

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

January 23, 2012

Everything Seedy and Those Pesky Tent Caterpillars

Note that my e-mail has changed to: gilkeson@shaw.ca Please add this address to your email address book to avoid having these message designated as spam.

As the coming gardening season begins to loom larger in our minds, you all are undoubtedly making lists and ordering seeds. If you have been looking through old seed packages, wondering if they are still good, you might want to do a quick germination test. Most seeds sprout within a couple of days so it doesn't take long. Here's how:

Germination tests: Count out 10-25 seeds (just use 5 seeds if you don't have many left). Put them on a piece of wet paper or cloth towelling and fold a flap of the towelling over the seeds to keep them moist. Slip this into a container or plastic bag; loosely cover the container or fold over the bag to allow a little ventilation. Keep the package in a warm place and check for moisture periodically. You can sprout several different kinds at once, but be sure to label each group of seeds. If using paper towel, before wetting it you can write the names directly on the paper with pencil or indelible pen. After 2-5 days, seeds that are going to sprout will show a tiny root tip: that's all you need to know in order to count sprouted vs. not-sprouted seeds. If over 70% sprout, that's great; if only a couple sprout, that's a sign to order fresh seed.

And while we are on seeds, be sure to plan to attend your local Seedy Saturday event (you can see a complete list, with contact information and links at:

<http://www.seeds.ca/ev/events.php>). I will be giving 2 talks at the Qualicum Beach event (see: www.qbseedysaturday.com) and will also be speaking at the Victoria event (www.jamesbaymarket.com/seedysaturday/seedysaturday.htm)

Local Seedy Saturdays (and the odd Sunday):

January 28: Denman Island; Ladner (Delta)

February 4: Qualicum Beach

February 11: Salt Spring Island

February 18: Victoria

February 25: Vancouver, Sooke

March 3: Richmond, Robert's Creek, Courtenay, North Vancouver

March 4 (Sunday): Nanaimo

March 10: Powell River, Cobble Hill

March 24: Duncan

April 7: Mission

April 14: Surrey

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Tent Caterpillar Egg Masses: If you have fruit trees, you will now be thinking of getting to dormant pruning. While you are at it, look for and remove tent caterpillar egg masses. There are a LOT of these this year on Salt Spring fruit trees (particularly apples) and also in some other areas. The egg masses are hard to see at first as they are coloured like the bark, but once you find a few it will be easier to spot more. The masses look like a small, grey (or silvery grey), flattened blob of hardened foam on small branches (finger width and smaller). The masses are about 1.5 cm long and wide and usually wrapped partly around the small branch--though this year, given the large number of moths around last summer, eggs were laid on other kinds of plants and surfaces. It takes a bit of picking to get the mass loose, but it will pop off in one piece and you can see the dozens of eggs inside. While the eggs are unlikely to survive once removed from the branch, it is a good idea to dispose of them (burn, compost, garbage).

For info on my books [including my new **Backyard Bounty**] or to check my 2012 schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area see: www.lindagilkeson.ca

No need to copy and save all these messages as I hear some people are doing: you can read all of my previous messages on the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website: www.saltspringenergystrategy.org