

# Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

May 25, 2010

## Coping with a cool spring; get ready for winter

**Cool Spring:** As often happens a warm winter hasn't led to a warm spring. In fact, there has been some pretty cold weather this month that will have those who have already put out their tomatoes, beans, corn, squash and other heat-loving crops worrying. Root diseases are the biggest problem in wet, cool weather and if infected, the plants usually die.

If you have plants under cloches or floating row covers they will fare better in this weather. My favourite cloche for individual plants is a gallon milk jug with the bottom cut out. Set it over the plant and push a stick through the handle of the jug to keep it in place. Put the lid or a flat stone on the mouth of the jug at night to keep the heat in and take it off during the day to allow ventilation. For seedlings in beds use floating row covers to warm up the crop (also useful to keep birds from pulling up small seedlings).

If you haven't set out the most delicate plants (cucumbers, melons, peppers, sweet basil), I would wait until next weekend when it sounds like temperatures will be higher. I just gave my seedlings a good dose of fish fertilizer to see them through a few more days in their pots. If you planted beans earlier this month, it might be a good idea to sprout more beans in vermiculite indoors to fill in gaps in the rows. The new seedlings will quickly catch up to earlier sown plants that have been struggling outdoors in cool weather.

Here is the **Get Ready for Winter** part:

Do you have all the seeds you need for fall and winter crops? As local garden centres are increasingly tuned in to mid-summer seed demand it has been getting easier to find seeds later in the season. However, in past years seed suppliers have run out of some of winter varieties so don't leave it too late to order seeds.

Right now is a good time to sow the hardy fall and winter cabbage varieties that take the longest to grow (Danish Ballhead, Melissa Savoy, Embassy, etc.). These take a long season to produce large, heavy heads.

Next week is a good time to start Brussels sprouts. I start them the first week of June so the plants begin to form sprouts in late September. This timing avoids the period when cabbage aphids are most active and can really mess up the sprouts. If you have already planted Brussels sprouts, be vigilant in August for the first sign of aphids attacking the sprouts. Blast them out with water and keep the plants well watered (aphids thrive on drought stressed plants).

If you are starting your own plants, you will need seeds for winter broccoli and winter cauliflower ready to sow in mid-June.

By July 1 you will want plenty of carrot and beet seeds on hand for the crop to be eaten over the winter. Other seeds to have for fall through spring harvests: winter lettuce, leaf beet, kales of all sorts, Chinese cabbages, leaf mustards and other leafy greens, Komatsuna, spinach, corn salad.

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Some pest notes for this time of year:

**Cabbage Root Maggot:** You can't see them, but they are responsible for a lot of damage to cabbage family crops. Attacked plants don't always die, but can be quite stunted. To protect transplants make barriers from 6-8 inch squares of heavy paper, cloth, tar paper, several layers of newspaper (this year I am using squares cut from a woven plastic feed bag). From one edge, cut a slit to the centre of the square. Cut a tiny X at the centre, where the stem will poke through, so that you can get the material fitting very tightly around the stem (the square of material lies flat on the soil surface). Anchor the barrier with a couple of pebbles or mulch to hold it in place. Leave in place for the life of the plant. For the small cabbage family crops, such as radishes or leafy greens, cover beds with light weight floating row covers.

**Leaf Rust on Garlic:** This garlic/onion rust is an increasing problem. The spores blow for thousands of kilometres and it has been causing a lot of damage in US garlic crops over the last decade. The fungus infects the leaves of the garlic. It first appears as white to yellow spots on the leaves, which then turn a typical rusty orange. If the leaf is entirely covered it turns yellow and dies. The fungus does not attack the garlic bulb directly and is not spread on the bulb so you can use the bulbs to replant. If there is enough damage to the leaves the bulbs will be smaller. Garlic is the most susceptible of the onion family and so far I haven't heard reports of it on onions or leeks. If you have this now in your garlic patch, you can expect to harvest an OK crop--but do your friends a favour and don't visit their vegetable gardens in your gardening clothes as you can spread the spores.

**Slugs, slugs, slugs:** You know they thrive in this weather and there are myriads of tiny, just-hatched ones out there now. Slug baits containing iron phosphate in granules of pasta are very effective. The Safers product is widely available. Certified organic growers will be happy to learn that the Sluggo brand of iron phosphate slug bait is now approved by OMRI. Unlike the toxic slug baits containing metaldehyde, these won't harm pets or wildlife. Sprinkle the granules very sparingly over the whole garden bed in the evening and replace it after heavy rain.

**Last note on olives:** The Saturna Olive Consortium may have a few trees later in the summer from the stock they brought in this year. If you missed the chance to get in on the trees they sold this spring, you can contact them about what will be available when: 250-539-3758 or [www.olivetrees.ca](http://www.olivetrees.ca)

**And my last addendum:** You might have heard me cursing from here when I accidentally deleted one of my distribution lists...and had to re-enter all 300 addresses. Please let me know if you receive duplicate messages in case I now have you on more than one list.

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For info on my books or to check my schedule for talks and presentations in your area see:  
[www.lindagilkeson.ca](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca)

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