

Gardening Newsletter

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May 13, 2014: Current Notes and Currant Pests

This coming weekend, West Coast gardeners join the rest of Canadian gardeners who traditionally plant pretty much everything over the May long weekend. While I would hold back on the tenderest cucumbers, melons, eggplant, basil, etc., anything else you haven't put out yet can be transplanted or sown directly in the next week or two.

It is also nearly time to seed Brussels sprouts and the winter cabbage varieties that take the longest to mature. Some excellent cold hardy cabbages, such as January King, Langedijker Red, Danish Ballhead and others take over 120 days so I am starting them right now to make sure I have full-sized heads before winter closes in. Check the days to harvest on your cabbage seed packages to figure out when to sow--some take as little as 50 days, but most of the big solid winter varieties take over 90 days. I wait until end of May to seed my Br. sprouts so the plants don't form sprouts until October, thus missing damage from aphids that often show up in the late summer.

Pests of note right now:

Winter moth: A lot of concern from Victoria area gardeners this month about winter moth damage. If your trees are being chewed by small greenish caterpillars up to cm long (3/4 inch) with fine yellow lines along their bodies, that's likely what it is. See: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/leaf_chewers.html#21 Winter moth caterpillars are 'inchworms', meaning they move by looping up in the middle of the body because they only have legs at the front end and hind end. There are other species of little green caterpillars around right now, of course, but they don't move this way and don't usually cause the same amount of damage. Early in the season, they chew on leaves of fruit trees, maple, oak, willow and other broadleaf trees and blueberries; when numerous, they can strip most of the leaves and destroy fruit buds. Trees will leaf out again and grow normally the rest of the summer, but a fruit crop can be lost.

If caterpillars are still feeding right now, spraying with the biological control bacteria BTK (e.g., Safer's Biological Insecticide) will help. You have to do a very thorough job of getting the spray into the leaves where the caterpillars are because they have to eat the spores to be infected. This isn't easy because the caterpillars roll or web the leaves around themselves. If there are no caterpillars present, then there is nothing to be done now, but make a note to put up sticky tree bands in the fall on all affected trees. Good timing for this is Thanksgiving weekend (for US readers, that's mid-October). Wrap a foot wide band of plastic wrap around each trunk and spread a layer of Tanglefoot or Tangletrap insect glue over the width of the band. The glue is sold in garden centres or by mail order; sometimes banding kits are also available. In late fall the female moths emerge from cocoons in the leaf litter at the base of the tree and make the trek on foot to the tips of the branches to lay eggs (they can't fly). They are readily intercepted on the sticky band so eggs never get laid. In February, take the bands down and that's that: no eggs = no caterpillars = no damage!

Currant (and gooseberry) pests: To clear up some confusion between 2 common pests that occur in the spring: European sawfly is the greenish worm that looks like a caterpillar and rapidly defoliates bushes. The eggs are laid on the lower leaves, often in rather large numbers. At my elevation on Salt Spring this is mid- to late April. See http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/leaf_chewers2.html#36 for what the eggs look like laid on the undersides of leaves along the leaf veins. When the eggs hatch, the tiny, dark green,

caterpillar-like insects feed together in groups, starting with lower and interior leaves of the bush, which is why they go unnoticed for a the first couple of week. Over the 3-4 weeks they eat, they consume the leaf tissue between the veins until there is hardly any left. The easiest way to deal with them is to examine the lower leaves from mid-April onward (go out there right now!) and destroy any leaves with eggs or groups of larvae. You could spray with soap or pyrethrins, but because they are usually on just a few leaves at this time of year I find it easier to just find them and pick them off.

The second insect is the currant fruit fly, which is a small grey fly that lays eggs in the developing berries on gooseberries and currants. See: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/borers.html#93> The larvae feed inside the fruit on the seeds, leaving a mucky black blob inside. Covering bushes with insect mesh, floating row cover or fine nylon curtain material stops the flies from laying eggs on the fruit. As long the mesh is tied into the trunk at the base of the bush and there are no other openings for them to get at leaves, it works fine. There is only one generation of flies so cover bushes starting about now and for the next 3-4 weeks, then take the covers off.

-----Upcoming workshops:

Saturday, May 24: 9:30-4:30 There is still space available in my **Year Round Harvest** at the UBC Botanical Gardens, Vancouver. We will cover compost and soil preparation; intensive planting; food in planters and pots; when to plant; how to store crops and winter protection. As always, my emphasis is on simple ways to grow the greatest amount of food in a small garden — for the least amount of work. More info: <http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/learn> To register: garden.info@ubc.ca or call 604.822.3928

Tomorrow (Wednesday) May 14th I am speaking at the Nanaimo Garden Club on pest and disease management; on Tuesday 27th, I will be at the Bowen Island Garden Club and Saturday, May 31st will be giving 3 free workshops on **Storing & Preserving Fruit & Vegetables** in Richmond. For more information and registration, see my web site: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/calendar.html>

See my web site www.lindagilkeson.ca for hundreds of colour photos of pests and diseases to help you ID problems, to order books or check my 2014 schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area. I am totally booked for 2014, but if your group is interested in a presentation, 2015 isn't full....yet....

All of my previous messages are archived on my web site under the *Gardening Tips* page and are also available through the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website: www.saltspringenergystrategy.org