

Horticulture Hints

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Well, the question always is, what to do in the garden in November? The busyness of the summer is past, but the weather is a little (!) cooler. Very nice to be outside in the mornings and evenings, especially when the morning starts out a bit cloudy. Still plenty of time to plant those cool season crops.

I had completely forgotten that I ordered garlic for planting in the spring. The company said they would send them when it was time to plant in my zone. Summer went by, and all of a sudden, there was a box at my door that said, 'Live Plants'. It was like Christmas. I had no idea what could be in the little box. And, back in the spring, I had no idea how much to order, so I ordered the minimum of 1/2 pound. I got 6 whole heads. Amounting to about 45 cloves to plant. So needless to say, come spring, I'll have plenty of garlic. Good thing we like it. I may even have some to share.

This summer I was finally able to get enough water to my puny little Chinese hat plant (*Holmskioldia sanguinea*) that it decided to bloom prolifically. If you've never seen this lovely thing before, it's also known as parasol plant or cup-and-saucer plant. It's scandent, which means that it's not really a vine, but will clamber over other things to reach its desired height. Which can be up to eight feet. It always blooms just about in time for Halloween, which I think is really cute, since the little hats (or parasols, if you like) are bright orange. A little more on this delightful plant: it grows best in zone 9 (mine has survived several hard freezes, dying back to the ground, but coming back in the spring), but likes plenty of water during those hot summer days. The rest of the year, it is quite drought tolerant. It is also tolerant of a variety of soils, but doesn't like standing water. It requires little to no fertilization for

this kind of show, and will root itself to the ground if it comes into contact with soil. So this is how it propagates. To get a new plant,



Chinese hat plant (*Holmskioldia sanguinea*)

just dig up the roots and cut the stem from the main part of the plant. I hope to get some new plants from this one, now that it's getting enough water.

This being a perfect time to start your cool season vegetables, here are a word or two (or three) concerning carrots and beets. Both of these veggies can be grown in the coldest parts of the year here in central Florida. If the roots are somewhat established when it turns cold, said cold won't hurt them. Carrots (*Daucus carota*) love soft, loose soil,



Beet seeds (Beta vulgaris)

and are very finicky about their germination process. If you've ever tried growing carrots, you know this is true. Part of the problem is that the seeds are the size of dust particles (only a slight exaggeration!). The other problem is that when they are sown, they don't want to be covered with soil. And they need to stay moist. So how to accomplish the impossible? A trick to do this is something I plan to try: sow your seeds, then cover the row with a board. Press down, and wait about six to seven days to check on the germination of your seeds. At the first sign of growth, remove the board and water ever so gently. In a day or two more, your little carrots should be rooted enough that you can water as normal. You will always have to thin carrots, unless you know how to plant one dust particle at a time. This is painful, I know, but needs to be done. What you could do, instead of pulling seedlings, is to cut them. Then you can add the micro green to your salad. They are very tasty and

nutritious. And you can continue to thin until they are spaced according to package specifications. On the other hand, beet seeds (*Beta vulgaris*) are much tougher and don't require particular processes in order to germinate. As a matter of fact, they will grow in almost any soil, the seeds are large, and they will germinate readily. Birds and squirrels do love the seeds, so you may need to protect them until they are big enough to stand up to the critters. The biggest thing that you need to know about beets is that there are actually three to four seeds in each 'seed'. Each 'seed' is actually the shriveled fruit of the beet plant, and so contains several seeds. It's easy to plant one at a time, but again, you will need to thin. And of course you know that you can eat the greens as well as the root. As a matter of fact, beets used to be grown only for the greens. Not sure who discovered that the root was delicious too, but 'Well done!'.

Happy fall, happy Thanksgiving, and happy gardening!