

## The Alternative Kitchen Garden Episode 70 transcript



Hello, and welcome to episode 70 of the Alternative Kitchen Garden. I'm Emma and I'm going to start this episode with an apology. I'm sorry that the episodes have been a bit sporadic of late and I haven't been managing to keep up with my weekly publishing schedule. I do have a good excuse, however – I am writing a book. I'm writing a book called 'The A to Z of the Alternative Kitchen Garden', and I'm working with Permanent Publications (the lovely people who publish Permaculture Magazine) to hopefully publish it early next year for you. So I'm writing a real book that's going to be published by real people early next year. Hopefully you're going to be as excited about that as I am. In the meantime it does mean, I'm afraid, that things are going to be a little bit erratic while I concentrate on the book. I'm sorry about that. I haven't given up, I'm not pod-fading, I'm just a little bit busy at the moment – which I hope you can appreciate.

It's now the 23<sup>rd</sup> June. We've just had the summer solstice here in the northern hemisphere, and the summer solstice really marks a turning point in the garden. Because although we're not particularly sensitive to the changes in day length, there are plenty of plants that are. A lot of our common garden vegetables have had their day length sensitivity bred out of them, so that they will effectively grow in different climates than the ones they were originally brought up, but there are plenty of vegetables that still have day length triggers.

Onions and garlic, and anything that produces tubers, frequently what you'll find is that they don't start producing tubers and swelling their bulbs until after 21<sup>st</sup> June. So they're really into their second phase of growth now. And it also means that you can now start sowing Oriental vegetables. Lots of Oriental vegetables are sensitive to day length as well, and if you sow them before the solstice then they have a tendency to bolt because the day length is wrong. If they're sown now, as the days start getting shorter, that's not so much of an issue.

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But what I'm really thinking about at the moment is the Credit Crunch, and the number of people out there who have started growing their own vegetables because they want to save some money as well as saving the planet. There are plenty of people out there who might have started growing their own this summer as a means of cutting down on their food bills. And although there are plenty of gardeners who put their gardens to bed over the winter, if you're gardening because you want to save money then there are plenty of things that you can grow over the winter that will still bring food to your table without costing very much money and give you crops right through the winter. But if you want crops through the winter you have to plan ahead. It's not like the summer where you can bung a few seeds in and you'll get something from most plants; if you want to crop over the winter then you have to put some planning and thought in now and start getting ready.

It can be a bit of a tricky thing to do, when the garden's going great guns and you've got crops that need harvesting and weeding and all kinds of things to do, to stop for a couple of minutes and think about what you're going to do for the winter, but that's what we're doing today – we're talking about winter crops. I've split it up into the kinds of space that you will have available.

So first up we've got people who've just got a windowsill – maybe a sunny windowsill in the kitchen or something like that. And if you've got a sunny windowsill and you've got herbs and salad crops growing, and things like that, then planning ahead for the winter is easy. You need to be sowing a second batch of your annual herbs now, so that's things like parsley and coriander and basil, so that you'll have some fresh plants growing when the frosts come that will keep you growing through the winter. If you've got perennial herbs they need dividing in the autumn, so you don't have to do anything with those yet (especially if they're growing outside), but in the autumn (nearer the time when the frosts are coming) you need to split them in half and bring one half inside so that you've got fresh herbs growing on the windowsill throughout the winter.

And you will also have space for some salad leaves or some stir-fry leaves, especially the cut-and-come-again mixes. If you've got a seed mix for different salad vegetables or different stir-fry vegetables (perhaps one of the Oriental mixes, they're very nice) then you need to be continually sowing those. Have them in trays, sow a tray; as soon as it comes up, as soon as the seedlings start to germinate, sow another one so that you've got a continuous supply of salad and stir-fry leaves. You can keep doing that through the winter. The growth might be a little bit slower in the winter, but you can eat them as seedlings so that's not an issue. So just keep doing what you're doing if the only space you've got is a windowsill.

If you're lucky enough to have a windowbox then you have a few more options available. The things that you might want to sow now for winter crops are spring cabbage, dwarf kale and chard as well. Chard's one of my favourite vegetables. If you sow it now, it will stand through the winter. And, as previously mentioned, you can sow the Oriental veg now – that's things like Pak Choi, Chinese cabbage, mizuna, anything like that that you fancy. And episode 18 was about Oriental vegetables if you want to go back and listen for some more ideas, although I haven't covered all of

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them by any means. There will be some more programmes coming up on Oriental veg at some point.

You can sow spring or salad onions now, and spinach. It's still a little bit warm in most places for spinach, and you'll have trouble with it bolting, but give it a few more weeks. When the weather starts to cool down, spinach is much easier to grow.

Don't forget that you can sow a few flowers as well. Winter-flowering pansies or violas are always good for brightening up the winter garden – giving you a little bit of sunshine on those cloudy days.

If you've got containers on your patio then you can be sowing some more carrots and beetroot. If you sow early varieties now then you'll have some baby roots; if you've got maincrop varieties growing already then you can pull those up before the frosts come and you can store them in boxes of damp sand, or something like that, and they'll keep quite a long time into the winter. So root veg you can sow now, turnips and things like that.

If you've already got a pot of potatoes growing then you might want to save a couple of your tubers when you dig them up and replant them in a month or so, in a pot that you can bring into a sheltered position. If you do that, they will grow again and you'll have some fresh, new potatoes for Christmas dinner – so that's a treat. I haven't tried it before, but I am going to try it this year. When I dig up my early potatoes I'm going to save a couple, plant them in a pot that I can take into the greenhouse and hopefully by doing that it means I'm going to have some potatoes for Christmas dinner – which will be absolutely stunning. So that might be one to try if you've got containers.

You could also try sowing some baby leeks, or some more dwarf French beans. The French beans, of course, won't last the winter but they will give you some crops late in the summer and into the autumn.

If you've got vegetable beds then you've got space – but there are plenty of vegetables that will stand the winter by themselves. The traditional vegetable crops for this part of the world include lots of brassicas like purple sprouting broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and cabbage and big kale plants. For most of those it's a bit late to sow them now, but if you want those sorts of things you can still go out and you can buy plants at the garden centre, you can order them online. Plant them out now and they will stand though the winter, so it's not too late if you've got plants growing or if you can buy plants. You can still have some of those winter brassicas, although of course they will need netting to keep the pigeons off and (at this time of year) to keep the cabbage white butterflies off as well. It's not much fun growing brassicas at this time of year, but good luck with that if you want to try it.

The same is true for leeks. If you want maincrop leeks you should really have sown the seeds a few weeks ago. You could still try it if you want some baby leeks growing in the ground, or you could get leek starter plants from the garden centre or online and plant those out as well. All of those crops will stand the winter without any protection at all and give you harvests throughout the winter and into the spring.

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Hopefully that's given you some ideas. I am in no way trying to insinuate that summer is over, there's still a lot of summer yet. I'm just saying that if you want some crops over the winter, and into the autumn, then you should be thinking about that now as well. It's sometimes very difficult to bring that to mind while the sun is shining, and it is actually shining today – which makes a change. Over the last week it has been very wet and windy.

If you're planning a winter garden, then do let me know what your favourite winter crops are and when they need to be sown or grown to get the best crops. If you want more information on this subject then I did a similar show last year called 'Seeds for late sowing' and I did that a few weeks later – that was published in July last year and there's some more information there. In the meantime, do let me know how you've been getting on, and have a great week in your garden. Goodbye!

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