

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

December 19, 2016

Come the thaw....

As this prolonged cold period is coming to an end, I thought a few notes on salvaging garden crops would be in order. In this last couple of weeks, the minimum temperatures and amount of snow cover varied quite a bit over the region so some gardens will have suffered more than others.

Well-mulched root crops with a blanket of snow over the top are quite likely to be fine, no matter how cold it got in your garden. Root crops with little mulch and no snow cover, however, are going to have frost damage on the shoulders of the roots. To see how yours fared, after everything thaws later this week, pull a couple of carrots, beets, etc., and see if the top of the roots look like they have been frozen (a water-soaked appearance). If so, the roots won't keep for long because the damaged tissue rots and the rots will spread to the rest of the root. To salvage frost-damaged roots, dig them all up soon, cut off the damaged top part and store the roots in the refrigerator. They should keep in good condition for 4-6 weeks, possibly longer.

Lows of -6 or -8°C (21-17°F) usually don't kill purple sprouting broccoli, winter cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, kales and other winter hardy cabbage family plants as well as the hardiest varieties of leeks. This was an unusually long period of cold, however, which might increase damage in some varieties. If it didn't get below -5°C (23°F) where you are, though, all those crops should be fine once they thaw out. Right now, everything looks wilted and sad and will continue to do so until the soil thaws and they can get enough water back up into their leaves. Just leave the plants alone for now and see how they do. If you are in a hurry for kale, it can be picked frozen and used immediately in a cooked dish. For everything else, including cabbages, let them thaw out completely and absorb water before you harvest. It can take a frozen head of cabbage a week to thaw out. When you harvest leeks, don't be dismayed by the deteriorating outer leaves (after this cold, they will be a mess)—once you peel them off, the leek inside is usually fine. As I have noted before, after such cold weather Brussels sprouts will be very sweet (and parsnip lovers will have a treat too).

Leaves of leafy greens, such as chards, Komatsuna and others may or may not have survived—it will depend entirely on how well you mulched before the cold arrived and on how much snow cover there was. Plants with plastic over them or in tunnels may have fared a little better if they were also well mulched. Even if the leaves were killed by cold, the roots are likely still alive. If they are, they will grow a new crop of leaves in the spring so don't be in a hurry to remove them even if the leaves have turned black and collapsed from frost damage. The same goes for parsley. The one green likely to be just fine no matter what, is corn salad—that little salad green is pretty much indestructible!

We won't know until spring if there has been damage to trees, such as figs, citrus, olives, tea. Severe cold can damage the embryonic figs and the tips of branches. I don't know if my outdoor lemon tree has survived despite the cheery Christmas lights wrapped around it. So we shall see...anyway, the great thought for this week is that the shortest day is the 21st and after that, days will (slowly) start getting longer. And the first Seedy Saturdays start up at the end of January!

Sad news for those of you that have been to my gardening classes and Master Gardener workshops: my dear old dog Charlotte, is no more. She travelled everywhere with me and enjoyed the attention (and treats) so many of you gave her over her 15 years.

Good news for 2017: I am on the point of sending my newest publication to the printer so it will be available in early January. Watch my web site for: *Resilient Gardens 2017: Pollinator Gardens, Garlic Diseases, Pest Update*. The main theme is how and what to grow to make your yard and landscape a richer source of food for pollinators and how to provide nest sites for them. The garlic diseases section covers the variety of root diseases, which are a perennial concern for coastal gardeners.

A note for those getting this message a day late: Unfortunately, Shaw now limits the number of emails that can be sent in 24 hours to 2000 messages so it will take me a couple of days to send this message to everyone. I hope to have figured out something else by January so your next message from me may look different.

Best wishes to everyone for the season and a new gardening year!

Check the calendar on my web site <http://lindagilkeson.ca/> for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area, also for book sales and hundreds of colour photos of pests, diseases and disorders to help you identify problems. My speaking schedule for 2017 is fully booked and the 2018 requests are all going into a folder for now as it is too far ahead to schedule.

All of my previous gardening messages are archived on my Gardening Tips page:
http://lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html