

# Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

June 22, 2026

## Carrot Day is Coming; Powdery mildew; Tomato Pruning

We are moving into the season when we start planting in earnest for winter harvests. If you are growing your own winter broccoli and winter cauliflower from seed, sow this week if you haven't already done so. I went into varieties and sources in detail last year so I refer you to my message of June 16, 2025:

[https://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening\\_tips.html](https://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html) It is also time to sow cabbage varieties that take 80-90 days to harvest. You can seed directly in the garden, but if there is a failure—what with midday heat, birds, slugs, etc.—it can be too late to start again, so I find it more reliable to sow in seedling trays. That way I can move the little plants safely indoors at night until they are big enough to plant. There is no need for grow lights as seedlings can be set outdoors during the day. Remember to set them in partial shade on hot days. Or you can skip fussing with seeds and buy starts in July and August from local suppliers that plant the right varieties for our winters (I will list the ones I know of in my next email).

As many of you know, July 1<sup>st</sup> is Carrot Day at my house: The perfect time to sow a big bed of carrots (and beets) for winter eating before I head off to enjoy other Canada Day festivities. With the accelerated growth rate of vegetables due to the warm spring we have had, your garlic and onions grown from sets might be ready to harvest a week or two earlier this year than usual. That should leave space for planting winter crops sown in early to mid-July, such as Swiss chard, kale, kohlrabi, turnips, endive and radicchio. See <https://www.lindagilkeson.ca/pdf/Linda%20Gilkeson%20Planting%20Schedule.pdf> to print out my winter crop planting chart as a reminder for what and when to plant during the rest of the summer.

When sowing now, remember that seeding vegetables in summer heat differs from spring seeding. Use a little more soil to cover the seeds, soak the soil well, and then shade the seedbed to prevent seeds from being cooked (saves a lot of watering too). You can use anything opaque, such as burlap, newspaper, white plastic, etc. to shade beds until the seeds germinate. I can't emphasize enough how hot the surface of bare soil is on a day like yesterday when it was 33oC [>90oF] in the shade at my house. Until seedlings are deeply rooted and mulched, protect them with shade cloth that blocks 30-50% of light or any shading device that blocks about half the sunlight, such as lath panels or turned-over seedling trays. For more details on sowing, shading, mulching carrots and other crops in the summer, see my June 28, 2024 newsletter: [https://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening\\_tips.html](https://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html)

Powdery mildew surprise: The unusually dry spring, now turning into a long, dry summer has brought on infections by powdery mildew fungi months earlier than usual. There are many species of powdery mildews and each species has particular host plants it infects; most PM fungi produce white dusty spores on leaves. Unlike other fungi, PM spores infect leaves in dry weather. These fungi grow best at moderate temperatures, in humid conditions, and on drought stressed plants. Spores can't germinate on wet leaves (which is why PMs are so rarely seen in spring when our weather is usually wet). Infections are usually common in late summer and early fall, while the weather is dry, but the air is humid. This is when plants also have more old leaves, which are more susceptible to infection than vigorous young leaves. Washing leaves down with water several times a week slows PM infections by inhibiting spores from germinating, but given the current drought conditions, may not be feasible for many gardeners due to local water restrictions. Something I do to manage squash PM is start a couple of zucchini plants from seed on June 30. When these plants are at their peak growth rate in August, they are more resistant to PM infections than my old plants, which usually allows good zucchini production to continue into October.



Pruning Tomatoes: If you are confused about how to prune tomatoes that's understandable because there are a lot of variables! It depends on the kind of growing season you have (short, long, cool, warm), whether plants are outdoors or in a greenhouse, the type of tomatoes (bush vs. vining varieties) and how you plan to support the plants (or not).

Bush (determinate) tomatoes are compact plants that naturally stop producing new shoots and flowers after reaching full-size. They don't have to be pruned and can be left to sprawl on the ground, tied to stakes or supported in tomato cages. A little pruning to thin out the foliage might be advisable if the plant is getting too dense. It will hasten early ripening of fruit, which is more important for gardens on the foggy coast or in years when we have a cooler, shorter growing season for tomatoes than this summer is forecast to be.

Vining (indeterminate) tomatoes don't have this built-in stopping point and continue growing new shoots and flowers as long as it is warm enough for them. The vines can grow over to 2 m (8 feet) or more in a warm greenhouse. To speed ripening and prevent plants from becoming a dense jungle, prune out "suckers"—those little shoots that grow between the main stem and the stem of each leaf. They start out very small, but if left to develop, every sucker becomes another strong main stem carrying flowers and fruit. The unpruned plant becomes a dense jungle, which delays fruit ripening and increases the risk of leaf diseases as the crowded foliage stays wet longer from dew or rainfall. Tomatoes in greenhouses are often pruned to one main stem supported on heavy twine tied to overhead supports to fit as many plants as possible into the space. Some growers let the first few suckers develop so that their plants grow up with 2 or 3 main stems. In a garden, pruning out suckers so plants develop only a couple of main stems makes it easier to stake them up. Large plants supported in large tomato cages benefit from removal of some suckers to manage rampant growth, enable good air circulation and focus the plant on ripening the fruit already set on the plant. In addition, for indeterminate tomato varieties, around Sept. 1 for outdoor plants or in October for greenhouse plants, prune off all new shoots and flowers to force ripening of fruit already set.



Tomato "sucker" between main stem and leaf

On any kind of tomato, you can remove the oldest lower leaves that are curling and turning yellow if you prefer, but it is optional. Leaves below the currently ripening cluster of fruit are not contributing much to maturing the fruit so can be removed to improve air circulation. For garden tomatoes, if you have pruned out suckers to keep plants manageable, there is usually no need for leaf pruning unless the foliage is unusually dense (or unless the weather is cool and rainy). For best flavour, keep as many leaves on the plant as possible, and especially important this summer, minimize leaf pruning so the fruit has some shade. It is sunshine on the leaves, not the fruit, that is necessary for ripening, while direct hot sun can cause sunscald injury on the side of the fruit exposed to the sun. It can also cause a disorder that causes the 'shoulders' of the tomatoes to stay green or yellow and never ripen because the heat damaged the fruit cells.

Early signup for my next webinar: Sunday, August 30. 3:00-5:00 pm. Simple Food Preserving: Fresh Storage, Easy Freezing, Dehydrating. This webinar is for anyone who wants to save garden surpluses for winter eating—or put by a stash of delicious, nutritious food for emergencies. I will cover four easy ways to preserve your harvest without complicated preserving. Learn which vegetables can be stored out in the garden all winter and how to cure and store produce like onions, garlic, squash, potatoes and apples to keep them fresh for months. I'll also cover energy-saving freezing methods and how to use a dehydrator to preserve fruit and vegetables. This is a pay-what-you-can workshop for the benefit of Transition Salt Spring. All registrants will receive the Zoom recording. To register: <https://transitionsaltspring.com/simple-food-preservation-fresh-storage-easy-freezing-dehydrating-2/>