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Think Ahead
by Kylie Lewis

The dog days of summer are here! It is finally sunny and dry. It is also time to start thinking of evolving your garden for the seasons to come. Let’s start plotting for the rest of the year. It will ensure that you are harvesting for months to come.

In early July you can start planting broccoli, Brussel sprouts, cabbage and cauliflower. If soil temperatures are high, it can be best to start these plants inside. Transplanting can give you the most success. All these varieties will also appreciate some shade. These veggies will reward you with a fall harvest or they can be overwintered. Vegetables that can be direct sown later in the month for a fall harvest are spinach, arugula, radish and green onions. Beets, carrots, kale, kohlrabi, parsnips and collard greens can all be direct sown in mid to late July for a late fall harvest or to overwinter. Time and energy invested now will keep you well fed as the seasons change. It is important to take advantage of July’s long days and pleasant weather.

How do you plant all these delicious veggies with summer crops flourishing? Easy; plant fall and winter vegetables between standing summer crops. You can get cooler weather plants off to a great start with some shelter and shade. Plant kale starts next to your trellised cucumbers. Plant broccoli or cauliflower starts in spaces between tomato plants. Plant extra kale or Swiss chard, as these are veggies that keep giving. Be sure to thin out your beds as summer crops come to an end to create good airflow for your cold weather crops.

Plant plenty and prolong your harvests. Make sure you amend the soil for your fall/winter crops. If you plant amongst your summer crops then top dress with a few inches of compost. If you remove summer plants first be sure to mix compost into the soil. Either way, don’t forget to mulch. Mulching will help to retain soil moisture, keep out the weeds and act as an insulating layer when the temperatures start to drop in the fall.

Think ahead and savor each season for all it’s worth!
There has been a great deal of publicity over the last 8-10 years about the plight of the honeybee. Honeybees are a crucial part of our food system. They are responsible for pollinating 1/3 of our food supply. Interest in beekeeping has increased as people look for ways to help save the bees. However, beekeeping is not practical for many of us. It requires a lot of time, energy and dedication to keep bees healthy due to erratic weather patterns and an increased number of diseases and pests that threaten them. Honeybees and other pollinators do need our help to survive.

**So, what can you do to help?**

The most important thing you can do is to provide food for bees and other pollinators. Bees in agricultural areas suffer from a lack of variety in their diet due to acres and acres of the same crop being their only available source for nectar and pollen. Oftentimes, bees will fare better in urban areas because of the variety of plants available in home gardens, as well as some wild native and non-native plants. Gardeners often have different plants blooming throughout much of the year, making our gardens attractive not only to humans, but also to bees, hummingbirds and butterflies.
Many of the plants that honeybees are attracted to are easy to grow and provide food for people too! I usually let my kale and cabbage plants that have overwintered go to seed, leaving them in the yard as long as possible in the spring. They produce long stalks of pretty yellow flowers that the bees love. There are also many herbs that bees forage for nectar and pollen, lavender being the best known to most gardeners. Some other common herbs that bees love are thyme, oregano, sage, chives, lemon balm, catmint, rosemary and basil.

You can dedicate an area of your yard to bee forage plants and shrubs, or mix them in with your landscaping. I usually plant a border of bee forage along the edge of my vegetable garden. These plants provide food for the bees as well as encouraging them to pollinate my garden. I use a mix of clover, phacelia, borage and yellow sweet clover. The plants will readily reseed year after year, but are easy to keep in check.

The plants discussed above are a tiny fraction of the pollinator-friendly plants in our area. There are also quite a few pollinator-friendly native plants, such as lupine, Oregon grape, Ocean spray and Nootka rose. A great resource is the Xerces Society page, Native Pollinator Plants, with lists and photos of the many native plants and shrubs, as well as growing tips. Pollinator Partnership is an international non-profit with a wealth of resources on all kinds of pollinators.

