

# Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

September 28, 2011

## Garlic & Sprouts

I hope everyone's fruit trees and garden plants survived the big wind this week. It is especially important right now to make sure that fruit trees and laden branches are well supported while they are heavy with fruit. Also, stake up big, top-heavy vegetable plants, such as cabbage, broccoli and Brussels sprouts, which can be flipped right over by strong gusts. If you have cabbage heads that are starting to split with this heavy rain, slow their growth by giving each head a yank or a 1/8 twist in the soil-- just enough to break fine roots but not to uproot the plant entirely.

**Garlic:** You can plant garlic any time now, if you haven't already done it. Garlic is best planted in September up to the end of October. Later plantings are better than nothing, but the earlier you can plant in the fall, the larger the roots will be by the time the days get longer in the spring. The increasing day length stimulates the bulbs to form so the more root development there is, the bigger the bulbs will be. If your garlic was healthy this year, use your own garlic to start the next bed. I go pick out the very best bulbs of my current harvest and divide these up for planting. If you do this over time, you will end up with your own line of garlic that is well adapted to your garden.

**If you need to buy seed stock,** Salt Spring Seeds has a locally adapted varieties:

<http://www.saltspringseeds.com/> including "Salt Spring Select", which has been grown on the island for 30 years. My favourites are the 'hard neck' varieties--AKA Rocambole garlic. You hardly ever see it in grocery stores, but is widely available at farmer's markets, which is another place you might look for planting stock (as well as garden centres). This type of garlic has a central stalk that dries as hard as a stick in the centre; it is strong flavoured, peels easily and keeps well enough to get you through to most of the year. The 'soft neck' garlic, familiar from the grocery store, doesn't have the central stalk, so the necks close up completely like onions; I find them harder to peel, but they keep somewhat longer than the hard-necks. I grow mainly hard-necks, but do grow a short row of the soft-necks to give me a few of the longest keeping bulbs. For gardens that have been troubled with garlic leaf rust, try to find very early maturing varieties so the crop is largely harvested before the rust infections become severe. The early one I have is "Portuguese Red", which is ready to pull in late June in my garden, 3-4 weeks ahead of other varieties. At this point I don't know a seed company selling it (please let me know if you know a source), but some growers at farmer's markets have it.

**Pinch Brussels sprouts:** For new gardeners wondering where the sprouts grow, the sprouts will form along the main stem at the base of each leaf stalk. You might only see a tiny nub there right now if you started plants in early June as I do to avoid getting aphids in the sprouts. Now is the time to snap out the tips of the plants to force the sprouts to plump up. Just break out the tip cluster of leaves (the leaves are edible). If your sprouts are barely noticeable right now, never fear, they will grow quickly over the next few weeks once you snip out the tops. If your plants already have full-sized sprouts along the stems, removing the top leaves is optional, but will help the last sprouts plump up. If you purchased small plants in August, I am afraid that it is likely too late to expect a crop (frustratingly, suppliers still haven't gotten the message about the right timing for this crop!). Plants should be 2-3 feet tall at this point.

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For those of you inquiring about my courses and talks this winter, I have updated my 2012 schedule on my web site: [www.lindagilkeson.ca](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca)

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There is still room in both of my 10-month gardening courses that start in January. One is on Salt Spring course and the other will be at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific/Glendale Gardens for Victoria area gardeners. There are also 2 places left in my Nov. 5-6 Backyard Bounty workshop on Salt Spring (Details and registration information for all of these are on my web site).

You can read all of my previous messages on the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website:

[www.saltspringenergystrategy.org](http://www.saltspringenergystrategy.org)