

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

June 25, 2013

Wet weather tips and tribulations

Are we wet enough yet? Since this is the most perfect weather possible for the growth of many plant diseases, I thought some notes on dealing with wet weather would be in order. For photos of all of the diseases mentioned below, scroll through this page on my website:

<http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/foilage.html#137>

Strawberries: To avoid losing ripe berries to *Botrytis* rot as they sit in the wet weather, I pick them when one side of the berry is perfectly ripe and the other side is dark orange but not quite ripe. Then I spread them out on the kitchen counter for a few hours or overnight to finish ripening in dry conditions. If you leave the berries until both sides are ripe in wet weather, the over-ripe side is open to attack by fungi, millipedes and other soil surface critters. I pick at least once a day to get the berries before they rot. In warm, wet weather I pick often twice a day to ensure no ripe ones are left behind to become a fuzzy grey ball of fungus spores (see photo).

If you haven't been impressed with the flavour of your strawberries so far, blame it on the cool weather. The berries are huge due to the rain, but the flavour of all cultivars is rather watery and won't really hit peak sweetness until there is warm weather. I have been making the year's supply of strawberry jam with my surplus right now on the theory that July and August berries will be tastier and better for the freezer.

Garlic/Allium rust: Yes, it is everywhere. There is no point in pulling out your garlic prematurely, however, since that won't control the rust anyway so you might as well leave the crop until it is mature. Next year, I heartily recommend growing early garlic cultivars, such as Early Red Portuguese, half of which was out of my garden and being cured by June 10th this year with the rest out the following week, thus missing the late infection period.

When you do pull infected garlic, cure it normally, but then destroy the tops (burn, bury, garbage). I suggest putting in out on a bed of paper and then just rolling up the dried tops in the paper to destroy after the cured bulbs have been clipped off. You can use the garlic for seed since the rust seems not be spread on the bulbs.

Is anyone seeing rust on leeks this year? So far, around the islands I have only seen the garlic strain of rust, but if it is on your leeks, then you have the garlic-leek strain of rust. If you only have it on garlic, clean up the garlic, but also check for infections on chives and perennial onions and, if found, destroy them too to remove overwintering sites for rust (your leeks should be OK). If you have it on leeks, however, remove them from the garden by fall to ensure there are no live leaves to overwinter the rust or to provide a launch pad for spores to get new garlic shoots.

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Apples: This spring is another reminder of why I like scab resistant apple varieties. Very susceptible, unsprayed apples are mostly a mess now, unfortunately. If the small apples have cracked they should be picked off since they won't be able to mature. Less susceptible apples show dark blotches on the leaves and a greater or lesser numbers of small scabs on the fruit skin. Scabs on the skin reduces their storage ability, but they are still OK to eat. Sulphur sprays, applied frequently (after every rain) help reduce scab infections, but you have to get the timing right and be aware that sulphur is toxic to beneficial mites on the trees. Really, long periods of hot, dry weather is the best control, of course.

Pears: More pear scab (a different but related fungus to apple scab) is being reported to me this spring (see the above link for a photo). It looks like apple scab but varies from a dense coating of small scabs all over the skin of the fruit to larger, more spaced out scabs similar to apple scab. As for apples, lightly scabbed pears are usable, but cracking immature fruit likely won't complete development so pick them off.

Pruning fruit trees to provide the maximum air circulation through the branches helps leaves dry quickly and slows scab fungus infections.

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

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