

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Carrot Day Once More

It is time for my annual reminder to sow lots of carrots for winter harvests in the next week or two. For me, July 1 is always Carrot Day as well as Canada Day (US readers: think 4th of July). As long as you sow before July 10, your carrots should have time to grow to a nice size by fall. They stay in the garden to be harvested periodically over the winter until the following April. Carrots sown earlier in the season can also spend the winter in the garden (if you haven't eaten them all), but sowing carrots later doesn't leave enough growing season to allow them to reach full size. Small carrots can be eaten, of course, but they don't grow during the winter or in the spring either, as that is when carrots use up the food stored in their roots to make flower stalks.

At this time of year the soil is often too warm for carrot seeds to germinate, but with that wonderful heavy rain last night and cooler weather forecast for the next week, conditions are ideal for good germination. Even at this time of year carrots can still take 6-10 days to come up. I find it a challenge to keep the soil evenly moist all that time, therefore I still shade the seedbeds until the first green shoots appear (it also keeps birds from picking up the seeds). Be ready to shade the beds if it gets hot again while seedlings are still tiny. I always sprinkle a little iron phosphate slug bait over the newly seeded carrot bed to control slugs for the week it takes for seedlings to come up.

Even if you usually don't need to cover spring-sown carrots to prevent carrot rust fly damage, most people should cover their July-sown carrots. By late summer there are a lot more carrot rust flies looking for carrots to lay eggs on than are present in the spring. For more details on carrot growing and how to use covers to protect them from carrot rust flies, see my June 29, 2018 message at: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

Other planting: Early to mid-July is a good time to sow more beets for winter, also rutabagas, kohlrabi, endives and radicchio. Even if you planted Swiss chard and kale in the spring you might want to sow more plants by mid-July to have a good supply of leaves in the winter. I aim to grow about 4 times more chard plants for winter harvests than for summer eating to allow for the fact that plants don't replace leaves during the winter.

A word about thinning fruit: Fruit trees are finishing shedding surplus and inadequately fertilized fruit (the 'June drop'). Now it is your turn to check fruit loads and thin the crop if necessary. Leaving too much fruit on a tree can overburden a tree (resulting in broken branches) and exhaust a tree (resulting in little or no fruit the following year). Painful as it may be to remove fruit now, don't think of it as a crop loss because the remaining fruit grow larger and thinning enables a tree to support a crop next year.

The general rule for apples and pears is to leave one fruit per blossom cluster if every flower cluster along a branch has set fruit. You can leave two fruits per cluster if most of the other flower clusters didn't set fruit. Some years, all five apples in each cluster sets and you have a lot of thinning to do. Other years, poor fruit set (which can be due to bad weather during the pollination period) may mean you don't have to do much. Thin plums to allow space for the plums to mature without touching each other (around 8 cm/3 inches apart). Peaches should be thinned to 15-20 cm/6 inches between fruit. Cherries hardly ever need thinning as they are quite good at shedding fruit in the June drop (frustratingly, some varieties seem to drop a lot of fruit year after year).