

# SEEDING STRATEGIES & TACTICS

FOR THE SOUTHERN WILLAMETTE VALLEY GARDENER



## PART I: A CAUTIONARY TALE



ause, if you will, to imagine the bittersweet scene. A grey sky. It is late winter sliding around on the foothills of early Spring. Stage left, a puddle. Stage right, behind a cluster of brassicas bravely fending off the seasonal slug assault, you, beat over, wincing in anticipation as you gently, eek, fork some over-wintering carrots out of the sodden ground and, agh, gargantuan even, clods of wet earth, and the fluffy, friable, fertile filth ("it was nothing more than clay and hardpan before I got to it, you know") you have given your soul in service to, clings now, horror of horrors, in sticky gelatinous clumps, the shame of it, to fork, fingers, and carrots, a cruel, yes, cruel mockery of the valiant defenses of the previous summers as you, heart-in-mouth, fended off - sorry, 'alerted', that's what I mean, 'alerted' - those leaden-footed, tourista non-gardener fool philistine vandals, that's not too strong a word for them, no, as they stepped not around, no, nor over, no, nor even beside your beds, but, how it hurts even now, ON them (compaction! compaction! most evil of words!) And as you rise now, carrots in hand (oh pyrrhic victory!) looking skyward, you offer up the greatest horticultural mantra of all: "This is no time," you intone, basso profundo, "to be working the soil."

paced perfectly to crest at the crescendo of your final, definitive distillation of the Horticultural State of the Union. "At this rate," you solemnly assert, as modestly as in fallibility affords, "it will be weeks before we get into the dirt."

To which your friend replies: "Actually, I got my peas in a couple of days ago."

from Hans Schönsperger's

AUGSBURGER KALENDER, 1457.

### A COSMIC CURVEBALL

Now don't get me wrong here. Yes I know gardening is an altogether relaxing and ennobling affair, the books tell me that, what with lightly tripping through the daisies, throwing off the cares of the world, and what have you. But it is also, dammit man, not without its shadow. And my acquaintance's cosmic curveball - delivered, might I add, with just a tad less sensitivity than the politesse strictly demanded by the presence of refined horticultural sensibilities - shipwrecked our fête-à-fête on a treacherous shoal, unmarked on official maps, that lurks, invisible, in the shallow waters of plant people niceties. To what exactly, do I refer? Why, to the hidden epidemic, that pernicious pathology, the euphemistically titled "Horticultural Seasonal Affective Disorder" or "HSAD" (pron. "Huh! Sad!")

Zurich-trained types recognize a symptom profile. Broad, varied, it includes but is by no means limited to:

✦ An unshakable sense of unease that one is not seeding as early or as often or as much as one should - related to the syndrome of "Manic Ambiguous Delight" (MAD) triggered when confronted by the largesse of seed swaps.

✦ A certain twitchiness evidenced around the aisles of garden stores. (aka "the DTE seed rack twerks.") Onset usually in February.

✦ An allergic response (sulk) to news (hints of, even) that others, known or unknown, are, where one is not, 'on top of' their seeding schedule - as evidenced by a sinking feeling in the tummy tum tum when, in conversation, a fellow gardening competitor, agh, sorry, brother/sister in arms, announces that their peas are in when yours are not.



Gardening Tools, from PUMBI'S GARDENO DE AGRICULTURA, Venice, 1590.

✦ With every glance at your wall calendar, the verdick rings in your ears: "Guilty! Could do better!" The buds of May ain't so darling - the cup is definitely half empty.

Glaring secondary symptoms include a) hiding your disease from those you live with - telling your partner that you are 'just stepping outside to take out the compost and take in the evening air' when, in actuality, you are slaking your addiction to checking out the phases of the moon, and b) remedial math classes with Tom Beltman (hoing the lightning quick ability to count back through Julian calendar dates from the days-to-maturity # on seed packets, at a glance).

### THE CAVALRY CHARGE

An hour and a half and a bull belly later, boots off, teat up, mug of tea in hand, basking in the sunny prose of the Territorial Seed Catalog ("Extraordinary!" "Heavenly!" "Uniformly large and sweet!" "A real winner!") it happens. The phonecall. From a fellow gardener. The Spring check-in. Hellos, Pleasantries. But quickly, to the real stuff: today's salad plate; the winter's accounting; the grim shared reports and consolations for 'the plants that didn't make it.'

Now, the esoteric, initiatory language ("Ask Pat," "felcos oiled," "He's allelopathic.") deepens, announcing the unspoken acknowledgement of the not-so-casual drift toward the mysteries of the inner sanctum. Taking the cue, you sense the chance for a flourish. Letting loose a cavalry charge - at a trot, poised, at a canter, prosodic, and at a full-blown gallop, positively Platonic in perspicacity, your (utterly compelling) dissection of The Season As It Stands, takes in tangential angles to the sun of the Flight paths of migratory birds, the length of nook shadows, S. Willamette Valley damping-off trends in the 3rd week of January for the past 20 years (note the emphatic underline: "I was looking through my notes...") and more, every morsel