Whatcom County Extension also has a great deal of info on all types of pollinators and plants at these 2 sites: Bumblebees in Home Gardens and WSU Pollinator Info.

So please keep the bees in mind when planting your garden. A pollinator-friendly garden will enhance your landscape with color and fragrance, while supplying the bees with the food they need to be healthy. The bees will return the favor by pollinating our food supply.
Thoughtful watering can make a big difference in the growth of your plants. Most plants drink up water through their roots, so it’s important to think about watering as adding moisture to the soil instead of spraying water directly on the plants themselves.

**ALL ABOUT SOIL.** Increasing the amount of organic matter in your soil and mulching will help retain water for your plants. Organic matter acts like a sponge, soaking up water. If your soil does not have organic matter, it can become hydrophobic, which means it will not allow water molecules to stick to the soil. If your soil appears to have a surface crust, you might be lacking organic material. Adding compost to your soil is a great way to increase your organic matter.

**WATERING TECHNIQUES.** There are several ways of watering that are effective. Regardless of which kind of watering device you have, you will be able to nourish your soil. Watering by hand with cans or pitchers is useful because you have more control over how much water you use and where it goes. Just make sure you evenly distribute the water throughout the soil. If there is more water in one area of your garden bed, the roots will grow unevenly and your plants might not produce at their full capacity. If you are using a hose, it’s best to use a water wand on the shower setting. This is gentle and will not cause soil compaction.

**TIME OF DAY MATTERS.** With busy and changing schedules, it might be hard to keep a consistent watering schedule. Watering is best in the early morning, late afternoon or early evening. Plants like to grow at night, and moisture gives them fuel to nourish themselves through the evening growth. Watering during the heat of the day is not advisable because most of the water will evaporate from the soil before it nourishes the plants.

**HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?** A trick described in John Jeavon’s *How to Grow More Vegetables* is the 3 second shiny rule. You know how after you water, there a shiny layer of water that remains on top of the soil for a few seconds? Count how long that shiny layer stays before its absorbed. Healthy soil should hold the shiny for up to 3 seconds after you stop watering.

**GET YOUR HANDS IN THE DIRT!** The best way to tell if you are watering too little or too much is to actually touch the soil with your bare hands. Put a finger into the top 2 inches of soil. If it is still moist, then you are watering enough.

**CONSERVATION AND WEATHER.** It is important for your soil and for the planet to utilize rainfall as a source of watering as much as possible. Rain contains certain nutrients found in the air that will aide in the growth of your plants. By adjusting your watering to the weather, you are able to conserve more water and rely more on Mother Nature. In Bellingham, we see many cloudy days with little precipitation. That might make you think your soil is retaining moisture. This can be deceiving! Sometimes cloudy, windy days actually dry out soil more than sunny days. Stick a finger in the soil to actually see how much water accumulated.

**HERE ARE SOME GOLDEN RULES TO SUMMARIZE:**
- Keep soil evenly moist.
- Add organic matter for better water retention.
  - Keep leaves dry.
- Avoid watering during heat of the day.
- Conserve water and be conscious of rain. Use Mother Nature’s natural irrigation system!
  - Mulch! Mulch! Mulch!
When life gets too fast and frustrating, there is nothing quite like pushing your face into fennel and taking a few deep breaths. It’s not just that fennel smells delicious—like a sweet licorice—but rather because this tall vegetable laces out into frills that will delicately swish around your face in a way that feels divinely relaxing. I highly recommend this practice!

Almost all parts of the fennel plant can be used for cooking, making teas or poultices. Fennel seeds and stems are used as an herb, whereas the bulb-like stem at the base of the plant is treated more like a vegetable and can be sliced and braised, grated into salads or even made into a soup. Fennel can be used at almost all points of its life.

