

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

August 22, 2012

Corn Salad, Feeding for Winter

With corn and blueberries, tomatoes and figs coming in from the garden now it might be hard to think about the humbler veggies, but in January crisp lettuce, tender kale and succulent leeks will be top of the charts again. SO, now is the time to make sure the crops you want to eat this winter get their growth in the next few weeks.

Corn Salad: Now is time to sow this amazing little salad green. I broadcast seed in any empty spots as well as under squash and tomato vines, beans and other plants that will be done this fall. You can sow fairly densely because it is quite a small plant. When harvesting next winter, cut the whole plant off at the soil line so leaves stay attached to the centre crown. That way it is easy to wash and handle; when ready to make salad, just cut off the base of the plant and drop the bite-sized leaves into the bowl.

Other greens: If you get onto it immediately, there is still time to sow hardy lettuce and annual arugula now. Sow as for corn salad, above. In the warmest microclimates and farther south in the region, you can still sow spinach, leaf mustard and Chinese cabbage.

Feeding up your crops: Given that there are only a month or so left of really good growing weather, have a look at your leeks, kale, Swiss chard, salad greens, Brussels sprouts, cabbage and root crops.

- Are the greens looking a little pale? This could mean they are getting short on available nitrogen, a common enough problem at this time of year, especially for plants that have been growing in the same bed all summer. I plant Swiss chard quite densely in May and the bed has produced a huge amount of leaves, but now some leaves are lighter coloured. It can use some extra feeding so there will be maximum leaves in the 'living refrigerator' that is my winter garden.

- Are plants a good size? Winter leeks should be wider than your thumb by now and preferably larger; fall carrots should be making tiny carrots; winter cabbage heads should be forming in the centre of plants.

If things seem to be lagging, or if you have recently set out rather small plants, you can give them a boost with liquid fertilizer. Compost or manure 'tea' or liquid fish fertilizer (follow mixing directions on the bottle) are good. To make manure/compost tea, put a shovelful in a big bucket and fill with water. Wait for 2-3 days, until the water turns dark, then diluted it to the colour of a weak cup of tea and pour it around the roots of the plants. Use up all the liquid and then make more rather than letting the tea continue to decompose (otherwise it gets buggy and stinky!). In established gardens with good soil and organic matter, one boost may be all that's needed. In new gardens or where growth hasn't been very good so far, you can use the tea every few days as it won't burn the plants. [For dedicated re-cyclers ('pee-cyclers'), diluted urine is a good source of nitrogen. Be sure to dilute it well--1 part urine to 20 parts water--as it can burn plants. Oh, and don't mention it to dinner guests while they are looking at your lovely veggies....].

Make sure plantings are thinned enough so that growth continues unchecked. You might want to revisit beds of carrots and other roots, as well as recently sown greens, to make sure plants are well spaced. High density planting doesn't mean overcrowded planting....

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Upcoming workshop in Victoria: *Troubleshooting Townhall for Your 2012 Garden*, Sept 30th, 1:00 – 4:00 pm. Horticulture Centre of the Pacific, 505 Quayle Rd. I will be giving this workshop on solving common garden questions as well as how to prepare your garden for winter. There will be plenty of time to ask questions (bring along samples or photos, if you have them) and find out how to avoid problems in 2013. HCP Members \$25.00 Non-members \$35.00. Please call HCP to register: 250-479-6162

For info on my books or to check my 2012 & 2013 schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area see: www.lindagilkeson.ca

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