

Pinehold Gardens Field Notes

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A DAY IN THE LIFE

Summer one day, spring the next, and back to winter this past week.

We've been getting a lot of questions about how the early summerish weather will affect the upcoming season. Well, it's had several effects already.

The first has to do with weed germination. Of course Nature is much better at sowing a cover crop in a timely manner than we are sometimes and so she has laid down a good crop of weed seed last fall, which had been nicely incorporated over this mild winter with its numerous freeze-thaw cycles. So it lays there in a nice moist environment waiting for the soil temperature to warm just a little, which it did in March. Lo and behold, along with the greening of the grass and the flowering of the willows, the weed seed sprouted by the second week.

The second thing the nice weather did was to help dry the ground. And we have never had such dry ground in March before. Mind you, we are not talking Sahara dry, but dry enough to take a tractor out with a few pieces of equipment without seriously compacting the soil. So we did. David got the disc and the field cultivator out and was not only able to open ground so it could dry further but in the process laid waste to all the weeds that were growing. So much for the first flush to weeds. He even had the opportunity to make some raised beds so if we did go into a wet period, the raised beds, built up about 10 inches from the surface with nice flat tops, will dry much more quickly than just the open ground.

The last thing the weather

allowed was for us to get early spring cover crops in. The old potato field was planted in field peas and oats, and the old winter squash field was planted in fava or faba beans. Cover crops, for our new members, is something we plant to feed the soil microorganisms. It is allowed to mature then is cut down and worked into the soil. It adds organic matter and nutrients, and if one plants legumes, such as peas and fava beans, it adds nitrogen as well. These crops will be worked in late May or early June in advance of the planting of fall crops.

ADAPT OR WHAT?

We have seen the young owlets and they are larger than you might think with their little blocky heads, wide eyes and ear tufts sticking up well above the nest. We were certain the old mother had hatched one, but two was a surprise. The old father is bringing special treats to owlets' typical fare for this normal cold time of year, like a nice long snake, to the nest box in our neighbor's tree. So, I guess it's official — spring has sprung, well ahead of the old schedule. Of course, that's been obvious to anyone who has forsenthia bushes or a tulip tree in their neighborhood. Even the later spring plants such as tulips and lilac are starting to bloom.

After this winter that wasn't it's still a bit disconcerting to see spring in full bloom so early. Part of us is still back in winter, using up food we stored, froze or canned last fall and catching up on winter chores. The other part of us, the one that yearns to be in the present, has begun the ritual of spring, eating lots of new greens, cleaning up the herb garden, and feeling, gener-

ally, like we are a bit behind — that the summer frenzy is going to be soon upon us. Our heads wobble to and fro. Our energy waxes and wanes. What to do? What to do? April can be a long cruel month and May has been known to throw a few surprises at us as well. Don't rush the season, we think. But what is the season?

Last year at this time it was cold here and in California, so cold in fact that bee shipments from California were held up until May. And then the spring and early summer flourish of flowers for the bees barely took place before high summer and its heat and dryness took over, making for a scant harvest for the bees. This year the bees in our hive were out as early February and collecting pollen in mid-March. What could they be thinking about these days? If we weren't here to attend to the bees needs, could they adapt quickly enough to these kinds of changes? We can't, but we must.

What the climate experts are saying is this is the new normal. Not an early spring necessarily, but an unpredictable one. Warm and dry one year, and cold and wet the next. If that were the pattern, we could adapt and maybe the bees and other critters too. But there is no pattern. It is as though our weather has entered into the world quantum mechanics where randomness rules.

Are the owlets now being hardwired by their parents to know that there are no defined dates to mate and breed? Have the old mother and old father discovered this? We are confused, unsure, discom-bobulated. What must the owlets and bees think of this

all? Our science, certain only that we can know nothing for sure, hasn't been much help. The future has always been unknown but, it is more unknown now than ever. And yet to see the owls wide innocent look on a fine spring day we'll just forget the calendar and the position of the stars. If it's spring, then let it be.

WHAT'S NEW THIS SEASON

This year there will be a box at each drop site called an exchange box. The purpose of an exchange box is to try and distribute vegetables to a good home. For example, if you have tried kale and it just isn't something that you will ever like, you can take it out of your box and leave it in the exchange box for someone else. We will also put extras and seconds in the box.

WHAT'S GROWING?

We are just finishing the harvesting of the greens that we had planted in the stationary greenhouse in December for March and April restaurant and Saturday on-farm sales. That greenhouse will then be prepped for pole bean and cucumber crops for the first CSA deliveries. Six week old tomato plants are being transplanted into the new movable hoop house at the end of this week. Plants seeded for later transplanting include onions, parsley, Swiss Chard and peppers. Peas for the upick are being planted today.

SIGN UP UPDATE

If you have intended to join us for another season, please let us know by sending in your sign up form or emailing us. Remember we do offer \$100 in assistance and flexible payment options. Just send us as many post dated checks as your budget allows.