Many varieties of fennel exist, some are merely ornamental. There are two main varieties of fennel commonly used by gardeners:

Florence fennel (Var. azoricum) is grown primarily for its bulbs and larger stems, although the seeds, leaves and smaller stems may be used as well. This biennial variety of fennel is most frequently used for salads and vegetable dishes. It can be trickier to grow, since it is less tolerant of cold and may die back over a cooler winter. In warmer areas, people will plant fennel in fall, spring and summer in order to harvest the bulb throughout the year.

Sweet fennel (Var. dulce), also known as seed fennel, is primarily cultivated for its seeds and smaller stems. This hardier perennial can survive cooler weather and is reported to re-seed itself into disturbed areas. It can be found all around the world and has been used throughout history by many different cultures for a variety of cooking and medicinal purposes.

**Planting and Care**

Fennel likes to be planted in warm, sunny spots. It is a water lover, although thicker clay soils will retain too much water for fennel to be fully happy. Fennel does like loose, fertilized or mulched soils. The soil should not have been freshly fertilized, but rather have had some time to sit. It’s best to rotate where you plant your fennel, as fennel intensively takes nutrients out of the soil.
Fennel can be great along walls or berms in your garden. It can also be planted in pots, particularly if it’s being grown for its leaves and stems rather than the bulbs. It does well companion-planted with nasturtiums and marigolds, but you should avoid planting it near dill or coriander if you are trying to collect seeds. Fennel will cross-pollinate with these two and mute the flavors of each herb.

Given sufficient water, fennel will shoot up to six-feet tall or higher, spread somewhat at the base, and bush out a couple feet on all sides. If there is wind, your fennel may need to be staked or trimmed back. Fennel will also attract some pests, particularly snails that will hide out along its tall stalks, and sometimes aphids. Snails can be picked off, but making sure that the soil does not have too much fresh compost will also help.

You can plant fennel at any time after the spring frost and throughout summer. In the late fall, however, when it’s getting closer to the first frost, the fennel should be cut back to the base and covered with mulch such as straw.

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**Harvesting, Storing and Eating**

Fennel is harvested differently depending on the part you are harvesting:

**Leaves and small stems** can be harvested throughout the season. The young, smaller leaves are more tender and delicious. Leaves and stems can be chopped up and added to thousands of different recipes. It is particularly excellent for salads, salad dressings, and for cooking fish. You can also store fennel by chopping it up, putting it in ice trays, adding a small amount of water and freezing in cubes. It does not dry well.

**Seeds**, gathered in umbrellas at the top of the plant, are harvested in fall as soon as they turned yellow or brown and are marked with gray stripes. First harvest is best, as the seed will retain higher oil content. You can thresh them and dry in a warm place for saving. Seeds can be added as a spice in sauces, and are used in various pickling recipes. Seeds can also be used in teas, and are considered to be an aid to digestion, upset stomachs, heartburn and constipation. Fennel seeds encourage lactation in a wide variety of animals and humans. Additionally, it can be made into a compress that can help with inflammation of the eyes. Literature reports a wide variety of other medicinal uses for fennel seeds.

**Large stems and the bulb-like base** can be harvested as soon as it forms, which is likely to be in fall in the Pacific Northwest. These bases are harder to grow, as they take more time and come from the cold-sensitive *azoricum* variety. Experimenting with growth patterns can help, but it is most likely that you will be able to harvest a bulb if you plant earlier in spring. These bulbs can be eaten raw, sliced and braised, grated or added to other recipes. Fennel bulbs do not store well, however, and should be eaten fresh.
Fennel Soup Recipe

Ingredients

- ¼ cup of butter
- 5 fennel bulbs, trimmed and quartered
- 1 container vegetable broth (32 oz)

