

## Are We Rushing the Season?

As the Good Book cautions, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." Some seasons past in an effort to hurry spring I have started seeds too early so that they were pot bound when the time came to transplant them outside. Had I a greenhouse, or even a makeshift one, I could have moved them to increasingly larger pots. I don't so I didn't and they landed on the compost pile.

Everyone's pet project, the tomato, should not be sown so early it blossoms inside. Tomato, pepper, and eggplant seeds can be sown inside six to eight weeks before the last frost date. The frost date seems to be a moveable feast, partly because it may be mid-May in some gardens but April 20 in a garden near water. A garden at the bottom of a slope is a spot where cold air settles while a higher area will be frost-free. Hardly original, but only death and taxes are sureties: climate is changing and weather is fickle.

Cole crops, relatives of cabbages and broccoli, can be started five to seven weeks before setting out while celery and onions need ten to twelve weeks to grow to transplant size. As you imagine from your past experience with galloping squash some plants even leap from seed to transplant in a hurry so can just be put into their garden spot as seeds. If you wish, and if the garden is still soggy, cucumber, squash, and melon may be planted in peat pots three weeks before setting out. Plants in the cucurbit family will really sulk if kept in their starting pots until they are root bound. Sometimes the sulks may become a permanent crop failure.

When to transplant depends on weather. Those vegetables that like cool weather, cabbage, broccoli, onions, lettuce, cauliflower, will respond to being set out when the daytime temperature is about 60 degrees. The warm weather vegetables had best be protected until the daytime temperatures are between 65 and 70 and night temperatures between 60 and 64. This group includes tomato, melon, pepper, celery and eggplant.

The peas you planted on George Washington's birthday will be eaten and gone before Memorial Day, having left nitrogen in the soil. (Peas are a legume thereby creating nitrogen in the soil.) Cut off the vine leaving the nitrogen rich roots in the soil and plant tomato seedlings among them. The trellis you placed for the peas may be sturdy enough for tomatoes or beans.

Veteran gardeners often know the lay of their own land so well that they can ignore all the guidelines and succeed grandly, often using cloches, row covers, fans and such to beat the odds.

### **When More is Less:**

Oh, Johnny Appleseed, where are you now that we need you? I am told that our United States has been home to 14,000 varieties of apples! Amazing. However, in the

past 100 years we have lost most of them. When we moved to Gloucester forty years ago there was a large remnant of an old apple tree leaning in the front field. We had no idea of its ancestry but it was a fine source of pies and sauce. Those apples were nothing to look at since we allowed it to decline with dignity as we planted an orchard of the dwarf species then available, two of the 11 varieties that constitute 90% of all domestic apple sales.

Recently that has begun to change. Researchers at the University of Arizona and the USDA have identified 110 types of apples on abandoned homesteads in the Southwest. The fact that they have survived in an arid climate gives rise to the expectation that their seeds can be used to provide species for other dry spots, especially important for our Southeast where droughts may be becoming more frequent and more intense. An aside: when I trudge through the cereal aisle searching for plain old spoon size shredded wheat, I have 50 bright boxes grabbing my attention. In the produce section – on a good day – there may be five or six apples from which to choose.

**Bees matter:** From Michael Embrey, Extension Apiculturalist at the Wye Research and education Center in Queenstown, Md. “We need people to increase nectar sources for bees, especially in the mid-Atlantic region...bees have a poorer quality of diet, which can set them up for diseases.” The presence of honeybees can help home gardeners with pollination. The increase in development, pollution, and pesticide use has made bees an endangered species. To avert a crisis encourage the native plants that are a rich source of nectar for feral bees. As a guideline, the same plants recommended for a butterfly garden will be valuable to bees.