. Pick flavourful pods when plump.

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# KALE

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Kale is a cold-hardy, resilient, non-heading green. It's one of the easiest members of the brassica family to grow.

Taste is improved after plants have been exposed to light frost.

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## GROWING

For fall production, sow 8-10 weeks before first frost date for full size and up until frost date for baby leaf. Sow seed .6 cm deep.

After about 2 weeks, thin seedlings to 8 to 12 inches apart.

It's important to keep kale well watered and fertilized. If rain is inconsistent, provide 1 to 1.5 inches of water each week (about 1 gallon per square foot).

Mulch the soil to keep down the weeds, retain moisture, and keep kale cool. Kale growth can slow if plants are stressed (too hot or cold, inadequate water, pests or disease).

## HARVESTING

Expect to wait approximately two months for your kale plants to mature from seeds. Spring-planted kale will be good for harvesting throughout the summer months, but it's especially tasty after a light frost.

You can harvest young kale leaves to use fresh in salads or allow your plants to mature for use as a cooked green. Remove the older outer leaves, and allow the center of the plant to continue producing. Kale will keep in the refrigerator, ideally in the crisper drawer, for about a week.

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### Description:

A mix of kales that contains every shape and hue you can imagine.

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# Challenge #2

## WANT A SECOND CHANCE?

***Share where you went wrong, what you learned and how you might do better next time, and in exchange get another pack of seeds! Email me with the juicy details here:***



email me back at [csheff@pplib.ca](mailto:csheff@pplib.ca)



## Seed redo

Did you have some seeds that just didn't take? Did you experience bolting or plants going to seed a little too early? Or maybe like me, you failed to thin out your plants. I'd love to hear what you struggled with, and what you learned in the process. Share the juicy details with me via email, and I'll hook you up with another pack of seeds that can still get into the ground in time for a late fall harvest!

