

Parsnips: Superb Winterkeepers

~ W. Burge

Parsnips may look like anemic carrots, but they are actually very hardy and can stay in the garden even under snow. They have a sweet, nutty flavor, perhaps the sweetest of the root crops. Gardeners who ignore parsnips have probably never tasted them at their best. Properly prepared, they are scrumptious!

Parsnips are easy to grow, but there are a few tricks for growing the large, sugary roots. First, buy fresh seeds each year. Seeds more than a year old germinate poorly, if at all. Dependable varieties include All American, Harris Model, and Hollow Crown.

Plant your parsnips in early spring, at about the same time as peas and radishes. Like carrots, they require a deeply worked, well-prepared soil. Till the garden bed as early as weather conditions permit, raking soil smooth of rocks and clods. To soften the soil and promote proper drainage, work in plenty of peat moss, clean sand, and leaf mold (if available). Avoid materials too high in nitrogen, such as manure, as it encourages lush top growth but only pencil-thin, hairy roots. Like other root crops, parsnips thrive in a soil rich in potassium and phosphorus, so till in a few sprinklings of wood ashes (potash) for good measure.

The seeds germinate slowly; they may take up to three weeks even in the best garden conditions. To hasten germination, some gardeners soak the seeds overnight, or treat them with boiling water to weaken the seed coats, before planting. Others prefer to pre-sprout the seeds indoors between moist sheets of paper towels. When the tiny white roots appear, the seeds are ready to be planted. Be careful not to break the small roots or allow the seeds to dry out before sowing.

A trick for growing monster parsnips is to plant them in prepared, conical holes. This is the method most often used by prize-winning parsnip growers. Drive a crowbar into the soil to a depth of about 2 feet,

rotating the bar in a circular fashion until the hole is about 6 inches across at the top. Then fill the hole with a mixture of sand, sifted soil, and humus or compost, leaving a slight depression at the top of the hole. Place two or three sprouted seeds in the depression, and then cover them with ½ inch of sifted sphagnum moss. Then water the hole. Space holes 8 inches apart each way in the bed.

As the seedlings grow, keep the soil evenly moist but not saturated. When the plants have three or four leaves each, thin to one strong plant per hole and then mulch the bed. A 2-3 inch straw mulch will control weeds, plus it will help the soil retain moisture and maintain a cool soil temperature. Parsnips grow slowly, and mulching is the best way to pamper them.

If the parsnips receive inadequate moisture during the summer, they'll be tough and are likely to split and rot with the fall rains. During dry spells, water the bed deeply once a week. If you have a drip irrigation system, count your blessings!

Aside from mulching and watering, the plants can be left alone until harvest, which isn't until after a few frosts in late fall. The colder temperature changes starches in the roots into sugar. Store parsnips right in the ground where they grow, digging them up as you need them throughout the winter. Mulch the entire parsnip bed with up to 12 inches of straw to keep the soil soft enough to dig. Even if there's snow on the ground, you can harvest fresh, tasty parsnips. Harvest the roots before the soil warms in the spring, however. Once the tops start to grow, the roots become bitter and tough.

When harvesting parsnips, don't pull them as you would most other root crops. Instead, use a spading fork to loosen the soil and carefully lift roots from the ground. Leave the dirt on the parsnips until you're ready to use them, for the roots tend to shrivel when exposed to the air.

Parsnips taste best straight from the garden. Wash and gently scrub the roots, and then briefly steam them to make peeling easier. For even cooking halve or quarter the roots to cook the cores to the perfect tenderness. With larger roots, remove the woody

core entirely and use the succulent flesh.

Many people ruin the natural flavor of parsnips by overcooking them until they are mushy and bland. The sugar in parsnips readily dissolves in water, so do not boil them, - a common mistake when preparing parsnips. Brown them in butter or sauté them in a little oil, keeping the heat low to avoid scorching the sugar. Another way to cook parsnips is to roast them in the oven, allowing the sugars to caramelize. No matter how, - enjoy those parsnips!

Meet the BRAGS Secretary!

You've all seen her up at the front quietly taking minutes during the meeting. Now's the time to learn more about our Secretary, Linda Cholette!

FAMILY:

- Born and raised and....still living in Burnaby – 60 years later!
- Married to the same man, Mick (also born and raised in Burnaby) for 36 years. We have a son Ben and daughter Amber and over the past 2 years they have produced 3 beautiful grandsons for us – 3 years; 1 year and 3 ½ months old.

