

# Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

January 4, 2016

## Starting Yams, Seedy Tips

If you want to start sweet potatoes (AKA "yams") from a tuber, now is the time to get started. Get small or medium-sized tubers of any kind you like to eat from the grocery store or use one of your own tubers if you grew a crop last summer. One root usually produces 5-10 (or even more) slips. Because, sometimes grocery store tubers won't grow, I suggest starting 2 tubers from 2 different sources to make sure you get one that sprouts. I used to recommend only buying organic ones--until I had a bag of those that wouldn't grow at all (?). Unlike Irish potatoes, which only sprout from eyes, sweet potatoes can produce roots and shoots from anywhere. Prop a tuber upright in a jar and fill with water, half-way up the tuber. Or lay a tuber on its side in peat moss or soilless mix with half the tuber buried. Keep them very warm, well away from cold windows, and don't let them dry out. My house is pretty cool at night so I start mine on bottom heat. After a month or more, depending on how warm they have been, shoots will grow from the tuber, followed by roots growing at the base of the shoots. When a shoot has a good supply of its own roots, carefully sever the little plantlet from the mother tuber and pot it up. Grow as a houseplant in the sunniest, warmest windowsill you have until time to plant out (May).

A common commercial variety is the dark orange 'Beauregard', which has produced well for me. There are also other dark orange, light orange, white and purple varieties of sweet potatoes (look for the latter in Asian food markets). If you want to buy plants from named varieties, such as the early, light orange 'Georgia Jet', Mapple Farms in New Brunswick sells slips in the spring. They do ship rather late for BC gardeners, so plants have a late start but you should still get a decent crop this year.

<http://mapplefarm.com> Their catalogue is well worth reading for the extensive information on growing sweet potatoes even if you don't buy plants. After experimenting again with in-ground growing, I am back to only growing mine in big black plastic tubs. Even in the long warm summer of last year, my tub plants produced 50% more than the plants in the ground and they were a lot easier to harvest without damaging roots.

**Seed selection tips:** As you pick through seed catalogues and seed displays, give a thought to choosing varieties adapted to weather extremes. I will be reading seed descriptions this year with an eye out for notably heat tolerant cultivars, thinking particularly of lettuce, which was a failure for so many gardeners in the heat and drought of last summer. Along with the multitude of lettuces that grow well in the spring and fall (and in what used to be our typical cooler summer), it might be a good to grow heat tolerant ones, such as that old, indestructible 'Red Sails' leaf lettuce. Batavian types (also called crisp-head in some catalogues) are supposed to do particularly well in heat and I see that West Coast Seeds this year lists the crisphead 'Anuenue' as being particularly heat tolerant. We are getting into more frequent, wild weather patterns as the climate continues to change, therefore I think it is a good idea generally to hedge our bets by growing several varieties of any type of vegetable. There can be notable differences between varieties in their tolerance for extreme weather conditions, whether to hot/dry or cool/damp or any combination thereof.

**Seedy Saturdays** kick off immediately, starting with:

January 9. Saanich. 10:00 to 2:00; Horticulture Centre of the Pacific, 505 Quayle Rd. Don Genova is a special speaker. See: [www.haliburtonfarm.org](http://www.haliburtonfarm.org)

January 30. Denman Island, Denman Community Hall

February 6. Qualicum Beach. 10 to 3:30; Qualicum Beach Civic Centre, 747 Jones St. See:

[www.qbseedysaturday.com](http://www.qbseedysaturday.com) I will be giving a talk at 10:30 am: 'Do You REALLY Know What the Problem Is'?

There are lots more Seedy Saturdays on the way! Seeds of Diversity has a list for 2016 at:  
<http://seeds.ca/events>

**Resilient Gardens 2016: Climate Change, Stress Disorders, Pest Update:** That's the long-winded title of my new, magazine-sized publication, which is now off to the printer(whew!). I expect to have it available by the end of January through my web site (hard copy and an e-version) and I will have hard copies for sale at all of my workshops and talks this year, including Seedy Saturday talks. Stay tuned....

---

My speaking schedule for 2016 is fully booked. Check the calendar on my web site  
<http://www.lindagilkeson.ca> for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area, also for book sales and hundreds of colour photos of pests, diseases and disorders to help you identify problems.  
All of my previous gardening messages are archived on my Gardening Tips page:  
[http://lindagilkeson.ca/gardening\\_tips.html](http://lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html)