

# Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

**April 23, 2013**

## Spring Planting, Starting Squash

Gardeners are certainly enjoying this spring! From my own temperature records, the dates plants are blooming in my yard are quite similar to 2006 and 2007--not the warmest years we had in the last decade, but bloom times are certainly several weeks ahead of the last couple of springs. There is no sign of either a La Nina or El Nino weather pattern at the moment so it looks like we are set to have a 'normal' coastal summer (whatever that might be!)

Although I was suckered by the sunny spells into starting my squash, cucumber and melon seeds 10 days ago, if you haven't started yours, it is certainly not too late. The plants will produce much better if the seedlings never experience a growth slowdown from being held too long in their pots. Therefore it is best to start them in late April or even early May and grow them on quickly. I will have to move mine to larger pots soon because it is still much too cold at night to set out such tender plants. I will try planting out a couple of zucchini plants outdoors in early May, covering them with floating row covers and see if they make it. I usually plan to set out squash in mid-May and cucumbers in late May or even early June if the weather is still rainy or cool. Gardeners in the warmer areas of Victoria and the Lower Mainland should be able to set out squash a couple of weeks earlier than this schedule. These are the most fragile of the warm season vegetables--tomatoes can go out in early to mid-May in protected gardens. Beware of late May frosts in valley bottoms and be ready to cover them overnight if it turns frosty. If you buy your tomato plants now you will have the widest selection to choose from, but plants won't be able to go out to the garden for a couple of more weeks. They should be OK planted in greenhouses or tunnels now, though.

Don't worry if you haven't planted potatoes, strawberries or onion sets yet--but do get to it as soon as possible. Peas, lettuce, radishes and Asian greens can be sown any time. I plant peas every month until the end of June so I can pick peas well into the fall. In contrast to interior regions (east of the coast mountains), most gardens in coastal regions don't experience temperatures that are too high to grow peas, lettuce and other 'cool' season vegetables in the summer.

For peas planted late in May and June, it is a good idea to sow varieties listed as resistant to pea enation mosaic virus. The disease is spread to peas by aphids in the summer, usually missing early spring peas that are done by mid-July (for a photo see: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/foilage.html#146> ; scroll down to photo for page 146). Examples of EMV resistant cultivars: snap peas (Cascadia, Sugar Ann), shelling peas (Aladdin) and snow peas (Oregon Giant).

A note on buying seedlings: Though it might seem counter intuitive, choose the youngest, smallest starts on offer, rather than larger seedlings. Seedlings rapidly outgrow their tiny pots and become stressed, which reduces their future productivity. Avoid buying plants that have become leggy or show lots of roots sticking out of the holes in the pot or that have yellowing or purpling on lower leaves. Younger plants that haven't suffered a growth setback will outgrow such over-hardened transplants. And do plant them as soon as possible so that you don't risk over-hardening them yourself. If this isn't possible you can move them into larger pots.

On Salt Spring:

Chorus Frog Farm stand (Rainbow Rd., across from the swimming pool) reports they are offering 28 varieties of tomatoes this year as well as their usual wide selection of other organically grown veggie starts, herbs and flowers.

Foxglove Farm & Garden Nursery (Atkins Rd.) has in a lot of hardy veggie starts, including cabbage family, lettuce and nice looking flats of peas.

My upcoming classes that still have spaces for more participants:

Duncan: Fall & Winter Gardening, April 27th, 10:00-4:00 at the Cowichan Campus of Vancouver Island University. The title should be fall and winter EATING, since the course will cover how, when, what to plant to make sure you have lots to eat from your garden all winter, including how to cure and store onions, potatoes, squash, etc. from the summer garden. To register, see the VIU Continuing Education web page <http://www.cc.viu.ca/ce/>

Vancouver: [Urban Organic Gardening Course](#) , Saturday, May 4, 2013, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm, UBC Botanical Garden Reception Centre. This course focuses on intensive, but low maintenance, food production in small spaces and community gardens and containers. \$60 public, \$50 garden members. Contact the organizers: 604-690-5375 or [garden.programs@ubc.ca](mailto:garden.programs@ubc.ca)

Another gardening course of interest:

An Advanced Gardening course will be held at Vancouver Island University in Fall 2013. For more information contacting the VIU Continuing Education Cowichan office 1-888-747-3519 or 250-746-3519. [www.viu.ca/ccs/certificates/mastergardener.asp](http://www.viu.ca/ccs/certificates/mastergardener.asp)

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See [www.lindagilkeson.ca](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca) for info on buying my books and to see colour photos of pests and diseases from the new edition of *Natural Insect, Weed & Disease Control*, or to check my 2013 schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area.

You can read all of my previous messages on the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website: [www.saltspringenergystrategy.org](http://www.saltspringenergystrategy.org)