FAVORITE ACTIVITIES:

- I am a Leo and find peace and tranquility when I am near the water. I love beachcombing – especially at our get-away place at Birch Bay, Washington.
- Reading mystery/suspense novels.
- Going for daily walks with our 80 lb Rottweiler, Emma.
- Playing vigorous games of badminton – in the same club for 35 years.
- Enjoy yoga/pilates to strengthen my body and for peace of mind.
- Love travelling to Mexico every year and also Arizona where we have another get-away place.
- Thoroughly enjoy babysitting my grandsons – playing and reading to them.
- Am an avid gardener but still have not figured out how to have colour

in my garden all year round!

WORK HISTORY:

- Even though I took early retirement from BC Women's Hospital, am currently working as an Office Support Casual for the Burnaby School District.
- Worked fulltime for 25 years as Office Administrative Support in various departments at Shaughnessy Hospital (later became BC Women's Hospital).

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:

- In my mid-40's became a Citizen's Crime Watch volunteer for Burnaby for 5 years and then "graduated" to become an RCMP Auxillary Constable for another 5 years. I have always been a late bloomer!

Thank you Linda for a wonderful bio!

Send me your secrets!

Send to Cheryl Fiddis @ ecfiddis@telus.net

We would love to have more members share their 'secrets' and garden thoughts. If you have been on a trip, please share some highlights with us!

Rhodofest Is Almost Here! ~ Sunday, May 6, 2012

As you receive this newsletter, the big day is just around the corner. If you haven't yet volunteered, and are able to assist before, during, or after the festival, please contact one of the below committee members. And if you are not able to assist, but can attend, we look forward to seeing you there!

Rhodofest:

Wendy Thompson 604-420-6513 or

wthompson868@gmail.com

June Dodson 604-939-2597 or junedodson@shaw.ca

Plant Sale:

Lanny Hui 604-415-4564 or p_lanny@yahoo.com

BRAGS 2011 EXECUTIVE

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Nominations

Judy Wellington

Publicity

Vacant

Rhododendron Festival

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OTHER COMMITTEES

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Vacant

Plant Sale

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Newsletter

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Faye Kilpatrick
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Raffle

Faye Kilpatrick
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Refreshments

Vacant

Speakers

Rosemarie Daviduk
604-431-6207

Website

David Forsyth
604-298-6350

BRAGS Membership/Meetings

Annual membership cost \$12. Members share various gardening interests and enjoy 10% discount of regularly priced items at Garden Works by presenting their membership cards.

All meetings start at 7 pm at the Burnaby Village Museum, - Main Building, 2nd floor. It's centrally located and there is ample parking. Refreshments are served. All are welcome. Bring your own mug to be eco-friendly!

Upcoming Meetings

May 2, 2012

Learn all about the amazing living artworks in the City of Burnaby Eco-sculpture program when Heather Edwards, Manager of Park Planning Design for the City of Burnaby speaks at our next meeting. Heather will reveal the origins, construction methods and community involvement in this program.

June 6, 2012, BRAGS Meeting

Get ready for a lively & informative presentation by Derek Matthews from the Vancouver Avian Research Centre. His amazing bird photos have captivated audiences and inspired novice and professional birders alike.

Visit the website at: www.birdvancouver.com for more details.

Planting for Hummingbirds



As you are planning your garden this spring, remember that Burnaby has many hummingbirds that can use your help. Many hummers wintered here this year, and those that didn't, arrived very early. Due to our unseasonably cold spring, I purchased a second feeder as I couldn't keep up with filling the first one, certainly uncommon at this time of the year!

Hummingbirds have a special affinity for the colour red. They are also partial to tubular or trumpet-shaped flowers. You can enhance habitat for these intriguing birds by planting a garden that meets their particular needs. Although hummingbirds are attracted to red flowers, you don't need to rely too much on colour when planning your garden. The first hummingbirds to arrive in spring will seek out any flowers rich in nectar, and as there are so few flowers in bloom in early spring, almost anything will do.

As spring wears on and summer gets underway, many more flowers blossom. Hummingbirds are partial to favourites like hawthorn trees and shrubs, native lilies, fireweed, cardinal-flower, dropmore scarlet trumpet honeysuckle, wild geranium, wild columbine, delphiniums and phlox.

Visit WildAboutGardening.org for specific instructions on how to obtain native wildflowers and establish them in your garden.