

# Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

**November 18, 2011**

## **Getting colder!**

Madly scrambling last night to get another layer of mulch on things, I thought I should drop a note to remind everyone else to finish up that task. Priorities are covering the shoulders of root crops, over the bulb of kohlrabi and putting a good layer over the soil between the above-ground plants. As it gets colder over the next few weeks, make the mulch deeper, completely covering over carrot tops and fluffing it half-way up the stalks of leeks and stems of cabbage family.

Plan for covers: If you don't have your leafy greens under plastic tunnels or in coldframes, it is time to make sure you have a stockpile of plastic sheets or tarps and a supply of rocks, bricks or boards to hold them down. That way you will be prepared if/when we get a sudden dip (below -5 degrees C) that could damage leaves. I never worry about kale, parsley or corn salad, but do throw a plastic sheet over the beds of other leafy greens if it is forecast to get really cold. While a brief cold snap won't kill the roots of such plants if they are mulched, it can kill the leaves if it gets cold enough, which ends the harvesting until new leaves grow in the spring. I throw over plastic covers held down with rocks as the occasion demands, but don't bother with supporting the plastic on hoops or frames (though that would be a good idea if you have them). Dump off accumulating water or snow as required. I used to worry about not letting the plants get squashed under the plastic, but have found that even flattened plants pop up again after the plastic has been off for a few day.

Protecting artichokes: Artichokes die in soggy, cold soil, so planting where they have well-drained soil is essential for successful overwintering. My own recipe for success at a higher elevation (where artichokes are marginal) is as follows: Any day now I will cut back the plants to about 6-12 inches above the ground and mulch right up over the top with a lot of fluffy leaves. Before it gets really cold, which might be soon the way things are going, I turn a 5-gallon plastic plant pot upside down over each plant. This protects the crown of the plant from excessive rain. I drive a couple of bamboo sticks through the drain holes in each pot to keep it in place during the winter, then pile leaves up around the outside of the plant pot as deeply as possible. For my 10-year old artichoke it takes two big tubs to cover the entire crown.

I hope you are all enjoying how sweet the carrots and beets are right now with the cool weather concentrating sugars in the roots. After the frost this weekend, I'll bet Brussels sprouts will be delicious!

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For info on my books [including my new **Backyard Bounty**] or to check my 2012 schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area see: [www.lindagilkeson.ca](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca)

Note: My 10-month gardening course on Salt Spring is full for 2012, but on March 24th, I will be giving a Transition Salt Spring workshop: 'Troubleshooting Townhall: Get Ready for Your 2012 Garden' that will be open to everyone. My 10-month course at Horticulture Centre of the Pacific is filling up too, so don't delay if you are planning on registering.