

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

February 1, 2013

Bug your local garden centre

This is the year that I hope many more garden suppliers start selling a sturdy, good quality 'bug mesh'. And maybe some will start selling disposable fruit bags in suitable quantities for home gardeners? This is why:

I hate to scare your pants off, but it is now more important than ever for gardeners to have access to durable insect netting to protect against two, quite nasty, fruit pests that are now established in the region:

Spotted wing Drosophila (a species of vinegar fly), which attacks stone fruit, berries, Asian pear, grapes and numerous wild plants (more info: <http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/cropprot/swd.htm>);

Apple maggot (a species of fruit fly) (more info: <http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb1928/EB1928.pdf>)

Bug Mesh: Carrot rust fly, cabbage root maggot, currant fruit fly and now these newly introduced flies infest roots or fruits with little white maggots. The easiest fix for a home gardener is a barrier that simply stops the adult flies from laying their eggs on plants or fruit. For decades gardeners have been making do with floating row covers for this purpose. The lightest weight row cover is the best for insect control, but it tears easily. The thicker row cover fabrics last longer and are fine for short term use to keep off insects, but they exclude more light than is desirable for crops, such as carrots, that must be covered for the whole season. They are not strong enough to cover fruit trees.

Enter 'bug net' or insect netting--sturdy, long-lasting, knitted poly monofilament fabric, sold in different widths and mesh size for different pests. Anyone from Great Britain knows all about these product because gardeners there have had them for years. Or check out Australian gardening web sites to see their variety of bug mesh products in that land of fruit flies. The fabric can be used to cover vegetable beds supported on hoops. It can be sewn into bags big enough to drop over a whole berry bush or small fruit tree or made into small bags to cover individual fruit or bunches of grapes.

So, I hope all of you go into your local garden centre and 'bug' them to start carrying one of the bug mesh products (there are several suppliers of different brands) so that you can buy lengths to suit your needs. Or get together with some other gardeners and order a wholesale roll to divide up. Last year on Salt Spring some of us ordered 100 m rolls of ProtekNet brand from Dubois Agrinovation (in Montreal) www.duboisag.com/. Various widths are available, but get at least the 60 gr mesh size, which is small enough for carrot rust fly, cabbage maggot and fruit flies. So far, nurseries that I know of stocking the knitted monofilament bug mesh are Dinter Nursery in Duncan and Russell Nursery in North Saanich.

Fruit Bags: Using paper, bug mesh or fabric bags to protect apples, peaches, pears and clusters of grapes from insects is a well-established method for commercial organic production. Gardeners have been devising their own bags, using those translucent paper bakery bags or small lunch bags. Where they can get them, some people have been buying the specially designed Japanese fruit bags with a integral twist tie used by the commercial orchardists. Years ago I sewed up a set of fabric bags with

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drawstring tops to keep racoons and insects out of my table grapes. They have proven their worth many times over and are quick to install; I am still using the same bags so the investment in time to make them was well worth it. BUT, now, with apple maggot upon us (they have been found on Salt Spring and Vancouver Island) gardeners will want to bag their apples. And with spotted wing Drosophila getting into all kinds of other fruit, including Asian pears, disposable fruit bags would be useful for these crops.

Note: I will be giving talks on how to deal with new pest and disease problems of food gardens, including the two flies mentioned in this email, this coming Saturday, Feb. 2 at the Qualicum Beach Seedy Saturday (see: www.qbseedysaturday.com) and Feb. 21st for the Pender Island Garden Club. (If you are in one of my Year Round Harvest classes, you will cover this material in the June module of your courses).

For info on my books, including the new database of colour photos from the new edition of *Natural Insect, Weed & Disease Control*, or to check my 2013 schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area see: www.lindagilkeson.ca

You can read all of my previous messages on the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website: www.saltspringenergystrategy.org