Optional Ingredients

- Dollop of sour cream
- Onion powder or finely diced and caramelized onions

Preparation

- Melt the butter in a large frying pan, medium heat
- Add fennel bulbs (and onion if used)
- Cook until brown, about 10 minutes
- Add with broth into a medium pot
- Cook until tender, about 15 minutes
- Add salt and pepper (and sour cream if used) when served
Herbs are the most flavor packed plants you can grow. Imagine your garden brimming with herbs. The delicate leaf patterns and intricate textures and colors are a feast for the eyes. Flowering tips are a feast for pollinators. Highly concentrated flavors transform meals into a pure delight for the pallet. Herbs are the green, leafy parts of the plant that we use fresh or dried. The word spice is used to describe other plant matter that provides flavor, like roots and seeds. Herbs can be culinary, medicinal or used for cosmetics and fragrances. When choosing which herbs to grow, don’t hesitate to sniff and sample to find the ones you like the most. Herbs can be perennial, annual or biennial. Perennials are plants that stay with us year after year. Some popular and loyal perennials are rosemary, thyme and lavender. Perennials will be with you through all four seasons, though often more desirable in the spring and summer. Annuals must be appreciated while they are here because they come but once a year. Make the most of this season with basil, cilantro and dill. To get the most out of annuals you should plant multiple successions. Biennials take two years from seed to fruition; they can be celebrated every other year. Parsley, for example, is a biennial that I generously use in my salads, vegetable dishes and smoothies.

**Let’s get planting!**

Herbs can be planted straight into the garden or into a container with drain holes. Buckets, baskets, wooden crates and window boxes are all great candidates for herb gardens. Make sure to drill drainage holes if they don’t exist. You don’t need to fertilize herbs, as it causes them to grow too quickly and dilutes their zesty flavors. Herbs are best when picked before they flower. For the most flavor, it is best to pick herbs on a dry day after the morning dew has said its goodbyes. One of the best things about herbs is that the more you pick, the more the plants produce. Each herb has different cultural needs, meaning particular growing requirements. As you explore the world of herbs, be sure to enjoy the learning process. Take delight in their beauty and strong aroma.
Here are a few of my favorites that grow well in the Pacific Northwest:

**Basil** is an annual that you can direct seed or transplant. This herb is tender, green or sometimes purple. It is both sweet and spicy. This Italian and Thai favorite should be planted in full sun.

**Chives** are a perennial that you can direct seed or transplant. Chives are one of the first signs of spring. They have oniony, grass-like blades and edible purple flowers that remind me of pompoms.

**Cilantro** is an annual that should be direct seeded into the garden. This fresh herb has a hint of citrus and is in the same family as parsley. It is often found in Middle Eastern, Mexican and Asian cooking. You should try the plant’s ripe seed, coriander, for its subtle nuttiness. Cilantro is prone to bolting in the summer months so water regularly and offer it some shade by planting it near a trellis or taller garden vegetable.

**Dill** is an annual that is best seeded rather than transplanted. Dill’s green leaves are wispy and fern like, as well as bright and delicious. The favor is great in salads, with seafood or on deviled eggs. You can also harvest the umbel flowers and mature seeds for pickles and preserving. The seeds are similar to caraway, in that they are sweet and lemony, with slight bitterness. This is a summer herb that needs some sun but likes cooler temperatures. It’s also light weight, so protect it from the wind.

**Garden sage** is a perennial that prefers to be transplanted. The plant is woody but has soft, velvety leaves. Sage has a strong, earthy flavor and a piney smell. This is a great container plant that will deliver abundantly. It’s a low shrub that can often be wider than it is tall. It’s best to trim it back every spring to encourage new growth. Sage is a great accent to pork, poultry, sausage and stuffing. There are various colors to choose from.
**Lavender** is a transplanted perennial. This old world plant is one that every gardener should enjoy in a container or in a raised bed. Use your lavender for aromatherapy, decoration or baking. Grind some lavender in a coffee grinder to be used in sugar cookies, cupcakes or lavender infused whip cream. A little goes a long way, as the flavor is strong.

**Lemon Balm** is a perennial that you can direct seed or transplant. The leaves are fuzzy and taste like lemon and mint. This herb spreads quick and therefore does best in its own container. Make yourself a tasty and soothing summer tea with this herb.

