

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

July 13, 2015

Sowing for winter, wonky zuccs and dreaded SWD

This week the cooler weather is coinciding nicely with the right timing for sowing Swiss chard, kale, collards, kohlrabi, beets, rutabagas, winter radish/daikon, radicchio and hardy endives for your winter garden. Chard or kale planted earlier in the season will continue all winter, but you might want to sow more now to account for the fact that replacement leaves don't grow in the winter. I plant about 4 times more chard for winter harvests than I use in the summer to ensure a good supply of leaves until growth starts again in March.

If you can find good quality started seedlings (e.g., from Chorus Frog farm stand on Salt Spring), transplanting is an option, of course, but if your local supplier is selling sad, yellowing seedlings, skip it. You would be better off sowing seeds directly in the garden--they will quickly outgrow stressed seedlings, which may never recover. With the cooler and maybe a little damper outlook for the next few weeks it should be easier to get seeds started than it was earlier this month.

If you didn't sow carrots earlier this month, you will likely still get a decent crop if you sow immediately. By the end of July sow mizuna, turnips, leaf mustards and mustard spinach (Komatsuna), Chinese cabbage and greens (Napa cabbage, joi choi, bok choi), winter onions (such as Walla Walla, Japanese bunching onions) and broccoli raab. Gardeners farther south along the coast in Washington can move the schedule a week or two later.

These new plantings can follow garlic and onions from sets, which are likely all harvested by now. They can also follow in spaces vacated by spring peas, lettuce and other cool season crops that frizzled in the hot weather. This has been such an extreme season of heat and drought that now is a good time to take stock and remove plants that are failing or look like they won't deliver; you also might want to edit out plants that are producing a surplus you can't use. With the rampageous growth of cucumbers this summer, I actually removed a couple of plants (I mean, there IS a limit to how many cukes one can eat!). I also pulled the plug on spring cauliflower and Chinese cabbage a few weeks ago--they were done for in the heat--which also left more room for new plantings. Don't be in a hurry to discard broccoli plants, though: even if they have been sitting there doing nothing in the heat, they should recover as temperatures cool off and continue to produce side shoots all fall.

Do you have problems with zucchinis or other squash starting to grow a little, then shrivelling and dropping off? This is a lack of pollination that you can fix easily. For more information and details on how to do this, see last year's message all about zucchini: [http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening-pdf/Winter Gardening 2014 - July 6.pdf](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening-pdf/Winter%20Gardening%202014%20-%20July%206.pdf) A different problem, occurring more often this summer, is that squash plants may drop the tiny female flowers before they open. Plants do this if they are carrying more flowers and fruit than they can sustain with the water or nutrients available to them. Excessive heat might also play a role too. To give plants a nutrient boost, water with compost or manure tea, made by soaking a shovel full of manure or compost in a 5-gallon bucket of water for 2-3 days. Dilute the resulting 'tea' to a light brown colour and use on plants as often as you like. This is meant to extract readily soluble nitrogen and other nutrients so don't leave it more than a couple of days or it will get stinky and draw flies. Fish fertilizer and other organic fertilizer mixes are also available from garden

centres. Urine (pee-cycling) is a little mentioned, but very valuable, source of nutrients for liquid feeding too; if you use it, be sure to dilute 10-15 times with water or it can burn plant roots.

And while we are on zucchini, irregular watering causes the fruit to grow with narrower places along the length (it also happens to cucumbers). While the plant is short on water, the growth slows and this shows up in the fruit as a constriction. There is nothing wrong with the taste of the wonky ones, but a thicker mulch and more attention to watering will produce straight sided fruit without 'waistlines' in the future.

Pest du jour: I am hearing a lot of reports of little maggots in cherries, blueberries and raspberries, largely thanks to the alien fruit fly called the spotted wing Drosophila. There are other fruit flies too, especially in cherries, but SWD is now well established in BC and we are going to have to learn to live with it. I expect a lot of SWD adults survived last winter and with the warmer than normal spring and summer the fly populations have expanded faster than in previous years. If you want to read more, including how to avoid damage next year, here is the info I sent out last year:

[http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening-pdf/Winter Gardening 2014 - July 31.pdf](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening-pdf/Winter_Gardening_2014_-_July_31.pdf)

Upcoming workshop:

Saturday, July 25: I will be giving 2 food preserving workshops at the Steveston Community Centre in Richmond. 9:30-11:30 Fresh Storage and Easy Freezing (reducing food waste, when to harvest, how to store onions, garlic, winter squash, potatoes, apples and other fruit; quick methods for freezing food). 1:00-3:00 Preserving Fruits and Vegetables (dehydrating, boiling water bath canning). The workshops are free but you must pre-register: 604-276-4300 or <http://www.richmond.ca/register>

See my web site <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca> for hundreds of colour photos of pests and diseases to help you identify problems. All of my previous gardening messages are archived on my Gardening Tips page: http://lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

My teaching and talk schedule for 2016 is rapidly filling up, so check my schedule on my web site for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area.