

# Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

May 21, 2026

## Adapting to Drought and Heat; Planting for Winter

The news of this spring continues to be the extremely dry conditions early in the season and the looming forecast of a hotter and drier than average summer due to the effects of a strong El Niño. After over a month without a drop of rain, some coastal areas received a little rain one day last week, but others barely saw the soil dampened. Soil in beds I haven't planted or started to irrigate yet are dry dust deep into the root zone. If your early-sown vegetables don't seem to be doing very well, check that they are getting enough water--many gardeners are not used to having to water this early in the season. Same with mulching: I usually start laying mulch around plants in June, but this year mulching a month early is in order. It makes a huge difference in conserving soil moisture, especially right now when plants are small and much of the water is leaving the soil by evaporation rather than being taken up by plants. If the early May heat wave killed or stunted seedlings in your garden, just re-seed: there is lots of time left in the growing season for vegetables.



Early May mulching in 2026

With heat and drought in the forecast I have made several changes to my garden plans this year—from eliminating most container plantings (they need too much water) to re-organizing beds to grow tall, heat-tolerant crops (e.g., pole beans) along the south/southwest sides of beds of greens, Brassica family, peas, etc. I am sowing my late May planting of peas in the more shaded end of one bed, but I might not bother with my usual late June sowing as peas just don't survive heat waves. I can always use that space for more crops to be harvested over the winter....

And with that segue...guess what! We have arrived at the time of year to start planting for next winter's dinner table. The last week of May to first week of June is a good time to sow Brassica family plants that take the longest to mature. I sow Brussels sprouts around the end of May to make sure my plants don't start developing sprouts in August when aphid infestations can make a mess of the sprouts. Delaying sprout formation until fall largely avoids damage because aphids stop reproducing by then. Timing is tricky, however, because if the plants are sown later than early June, they might not have enough time to produce sprouts by fall (and if they don't make sprouts in the fall, they won't make them at all). So Brussels sprouts sowing is on my calendar for next week. The other things to sow in the next couple of weeks are varieties of cabbage that take the longest to mature. Many excellent, cold-hardy/storage cabbages (e.g., 'January King', 'Deadon', 'Langedijker', 'Danish Ballhead') produce large, heavy heads that need a whole growing season to reach full size. Check variety descriptions of cabbages you plan to grow for the days-to-harvest and sow varieties that need over 110 days soon (if the days to harvest aren't marked on the packet, check descriptions on the seed company website or catalogue). Unlike Brussels sprouts, starting cabbages later won't mean a crop loss, just that heads may be smaller. I am sowing my winter cabbages now, a week or two earlier than usual, to allow for the loss of some growing time during heat waves. Cool weather crops just can't grow much when temperatures are too high so heat waves cut into their growing time.



Sow cabbage for winter harvest by early June

To preview the winter crop planting schedule through summer, you can print out my trusty old planting schedule here: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/pdf/Linda%20Gilkeson%20Planting%20Schedule.pdf>

Recycling Corner: Rather than rewriting information from previous newsletters, I refer you to timely notes in the archive on my website [http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening\\_tips.html](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html)

See May 23, 2025 for detailed info on how to use barriers to prevent attack by 3 common vegetable pests (carrot rust fly, cabbage root maggot, beet leafminer).

See May 27, 2024 for *ABCs of Gardening: Irrigation* This section contains notes especially for beginning gardeners, but everyone might benefit from a quick review of how much to water in this dry, dry, dry spring....

If anyone doubts the economics of a home-grown veggies, consider that the Canadian Consumer Price Index showed fresh vegetable prices in grocery stores jumped 7.8% in March—considerably higher than the 0.5% increase recorded in February. With the major driver being “adverse growing conditions in producing countries” according to StatsCan, it makes more sense than ever to grow what you can in your own garden or allotment and know how to protect crops in extreme weather.... Which is another clever segue to.....

My next gardening webinar open to the public, coming up in a little over a week:

Sunday, May 31, 2:00-4:00 pm. *Grow the Most Food for the Least Money, All Year Round*. I have been concerned for years about the high cost of seeds, gardening supplies and equipment, but these days with cost of everything rising, I especially wanted to include ways to garden as cheaply, ecologically and simply as possible. I will cover how to grow more food in the space you have, when to plant for harvests all year round in the coastal climate, how to protect crops from extreme weather and extend your harvest through every season—while focusing on keeping costs low. This is a pay-what-you-can fundraiser to support Transition Salt Spring. To register: <https://revenue-can.keela.co/linda-gilkeson-webinar-registration-revenue-may-2026> The workshop will be recorded and the link to the Zoom recording will be sent to everyone registered.