**Marjoram and Oregano** are closely related perennials that do best when transplanted. These are best used in cooked dishes because they have a somewhat biting quality when used fresh. They pair beautifully with tomato dishes and should be planted in full sun.

**Mint** is another aromatic perennial that likes to be transplanted. This herb is aggressive and needs space to grow. It can be best to grow it in its own container because of its spreading nature. There are various flavors and all of them are good in salads, teas and smoothies. Mint can happily be tucked away in the corner of your yard or garden. It appreciates some shade.

**Rosemary** is a woody, perennial that should be transplanted. This herb is fragrant with evergreen, needle-like leaves. Its flowers come in an array of colors including white, pink, purple and blue. Rosemary can tolerate salty, windy seaside conditions. It is best to plant rosemary in a place that it can settle its roots for many seasons to come. This known Mediterranean herb is a must in pastas and great in baked breads and dinner.

**Thyme** is a perennial which does best transplanted. These low, sprawling plants don’t look like much but are a classic. The leaves taste like both pepper and lemon. Thyme is often dried, chopped or ground. The Spanish and French use thyme to flavor their meats. Thyme grows well when planted near cabbage or tomatoes, as well as in its own container.
KID'S CORNER

A Fun Way To Explore: Water Gauge

A water gauge (more commonly called a rain gauge) is a tool that is used to monitor the amount of water that is getting to a certain area of your garden. This tool can be used to determine if your plants are getting enough water through the hot summer weeks. You could use your garden journal or make a new journal to record how much water your garden is getting.

6 Simple Steps:

1. Use the scissors to cut off the top 2 inches of the bottle. You may need to ask an adult for help.

2. Use the ruler and permanent marker to make a scale on the bottle. Start with 0 at the bottom of the bottle, and mark every inch up to the cut edge.

3. Put the rocks in the bottle to weight it down.

4. Turn the top upside-down like a funnel and put it in the bottle.

5. Use the binder clips to hold the top in place.

6. Place your water gauge in the garden, monitor and enjoy.

Note: Every time you record the amount of water in your gauge make sure to dump out the water.

Supplies Needed:
- Empty, clean plastic bottle, without lid
- Scissors
- 2 Binder clips
- Ruler
- Permanent marker
- Rocks for weight

Fun Facts: Water
Every Little Drop Counts...
by Alasia Canares

- Only 3% of Earth’s water is fresh water. 97% of the water on Earth is salt water.
- The water found at the Earth’s surface in lakes, rivers, streams, ponds, and swamps makes up only 0.3% of the world’s fresh water.
- 1.7% of the world’s water is frozen and therefore unusable.
- Water covers 70.9% of the Earth’s surface.
- Water can dissolve more substances than any other liquid including sulfuric acid.
- There is more fresh water in the atmosphere than in all of the rivers on the planet combined.
- Water boils quicker in Denver, Colorado than in New York City.
- American residents use about 100 gallons of water per day.
- Americans use more water each day by flushing the toilet than they do by showering or any other activity.
- At 50 gallons per day, residential Europeans use about half of the water that residential Americans use.
- Residents of sub-Saharan Africa use only 2-5 gallons of water per day.
- The average faucet flows at a rate of 2 gallons per minute. You can save up to four gallons of water every morning by turning off the faucet while you brush your teeth.
- Taking a bath requires up to 70 gallons of water. A five-minute shower uses only 10 to 25 gallons.
- It takes more than ten gallons of water to produce one slice of bread.
- Over 713 gallons of water go into the production of one cotton T-shirt.
- 1000 gallons of water are required to produce 1 gallon of milk.
- Roughly 634 gallons of water go into the production of one hamburger.
- Water makes up between 55-78% of a human’s body weight.

http://water.epa.gov/learn/kids/drinkingwater/water_trivia_facts.cfm