

Workshop Title: Backyard Vegetables for Winter Storage

Speaker(s) & their title(s): Gail Kern of Summer Garden B & B

Executive Summary:

Gail Kern's farm rests on 100 acres and is used to run a B&B, a market garden and feed her extended family. Her vast knowledge of gardening extends to include several methods of food preservation and season extension. Kern's presentation provides advice on seed selection and storage requirements for keeping vegetables through winter.

Detailed Notes:

Gail recommends buying seed from catalogs that provide the most information. Things Gail will look for in a seed catalog might include:

- Plant varieties and scientific names
- Germination rates
- Planting advice, dates
- pH requirements
- Temperature needed for sprouting
- Harvesting advice...how to extend your harvest
- Information on storing requirements

She also considers:

- How much does she want to eat?
- How much space she has for growing or storing
- How long do foods last?
- Time needed for growing out each variety
- Is she planning on direct seeding or transplanting? Transplants allow you to get a jump on growing season and crows will eat seeds but not transplants

Know your varieties:

Beans

- Some freeze well, dry or pickle. Make sure you label these well.
- Round or flat pods are good for freezing
- Fillet beans do not freeze well but pickle well- 'Oceanis' fits well in jars
- Most dry beans are heritage varieties so you can continue to save seed and not buy them again

Broccoli

- Large head or sprouting varieties
- Rappini/ Broccoli Raab - grows into small broccoli heads and you can eat leaves etc.
- grows well in cold climates, good for winter greenhouse

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Cabbage

- Early varieties are tasty and sweet but do not store well
- Look for storage varieties, with hard, large heads or sauerkraut types

Carrots

- Baby varieties are sweet and small but don't store well
- Storage types grow large
- 'Napoli' is good in winter greenhouse

Celery

- Stores for up to a month
- Celery root however stores much longer

Eggplant

- Will freeze - sliced and tossed in oil before roasting in oven

Greens

- Do not often freeze well, but can be planted in a winter greenhouse

Leeks

- Harvest and freeze without blanching
- Extend harvest in winter greenhouse

Onions

- Choose storage varieties - the onion neck will start losing moisture and tops will droop.
- Pull onions and allow neck to dry for 3-4 weeks before trimming and storing.
- 'Cipollini' - small, flat onion with excellent storage

Zucchini /summer squash

- Does not store well.
- Some people will shred summer squash and freeze it for baking.

Winter squash

- delicata and acorn types- shortest storage life- eat before January
- Butternut and buttercup - mid range storage
- Hubbard or kombucha types- harder skin, keeps longest

Winter squash - when is it ready to harvest?

- Squash touching ground is yellow.
- Thumbnail should not push into skin
- Stem is hard and woody
- Taste develops, sugar develops when cured properly

Sweet potatoes

- Morning glory family - must sprout eyes into slips
- Likes heat and moisture

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- Harvest before frost. Cure in 85 degrees, and high moisture.
- Put a sheet over storage bin with a lamp underneath, and a pan of water

Turnip/Rutabaga

- Rutabaga does store well. 'Laurentian, or 'Helenor'
- Baby turnips do not store, or freeze, but can be planted very early or very late.

Herbs

- Can be dried, put in oil, pesto, crumbled and frozen loose

Storing vegetables for winter:

- Fridge- lettuce and greens for fresh eating
- Long term- cold room, drying, leave in ground, freeze, salting, canning.
- Store only the best - no cracks, insect holes etc.
- Dust soil off.
- Lay out single layer in a place with good air circulation, but not in direct sunlight

Cold rooms:

- Insulate walls in basement to keep heat out from inside house.
- Air movement needed to prevent disease - insert an air outlet at top and bottom
- Pallets on floor
- Continue checking root cellar to monitor conditions, and remove damaged or rotting vegetables
- Do not let fruits touch, single layering is best
- Consider ethylene- apples, pears, melons and other fruits will release this gas. Do not store these with carrots or potatoes which can be affected and develop a bitter taste.
- Different humidity and temperature requirements are needed for different crops
- Beets, Carrots, Celeriac and Rutabaga – store at 0 C, 95-100% humidity for 5-6 months
- Kohlrabi – store at 0 C, 95-98 % humidity for 4 months
- Brussel sprouts, cabbage, napa cabbage, celery, daikon radish, leeks, winter radish – store at 0 C , 95% humidity for 1-2 months
- Onions, garlic, shallots – store at 2C, 65-75% humidity for 6-9 months
- Potatoes and Jerusalem artichokes – store in total darkness, at 4-7C, 90% humidity for 6 or more months
- Sweet potatoes – store at 10C, 95% humidity for 4-6 months
- Winter squash – store at 10-18C, 75% humidity for 3-9 months

Drying:

- Plum tomatoes have less moisture
- Dry them to be flexible, but not wet – stored in fridge
- Apples can be sliced into a bowl of water with lemon juice, and dried on screens in the oven.
- Dry beans, or peas are air dried in shell to use in soups or stew

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Freezing:

- You can freeze anything– complete book of preserving by Ann Seran provides good instruction on blanching times
- Freeze carrot juice
- Freeze eggplant slices- sliced and tossed in oil and roasted in the oven
- Leeks and peas do not need to be blanched before freezing
- Tomatoes- dry slightly on trays in oven, roasted at 250 for 2 hours, freeze flat in bags. Nice flavour!
- Asparagus, Corn, Beans (not fillet), broccoli, brussel sprouts, or cauliflower

Canning:

- Water bath canning for acidic fruits
- Pressure canning for non acid fruits/veggies
- Pears should be picked before they are ripe, and preserved as sauce, dried or in jam
- Eggplant or zucchini- can be preserved in oil, research internet for reliable instructions; keep in cold in fridge to prevent spoiling
- Vinegars are used to keep herbs -put herb in jars in the sun for 2 months, then use vinegar, or herbs (tarragon for example)

Salting:

- Chop up parsley and layer with salt in jars.
- Use as a salt.
- Sea salt was used - a coarse sea salt did not work as well
- Cabbage- sauerkraut or kimchi

Juicing:

- Carrots, beets and tomatoes

Oil curing:

- Used for eggplant, zucchini or globe artichokes

Leave it in the ground:

- Some crops can be mulched heavily, and harvested in spring but this is dependent on climate, and is more successful in areas that have a milder winter.
- Beets, carrots, leeks, parsnips, winter hardy scallions, parsley or perennials (asparagus, rhubarb)

Extending the growing season:

- Cold frames are good for spinach, claytonia, mustards, mache, minutina and kale.
- Row covers or unheated hoop houses – are good for all the above vegetables plus lettuce, swiss chard, scallions, pak choi, tatsoi, escarole, radish, turnip, carrots or mizuna.
- Winter greenhouse - winter carrots, brassicas, escarole (bugs don't like it and its less bitter when cooked), 'evergreen hardy white' scallions or leeks

Sprouts or micro greens can be grown indoors if you do not have a cold frame.

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Mumms Company is good for sprouting seed. Check sprouting.com

Question: What would you start in a winter greenhouse now? (Nov. 23rd)

Answer: Gail would recommend planting 3 weeks earlier to give the plants a start before the daylight hours are too short. Eliot Coleman's book includes a chart for recommended starting dates. Rapini was sown in September.