

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Waterlogging; Winter Pests; Enjoy 2 Garden Videos

With hardly anything to do in the garden at this time of year, the gardener's main job is to harvest vegetables when needed—and, of course, to be vigilant in case of cold weather. So far it has been a warm fall, but I think I will lay that extra layer of leaves over my root crops this week. If you are going to be away over the holidays or too busy to worry about the garden, sparing a few minutes to add more mulch now will protect the garden should temperatures start to dip below freezing.

If you are concerned about yellowing and dying lower leaves on broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprout plants at this time of year, don't worry! It is normal for the oldest leaves to be dropping now. I just leave them under the plants to add to the mulch protecting the soil. All we really need to be concerned about is making sure these big, top-heavy plants are well enough staked or supported that the stems and roots won't be damaged by high winds or heavy snow. If younger green leaves are broken off by storms, not to worry: the plants will be growing new leaves in February and March.

If the heavy rainfall of the last weekend (and the forecast of more downpours this week) leaves your garden flooded or waterlogged, that doesn't bode well for survival of overwintering vegetables. The longer the soil is waterlogged the more roots suffocate and die. It might be necessary to do some salvage harvesting after this week if the soil continues to be soggy. Make a note of where it was waterlogged for next year's garden plan so you can avoid planting winter crops there--or perhaps plan to build higher beds.

A last couple of pest and disease tips for this time of year:

Rats: They are an increasing problem in the region, with CBC reporting that Victoria, Vancouver and Lower Mainland cities are among the most rat-infested cities in the country. Some gardeners report so much rat damage that it is really cutting into their harvest. This is a good time of year to control rats because there isn't as much tasty garden produce around to attract them away from traps. More on catching rats in last year's November 13, 2024 message [see my archive: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html]. Given the situation in some neighbourhoods, it might be advisable to call a pest management company that can help with trapping and controls and on modifying the environment to make it less friendly to rats.

SWD: Seeing the late fall surge in numbers of that pesky fruit fly, Spotted Wing Drosophila, caught in my vinegar trap this week, was a reminder for me to remind you to keep on keeping that trap out for the winter. Adults overwinter in nooks and crannies in buildings and other protected places so the more adults you can catch over the winter, the fewer there will be to lay eggs in the spring in strawberries and other fruit. You only need one simple homemade trap in your yard. Take a plastic container with a lid, such as a cottage cheese or deli container, and punch 4 - 6 small holes around the rim. The size of a paper-punch hole is ideal, but if you don't have a hand punch to make the hole, cut small square



holes that size. Pour about an inch of apple cider vinegar (not apple cider flavoured vinegar) into the container and snap on the lid. Set the trap somewhere in the yard where it will be out of the rain (and out of reach of racoons). Don't set the trap on the ground among berry plants—the flies can find the trap wherever it is placed so put it where it is easy for you to see and reach. I count the drowned fruit flies and keep a record but you certainly don't have to do that. Just add more vinegar every month or two over the winter if you notice it looks low or replace the vinegar if there are lots of drowned flies.

Allium rust: If you saw dusty orange spores of rust fungi on your garlic or leeks during the growing season [for a photo, see: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/foliage.html#151>] you can break the cycle of infection for next year's plantings right now by harvesting any leeks that are still in the garden. This rust overwinters on living plant material so infected leeks standing in the garden over winter enable the fungus to survive to next spring. If infected leeks are removed before the new garlic shoots come up, the absence of leaves of host plants allows the spores to die out (but do act immediately as garlic may be sprouting early in response to the warm weather). This break in the infection cycle is often very effective, allowing you to grow a clean crop of garlic and other Alliums next summer. Rust spores could still float into your garden on the wind next summer from farther afield, but spores arriving later in the season cause less damage than infections that start early from spores that overwinter right in the garden. Tip: Fresh leeks keep for at least a month in the fridge and you can lightly sauté them and freeze them too--so a premature harvest won't go to waste.

Gardening videos for the holidays: Make some popcorn and snuggle up!

On a rainy winter's evening, here are two videos you might enjoy. These are recorded webinars I gave as fundraisers for two of my favourite Salt Spring non-profits this year. These recordings are being made available free as community resources—but if you enjoy the videos, it would be greatly appreciated if you made a donation of any size to either of these organizations:

Simple Food Preserving: Fresh Storage, Easy Freezing and Dehydrating was presented in September for Transition Salt Spring. Although it is not the time of year when people have surplus produce to store, you might find it helpful in planning your next year's garden. Non-gardening folks and those involved in food banks and community food security might also be interested in low cost, simple ways of preserving food. Here is the link on the Transition Salt Spring YouTube channel: https://youtu.be/FL-0g60_qVs?si=4mQsDtfZMA5kvywW and their home page in case you would like to see what they do or send them a donation: <https://transitionsaltspring.com/>

ABCs of Gardening, Part 1 was presented in November for the Salt Spring Farmland Trust. It is the first of a 2-part series I am doing for beginning gardeners in their Root to Bloom Learning series. This recording covers where to put a food garden, designing garden beds, breaking sod the easy way, how to provide fertile soil, soil amendments and fertilizers, winterizing the garden, garden plans: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9mFUp7WXJg> If you would like to learn more or to donate, here is the Farmland Trust home page <https://www.ssifarmlandtrust.org/about>. Register for the February 18 *ABCs of Gardening, Part 2*, covering year-round planting schedules, sowing seeds, irrigation, mulching and managing common pests at: <https://www.ssifarmlandtrust.org/post/abc-s-of-food-gardening-with-linda-gilkeson> Everyone registered for ABCs Part 2 will receive a link to the recording afterwards.

As another year rolls over, it's a cheering thought that there are only 6 sleeps left until the shortest day of the year! Before we know it, the days will be longer and we will be planting seeds again. Until then, wishing you all the very best for the season, for your gardens and for the new year!