

# Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

August 2, 2013

## Critters in the Crops

With bumper crops of fruit and vegetables coming in the inevitable conflicts with local wildlife continue. Is there anything MORE frustrating than discovering that the racoons have picked the peaches (or plums, corn, grapes...) the night before you planned to harvest them?

Rabbits: As the number of rabbits continues to increase I have redone the bunny barriers around my garden fence. I now use 2 foot wide x 1/2 inch chickenwire, installed on the outside of the existing wire fence. On Salt Spring, Windsor Plywood can bring in the fencing; elsewhere, try local building supply or feed stores, such as Buckerfields.

I like the 1/2 inch mesh because, unlike larger mesh wire, it is quite stiff, making it easy to push it tight into the ground under the fence. It is also stiff enough to keep a rabbit from pushing through. I tack it from post to post along the bottom of the fence and it is easy to detach and lift away when I want to weed along the fence line. There is no need to bury the bottom edge of the wire to keep out digging bunnies if you can make a tight fit to the ground (or you can set rocks along the lower edge to hold it down). In my experience the way they get into a garden is through very small gaps in or under the fence. Don't forget to fill the gap between the ground and the bottom edge of gates with wire too (proved to be the weak spot in my defences this year). The 1/2 inch mesh chickenwire is strong enough to drag along in contact with the ground under the gate or you could use hardware cloth/welded wire mesh.

You might find it easier to forget fencing the garden and just cover or fence individual beds. A height of 2 feet is enough and if you are fencing on top of an already raised bed, so much the better. Draping fishnet over the entire bed works well too (in Victoria, used fishnet is sometimes available at Capital Iron; on Salt Spring sometimes at The Fishery Seafoods). Support it on stakes and cover the whole bed. Note: This isn't a solution for deer--they learn to just pick up or paw away the net.

A final note: Rabbits are defined as 'vermin' in provincial regulations so there is no restriction on trapping, shooting, snaring or eating them as long as other relevant laws, such as firearms regulations, are obeyed.

Racoons: A dog with good hearing and a loud bark helps in any critter repellent program, but lacking that, you are up against a very clever thief of fruit, tomatoes and sweet corn. Years ago I invested in a Scarecrow™ device and it has served well to protect ripening fruit. Available in garden centres or by mail order from the Victoria based company, Contech that invented it: <http://www.contech-inc.com/> The device sprays water when it detects motion. It is hooked to a garden hose for a water supply and has an internal battery to run the motion detector. When a moving animal (or person!) trips the motion sensor, it shoots a jet of water. It only shoots out a cup or two of water at a time, so the tap only has to be turned on to a trickle. For the greatest startle effect, point the Scarecrow where the jet of water will hit leaves, which amplifies the noise and startle effect. The device is effective for scaring away racoons while tree fruit or grapes are ripening, but they will get used to the Scarecrow if it is always in the same place for long periods so move it to different positions every few days.

If fruit trees have their lowest branches fairly high off the ground, you can stop racoons from climbing up by wrapping the trunk in aluminum flashing or other thin, flexible sheet metal. Make it a metre/yard wide (2 widths of roof flashing will do it) if possible and remove it when the fruit is harvested. This only works if the varmints can't climb into the tree by another route, such as a roof or fence.

Here are some methods others have used, but can't vouch for personally: Sprinkle hot pepper or products containing it (e.g., Critter Ridder) on paths, lawns or other areas racoons will have to cross to get to your garden (but not where your dog or cat might walk because it will also irritate their paws). Play a radio at night in the garden, put up electric fencing. More info on urban racoons at the BC SPCA web site: <http://www.sPCA.bc.ca/welfare/wildlife/urban-wildlife/raccoons.html>

Winter Vegetables: Veggie starts are on the market now so if you didn't have time to sow them earlier, now is the time to buy plants to set out. As always, check that the cultivars for sale are for overwintering (see my previous messages for July 9 & June 17 at: [http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening\\_tips.html](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html) )

Fortunately, on Salt Spring we have knowledgeable suppliers with lots of good stuff this year!

- Chorus Frog Farm (Rainbow Road farm stand) has a good selection of organically grown plants: kales, cabbages, purple sprouting broccoli (several cultivars), Galleon cauliflower, leafy greens.
- New: Local horticulturalist, Steve Lynch has organically grown starts: Galleon cauliflower, mizuna, pac choi, white kale, purple sprouting broccoli, arugula, Rhubarb chard, purple and white kohlrabi. Email him ( [exchef1@telus.net](mailto:exchef1@telus.net) ) or call him ( 250-537-9341 ) to set up a pick-up time. \$3/6-pack of plants.
- Foxglove Farm & Garden Nursery (Atkins Rd.) has their winter starts out now: lots of purple sprouting broccoli, winter cabbage, kales, raddichio and greens there too.

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For colour photos of pests and diseases, info on buying my books, including the new edition of *Natural Insect, Weed & Disease Control*, or to see my upcoming schedule of workshops and gardening classes, see: [www.lindagilkeson.ca](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca)

You can read all of my previous messages archives on my web site under the Gardening Tips page or on the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website: [www.saltspringenergystrategy.org](http://www.saltspringenergystrategy.org)