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BRONWYN'S GARDEN IN



DECEMBER

Bronwyn Richards gives us her monthly garden tips

IT'S NOT TOO LATE for potatoes but garlic should be out of the ground by the end of December. You can plant just about anything at this time. A good time for onions to go in for a nice fast crop before Autumn; but they can go in then too.

Carrots can go in now but you need to get the soil right to get them to germinate. That's the trick with carrots.

Lettuces, rocket and other salad greens that might be in the garden now should now be covered with shade cloth because the heat will send them to seed quite quickly.

Chinese vegetables too, will grow well under shade cloth and will then not bolt to seed.

Some people plant coriander over summer but I wouldn't. It's a winter crop and will mostly always go to seed when planted in summer.

Peas are good to go in now — snow peas, sugar snap peas and shelling peas. All the peas need a frost-free environment to grow well.

Remember, your garden is always a cycle. At any time you can be planting, harvesting, preparing beds and nurturing the soil. It's on-going process so you're never just doing one thing at any particular time of the year.

The summer plants you'd be looking at are gross feeders, with high growth requirements and they require lots of nutrients in the soil. So you need your soil well prepared. What's required is well-composted manure; like you can buy in bags from Braidwood Rural or Bunnings. Less well-composted manures can be too hot, they generate a lot of heat and will burn your seedlings.

One thing to be careful of with commercial composts is their acidity. They can often be too acid and you need to add lime or dolomite to adjust the pH* level. You can get a soil kit from rural supply stores that will measure the acidity or alkalinity of your soil. Your soil should be neutral or very slightly towards acid. Most of the soils in the Braidwood region are already a bit acidic.

Another useful addition to the soil are microbes and biology. We're very lucky to have Rob Gourlay in this region and

* In chemistry, pH is a measure of the activity of the (solvated) hydrogen ion. Pure water has a pH very close to 7 at 25°C. Solutions with a pH less than 7 are said to be acidic and solutions with a pH greater than 7 are basic or alkaline. (Wikipedia)

you can get microbiological additives from him. The way I do it is to apply the microbes to the bed and water them in as I'm adding the compost. Then when I've formed the beds and planted the seeds, I water them in with a watering can with some of the microbe mix in the water. Seedlings I soak in the microbe mix before they go into the ground.

If you're making your compost in a traditional bin, adding kitchen scraps and green waste or whatever, when the bin is full it should then be left for about six months to cook, or cure. If you've constructed your compost well at the end of the six months it will have a lovely crumbly, dirt-like character. Then it's ready to use. If you still have identifiable bits in the compost, then it's not ready to use.

A lot of commercial mixes these days are not made that well, like say, fifty ton of manure with something else thrown in. But you can get a wonderful compost from Ylad Living Soils out at Young. They supply a natural based, microbe compost mix that's scientifically prepared. I used it this year to grow my garlic and I'm using it for my summer plantings because my current home-made composts aren't ready.

If you're wanting to start a new garden crop in December, you'd be better off preparing the soil and getting ready for your autumn/winter crop. Think about what you want to be eating over autumn and winter now. You'd be putting in cauliflower seeds, broccolisprouts, broccoli and cabbage seeds so you'll have something to eat in May, June and July.

There's nothing static about a garden, you'll always be planting and you'll always be eating — but if you don't plant, you don't eat. It's as simple as that.

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