

The Urban Homesteader

March 2014

EATING LOCAL AND SEASONAL

Today, I harvested the last celeriac, also known as celery root. Celeriac is a winter hardy root crop that stores well in the ground under leaves (to protect the tops from frost damage).

In celebration, I made Waldorf Salad, substituting coarsely grated celeriac for chopped celery on a one to one basis.

Thus ends the 2013 garden.



Pest exiting the garden June 2013 – it had been dining in our cherry tree. And I had been wondering how raccoon stew would taste.

The Urban Homesteader Reflects on Rain (Lots More Rain)

What's good for our mountains, may not be good for the garden. While part of me is relieved that our snowpack is up to nearly 90%, all this water has saturated the garden just when I was getting ready to plant early spring greens. Working saturated soil destroys the structure and organisms that help my plants pull nutrients from the soil.

So, I need to wait for the garden to dry out before I plant. Or I can cheat a little and cover the parts of the garden I want to plant in a week or so with clear plastic to speed the drying process.

The added benefit is that clear plastic warms the soil (called solarizing) as well, raising soil temperatures down to root depth. According to the gardening Extension at the University of Maine, clear plastic is more effective than black plastic as a warming mulch because it lets the sun's rays through. The down side is the clear plastic will allow weeds to grow.

To apply the plastic, smooth the soil, then anchor the edges. Clear plastic should be removed before planting seeds or starts.

To determine if your soil is dry enough to work, compress a handful in your palm. Drop the ball from a foot high. If the soil mostly stays in a ball, but breaks apart a little, your soil is ready for planting.

Garden Pests: Plan Now to Reduce Problems Later

The best time to plan for pest control is before you plant, not after the pests appear. There are a number of high quality websites that list possible control methods to be found on Google. One of my favorites is the Cornell manual for organic gardeners.

<http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/education/mgprogram/mgmanual/09organic.pdf>

Here are my favorite tricks for flea beetles and aphids:

- Reflective mulch (clear plastic works)
- Monitoring of small plants to catch the problem early
- Row covers for cabbage family crops
- Glue covered boards – shake plant – flea beetles fall on glue

Finally, I apply a good dose of tolerance. As long as the pests are not killing the plant, I do not view them as a problem. In an organic garden, total eradication of insect pests is not



Tomatoes in Cold Frames at the UW Farm, July 2013

possible or even desirable, as they attract beneficial insects. (A few slug holes in my lettuce is OK; it means the lettuce has no chemicals on it.)

Season Extenders: Get Ready Now to Plant Summer Starts in May

I saw a simple and relatively affordable cold frame at the UW Farm last summer. The frame was constructed of 2X8 pine boards double stacked. The top was a 2X2 frame with polycarbonate panel screwed on with rubber gasket roofing screws.

Estimated Cost for 6X4 Foot Cold Frame:

- \$22 26"X8' Clear Polycarbonate Roofing Panel
- \$33 for six 2X8 by 8 foot boards
- \$5 for screws

\$60.00 plus or minus a little

Most commercial cold frames are double (or more) the price of this design, and 2/3 of the size (or less).

For other ideas, I have found the information at the Virginia State Cooperative Extension to be helpful (I need pictures). Here is the URL:

<http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-381/426-381.html>

Finally, plastic salad containers, the big ones, make effective mini-cloches to put over warm weather plants. If, like me, you are prone to forgetting to remove them on sunny day, just cut a small hole in the top to vent the hot air so your small plants don't fry.