

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

June 26, 2014

It is almost that day again....

What day, you ask? Carrot Day, of course!

As long-time readers of my messages know, I celebrate Canada Day, July 1, by planting a big bed of carrots (and beets and other root crops) for winter harvests (US reader can put that on the agenda for the 4th of July). From the first week of July to the end of August there is a succession of planting deadlines for sowing various winter crops. If you don't have a copy of my small planting chart to remind you these dates, you can print one from the pdf link on my web site home page: <http://lindagilkeson.ca/>

An early July sowing date for root crops ensures that they will mature full-sized roots by fall on the BC and Washington coast. It is important not to plant them too late because roots that don't reach full size by late fall will stay small all winter (the growing has to be done by November since growth stops in the winter). When growth resumes in the spring, those plants put their energy into producing flower stalks, not roots. Even if we have warm weather in the fall, October days are so short and nights are so cool that they can't make up for missing out on long, warm days of midsummer. This applies to all of the veggies we will be sowing this summer as the various planting windows arrive.

Summer seeding methods differ from spring, when the concern is usually to dry out and warm up the soil. For summer sowing, keeping beds cool and evenly moist is the challenge. A common cause of poor germination is soil that is too warm or dries out intermittently. Those little seeds are just under the surface and easily parboil in the heat from direct sun. After sowing, soak the bed well, then cover it with opaque material to shade it: burlap, old towels, cardboard, newspapers or anything else you have on hand. Having slugs well-controlled before you sow is a good idea because this is a very attractive environment for them (the safe slug baits that contain iron work really well: e.g., Safer's or Sluggo brands; the latter is OMRI certified for organic growers). Check under the cover regularly for germination and lift the cover to water as needed; the moment you see tiny green shoots remove the cover. If it is really hot at the time, continue to shade the beds at midday or use latticework, shade cloth, lattice seedling flats turned upside down, etc. to mitigate the heat of the sun for a few days until roots go deeper.

Sowing carrots in summer is further complicated by the fact that most gardeners will need to cover seed beds with floating row covers or insect netting to prevent carrot rust fly attack [See: http://lindagilkeson.ca/root_feeders.html#67]. Carrots beds must be securely covered with insect barriers before the tiny shoots appear, but row covers and insect netting keep in heat, which compounds germination problems in warm weather. My solution: Sow and cover carrot beds with burlap for the first week. Then remove the burlap and install the insect netting, but cover that with a large piece of shade fabric (lacy curtain material from the thrift shop works great) until the carrots shoots show. You could also cover the seed beds at the outset with insect netting and cover that with shade cloth from the start--either way this ensures that rust flies don't get a chance to sneak in. And do be sure there were no self-sown dill, cilantro, parsley or other carrot relatives in the soil before you sow carrots because the rust fly maggots can be in the roots of those plants. If you sow carrots and cover the bed with maggots already there, the next generation of rust flies will have a heyday attacking carrots under the covers for the rest of the season.

Cabbage root maggots: Everything I have said above also applies to avoiding damage from root maggots on summer sowings of radishes, daikon, rutabaga, turnips, Chinese cabbage and other small, cabbage/mustard family crops. See: http://lindagilkeson.ca/root_feeders.html#69

Insect Covers: Knitted monofilament insect netting is much stronger and lets in more light than floating row cover so try to get some this year: One product with a distributor in Canada is ProtekNet, but there are others that should be coming into the market. Ask your local nursery to bring in insect netting or buy it from William Dam Seeds (<http://www.damseeds.ca>). OR get together with a few other gardeners and order a wholesale roll directly from the distributor in Montreal: <http://www.duboisag.com/en/net-trellis-fence/nets-proteknet-accessories/insect-netting.html>). Local nurseries currently stocking ProtekNet that I know of are Russell Nursery (Wain Road, north of Victoria) and Dinter Nurseries (south of Duncan). Smart Net Systems in Comox says they are carrying an insect netting and Foxglove on Salt Spring is also planning to bring some in. Others will carry it if you tell them you want it, so go forth and bug them until they get it in!

Upcoming events:

Salt Spring: Sunday, June 29. 1:00-4:30 pm. **Preserving Your Garden Harvest.** I will be giving a community workshop on preserving your garden surplus for Transition Salt Spring. Learn to cure and store onions, garlic, winter squash and potatoes, how to keep fresh roots, apples and other fruit over the winter. We will also cover easy freezing methods, using a dehydrator and a step-by-step guide to boiling water bath canning. Just turn up at the Farmers Institute on Rainbow Rd., on a 'first come' basis, admission by donation.

See my web site www.lindagilkeson.ca for hundreds of colour photos of pests and diseases to help you ID problems, to order books or check my 2014 schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area. I am totally booked for 2014, but if your group is interested in a presentation, 2015 isn't full....yet....

All of my previous messages are archived on my web site under the *Gardening Tips* page: http://lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html