

## Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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### Save Seeds, Help New Gardeners

Finally, the forecast is for a warm, sunny week of seasonal temperatures. I was more than a little put out by the frequent snow showers that fell on my garden last week—and had to apologize to the peas I planted outdoors the week before [in these strange time, talking to your vegetables is OK, right?...as long as you aren't hearing them reply, of course...]

If you are starting seeds indoors, it is time to sow summer and winter squashes, cucumbers and melons. I wait until now because these plants grow quickly and can't be set out until the soil is really warm, often mid-May. Among the squashes, zucchinis are generally the most robust and sometimes can be set out in late April, depending on the weather. Cucumbers and melons are the most delicate, with the least will to live; in some years I haven't been able to plant them outdoors until early June.

As for planting in the garden, the soil is still cold, but that will change after a week of sunny weather. When the soil is dry enough to handle, you can sow hardier vegetables directly in the ground (peas, lettuce, cabbage family greens, broccoli, cabbage). Sow extra seeds because slugs, cutworms, birds and other critters take their toll. Plant potatoes and onion sets any time. I usually wait until about the third week of April to plant out onion and leek seedlings to make sure they are robust enough to handle life outdoors, but again, it depends on the weather.

Saving seeds? Anyone shopping for vegetable seeds lately has seen cleared out racks and delays from online suppliers due to high demand. If you haven't saved seeds, you might want to try it this year. The reason I am mentioning it right now is that this summer is when you would save seeds from hardy biennial vegetables that survived over winter in your garden. Plants such as kale, Swiss chard, carrots, parsnips, beets, leeks, purple sprouting broccoli, mizuna and Komatsuna are biennials, meaning they produce flowers, and then seeds, in their second summer. If you want to save seeds from them this year, remember not to harvest all of the plants (and make sure garden helpers know which plants are keepers, too). Flowering stalks grow quite tall and it will take most of the summer to ripen seeds. Bearing this in mind, if seed plants would be in the way of this year's garden plans, you can carefully dig them up now and move them out of the way, such as the back of a flower border, to complete their life cycle. These won't be as securely rooted as they would have been had they remained in place, so stake them up for the season.

You can save seeds from a single plant, but for genetic diversity it is better to save seed from a dozen or more plants of the same variety. If you don't have that many plants, save seeds from as many as possible. If you have several varieties of the same vegetable, choose just one variety to save seeds from this year (you can save a different variety next year). Pollinators and the wind move pollen between plants, causing compatible plants (those of the same species) to cross. You still get seeds but these natural hybrids are unpredictable and won't be exactly like the parent variety. To learn more about seed saving, there are lots of online resources, including Salt Spring Seeds <https://www.saltspringseeds.com/blogs/articles/17132259-how-to-save-seeds> and Seeds of Diversity <https://seeds.ca/sw8/web/home>.

Help for new gardeners. Suddenly there are lots of new food gardeners and they have a lot of questions! On Salt Spring, a couple of us thought that it would be helpful to pair experienced local gardeners with new gardeners so that each first-timer has a mentor they can call on for assistance. Thanks to communications today, this can be done by email, phone, video conference and social media. Advice can often be as simple as providing information on where to get supplies. On Salt Spring, if you are a new gardener looking for help or if you want to volunteer as a mentor gardener, the contact person is Marian Hargrove [momhargrove@yahoo.com](mailto:momhargrove@yahoo.com) (for Salt Spring only). In other communities, a garden club or other group might be interested in organizing garden mentors. If you want to volunteer to organize such a program in your community (or are already doing it) I would be happy to help publicize it, if that would be useful. If so, send me your contact information and community location to [gilkeson@shaw.ca](mailto:gilkeson@shaw.ca) and I will put together a list of organizers in each community for my next message.

To view the slides sets for my 10-month Year Round Harvest course (open to the public this year) go to: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/coursenotes.html> Enter this year's password: honeycrisp [Click on SUBMIT]. Around the middle of each month, until October, I will put up a new module on a different topic appropriate to the season.