

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Hot summer gardening alert

Meteorologists are warning that the expected El Nino climate pattern this year is going to be a "super El Nino" comparable with the 1997-98 year. For coastal British Columbia, that brings record heat waves in the summer. With unprecedented warm Pacific water now reaching our coast, combined with a strong El Nino, which also brings warm water across the Pacific, gardeners need to be on top of managing for high temperatures. It starts this coming weekend and Environment Canada has issued a weather alert for a prolonged period of hot weather for coastal British Columbia, starting tomorrow and continuing through early next week. Predictions are for 27-31 degrees C (80-90 F), with the higher temperatures further inland.

Managing for heat:

Garden vegetables are most vulnerable to heat damage at this time of year because plants are still small, with shallow roots and young leaves.

Shade young plants and seed bed: Cover small plants, at least for the midday heat for a few days to help them survive. For this, anything can be pressed into service, from proper shade cloth to curtain material or other fabric, newspapers, latticework, seedling flats turned upside down--anything you have.

Because soil can easily be too warm for seeds to germinate, cover them with opaque materials to keep them cooler and evenly moist until seeds germinate. If it is still hot after the seeds germinate, graduate to covering beds with shade cloth or latticework. This will still cool the soil while allowing in sunlight, which the seedlings must have to survive. If possible, remove the shade for the morning sun and replace it for the hottest part of the day.

Mulch everything: Use smaller particles for small plants (take care not to cover the leaves) and coarser, deeper mulches for larger plants. If you are short on mulch and have a lawn to mow, use clippings to mulch seedlings. Lawn clippings rapidly dry up so don't last very long, but will help right now until you can organize other mulches. Straw and reed canary grass are particularly good mulches for summertime to keep soil cool because they are lighter coloured. If you have leaves stockpiled from last fall, of course, use those. If not, remember that pulled weeds, any garden waste, rhubarb leaves or crop trimmings, fern fronds, even newspaper can be used for mulching. More on mulch:

[http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening-pdf/Winter Gardening 2014 - June 6.pdf](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening-pdf/Winter_Gardening_2014_-_June_6.pdf)

Tip: If you have started seedlings (such as cabbage, beans, corn, etc.) to set out, I find it easier to mulch the whole bed first, then dig holes in the mulch for the little plants.

Leave more foliage on your tomatoes: The leaves help protect the fruit from sunscald, grey wall, blotchy ripening (all show up as various shades of gray, brown or hard white blotches on the skin or inside the fruit). It can also help with greenback (shoulders of the fruit stay hard and green; for more on that:

[http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening-pdf/Winter Gardening 2014 - August 29.pdf](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening-pdf/Winter_Gardening_2014_-_August_29.pdf)). These disorders

are all related to heat stress or bright, hot sunlight hitting the ripening fruit. So this year leave suckers and leaves on the plants to help provide shade. One of my tomatoes is a leggy, tall plant with widely spaces leaves and I plan to shade the clusters of developing fruit with pieces of white paper clipped to the stems. If your tomatoes are in a greenhouse, tunnel or sunroom, try to keep air temperatures from going over 35 degrees C (95 F), as temperatures in the range of 32-35 degrees C sterilize the pollen. This

weekend it may be impossible to keep temperatures inside a greenhouse low, so consider using shade cloth or other shading in the middle of the hottest days. Tomatoes need full sun to grow, so you don't want permanent shades, but temporary shading will get the plants through the heat.

Be on top of watering. I am sure that goes without saying, but don't be surprised if cabbage, broccoli and leafy greens wilt a bit in midday heat. These are cool weather crops and when it gets too hot, they can't maintain enough moisture in their leaves even in well watered soil. This is a normal response to heat and they should recover in late afternoon. If plants are still wilted by evening, then they are not getting enough water--or there is a root disease or pest problem, which often become obvious when plants are under drought stress.

Control slugs: When it is hot and dry in the areas around your garden, the moist zones around your irrigated plants are even more attractive to slugs. Don't mess around with home remedies or trying to catch them: just go straight for the very effective slug baits that contain iron, such as Sluggo (approved for certified organic growers) or Safer's Slug and Snail bait. If you are laying down leaves from last year, it is a good idea to sprinkle some slug bait on the soil first before mulching. If you have already mulched, just sprinkle the bait on top of the mulch.

See my web site <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca> for hundreds of colour photos of pests and diseases to help you identify. All of my previous gardening messages are archived on my Gardening Tips page: http://lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

My teaching and talk schedule is fully booked to April 2016 and the rest of the year is rapidly filling, so check my schedule link on my web site for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area.