

# JUST WHEN YOU THINK IT'S SAFE TO TAKE A BREAK...

## Winter is for planning and prepping

There are so many things to do in the garden in January and February.

Okay, not as many as when the temperatures hit prime for planting crops, or as much as harvest season. But still plenty to occupy your time. And let's face it, you can't spend hours in the garden when the mercury dips below freezing anyway. But there is plenty to do in front of the fireplace...

Last year's seeds are still sitting in that old shoebox. They probably have the company of seed from two or three years ago. Toss them or keep them? That is the question. According to Wikipedia, the oldest viable seed was 2,000 years old when germinated. And of course we can believe everything we read on the internet...

Your old Territorial seed packets are probably a little younger than that, and most seeds do hold viability for several years, if they are kept cool and dry. The problem of course is that you want great productivity out of your garden, and every year seeds age they lose some viability. I like to make sure I have enough quantity of this years seeds, and use last years as filler. And lucky for us, the seed racks in Bayview's Garden Shop are filling fast. Get your seeds early for the best varieties.

# A little more heat please...

My evenings in January are spent diving into seed catalogs and organizing last years packets (I also spend a great deal of time daydreaming about a garden that any realistic person would poo-poo as too much hard work).

Any seed variety that utterly failed me last year gets tossed and written down in the back of my garden journal. There are a few varieties I will try again because I suspect last years La Niña ruined the crop, such as the bush bean Flageolet – AKA Flagrano. I only got enough last year to make 2 French Cassoulets, but I may never use a dried Great Northern Bean again, they were that good. I will also replant the yellow slicing tomato 'Taxi', even though last year half of them rotted on the vine. The other half ripened even before my cherry tomatoes did, and the flavor... oh the sweet sweet flavor...

Once I've organize my seeds it's time to create a calendar. I use one of the many blank notebooks that have accumulated on my shelf. For some reason fancy notebooks are a favorite gift to buy someone when you don't know what they want. Using a rough sketch of the garden and my handy Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades (by Steve Solomon), I then create a rough sequence of events for germinating, transplanting, prevention and treatment for bugs and disease, and harvesting. Experience has taught me not to complicate things. A garden calendar should be like Thumbelina Carrots – short and sweet.

# A LITTLE MORE WORK, A LOT MORE REWARD

For those of us with greenhouses...

Heat, protection from the wind and snow, magnified sun radiation. What more could a plant desire? Unfortunately the fungi and bacteria that are deadly to our beloved crops also love these conditions. Greenhouses must be kept clean, and January is a great time to get in there. Many disinfectants are non-toxic, and most of them are in your pantry. But remember if you have plastic walls many of the standard cleansers (vinegar, baking soda, soap, bleach, etc.) can damage the surface. If you use them, be sure to rinse the panels well afterwards. You don't need much. Dilute bleach 1/9. Vinegar and Baking Soda can be more concentrated. Soap will clean, but not kill pests. It's a good idea to cover your greenhouse floor with ground cloth and gravel to help protect against pathogen. Remember... its easier to prevent than to eradicate an infestation.

I use bleach for my greenhouse. It's not as non-toxic as I prefer, but I don't use it anywhere else on a regular basis, and I avoid other toxic chemicals for most things. A cup or two of bleach once a year seems sustainable to me. I also use the bleach on my plastic seedling trays while I have it out. Unless I notice disease the previous year, I don't bother disinfecting any of my larger pots. If handled gently, plastic grow-pots can last years.

I also do a quick check of the greenhouse's seams for air leaks.

Once the greenhouse is scrubbed, rinsed, and aired, it's just a matter of time until the sun stays out long enough to germinate your first crop of the season... Mine will be lettuce, kale, and pearl onions the first week of February.