

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson
December 27, 2022

Thinking of seeds; 2 talks open to all

I usually send a note earlier in December celebrating the solstice and the beginning of longer days, but this year's plan was derailed by having to rush my sick dog to Victoria in the teeth of last week's blizzard, getting snowed in in Victoria for two days and, after getting back to the island, coping with the winter weather we have all been dealing with. My little dog is making a complete recovery and, thankfully, we survived the experience through the great kindness of friends who drove us through the snow storm, billeted us for days, and shoveled ever more snow...

The deep snow we had during the coldest weather benefited our overwintering vegetables, burying them in an insulating layer and keeping them from frost damage. Root crops under mulch probably didn't feel a thing. While other plants may now be looking pretty squashed by the snow, most will be fine. Crushed leafy greens, leeks and smaller plants usually straighten up over time and, even if older leaves have been broken, the plants sprout new leaves as



winter ends. Winter broccoli and cauliflower plants only have to get through the season with roots and stems intact, so don't worry about lost leaves: they grow new ones in February and March, anyway. Brussels sprouts don't need leaves now and you can strip them off entirely to make plants less liable to being pulled over in the next snowstorm. And to answer a common question: don't worry if you see the tips of garlic shoots poking through the mulch this month—they are extremely hardy.

Heavy snow really flattened mulches, which reduces their insulating value. You might want to take advantage of this lull in the weather to fluff up the mulch over roots crops and around other plants, or even to add more mulch on top if you have a stockpile of leaves or straw. After all, there is a lot of winter left to get through and often our worst weather is in February.

Gardening job one: With the busy-ness of the holiday season winding down, now is the perfect time to check over your seed collection and start planning your next garden. If you need to order seeds, that should be a priority, because seed companies are already very busy. Just as the covid situation was an incentive for many new gardeners to try growing food, leaping food prices are stimulating another batch of new gardeners to try their hand...I mean, \$8 lettuce, seriously!!??

Seed sources: A source of locally grown seed that has expanded every year, is the BC Eco-Seed Coop <https://www.bcecoseedcoop.com/> which now has over 20 growers contributing seeds and an impressive list of varieties, most not available through mainstream catalogues. I am particularly happy that Salt Spring's Bright Farm sent seeds of that wonderful winter cauliflower variety 'Galleon' to the coop (it is now the only source I know of for this variety).

Of course, these are many other BC seed companies to investigate, including, but certainly not limited to:

Salt Spring Seeds <https://www.saltspringseeds.com/>

Full Circle Seeds <https://fullcircleseeds.com/>

Saanich Organics <https://www.saanichorganics.com/seeds/>

West Coast Seeds <https://www.westcoastseeds.com/>

Many small and regional seed companies attend Seedy Saturday events, which are coming back after being cancelled due to covid in previous years. On Vancouver Island, the earliest one I know of is going to be the Saanich Seedy Saturday on January 14, 2023 at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific, 505 Quayle Rd. For more info: <https://hcp.ca/>

Dates of other Seedy Saturdays (and some Sundays) are kept on a list compiled by Seeds of Diversity <https://seeds.ca/events/> so keep an eye out for events near you as it is a great way to meet local seed growers and to trade seeds with other gardeners; some events also sponsor talks or workshops by local gardening experts.

Thinking about seeds always cheers me up... and for another bit of good news: I am happy to let you know that I have two zoom presentations coming up soon that are open to everyone. These are fundraisers for 2 Salt Spring organizations that I want to support in every way possible, because they are doing such excellent, essential work in our community. If you have seen earlier versions of these talks, I invite you to join us again, as I continually update the information.

Sunday Jan 8, 2023, 2pm. **Where Have All the Insects Gone?** Presented by the Salt Spring Island Farmland Trust.

Global insect populations have crashed over the last couple of decades. Learn why this matters for our food supply, for a healthy environment and the future of wildlife. Find out the latest research into the many factors contributing to the widespread decline and how gardeners and growers can help to reduce the harm from some of these factors and improve insect habitat on their property. To register: <https://give-can.keela.co/where-have-all-the-insects-gone>

To learn more about the Salt Spring Island Farmland Trust <https://www.ssifarmlandtrust.org/>

Sunday Feb 12, 2023 2:30 pm. **Resilient Gardens for a Changing Climate.** Presented by Transition Salt Spring.

Our regional climate is transforming rapidly as the global climate changes, with extreme weather events setting records. What does this mean for our food gardens and landscapes? How can we take on the challenge of increasing local food resilience and enhancing our landscapes ecologically to respond

to our changing climate? Learn how extreme weather affects plants, including trees, and how to design resilient food and ornamental gardens that help plants survive our changing weather patterns. Discover the important role gardeners can play in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, including designing landscapes to capture carbon. [registration will be available through Transition Salt Spring <https://transitionsaltspring.com/> in a couple of weeks]

It is now a week past the winter solstice and days are already 2 minutes longer than last week...that doesn't seem like much, but the number of minutes that days get longer increases with every day. In mid-January, we will be seeing a couple of more minutes added every day. By then, with our daylight half an hour longer, it will also be noticeable that darkness isn't closing in quite so early. With that thought, I wish you all the best for the season and for the new year ahead!

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On my web site you can order books, look at hundreds of photos of pests, diseases and disorders to help you identify problems and also view pdfs files of my talks on how to grow vegetable seedlings, saving seeds, climate resilient gardens and the issue of global loss of insects.

Both my Year Round Harvest courses are filled for 2024. My teaching and speaking calendar for most of 2023 is also full so I won't be adding more events to my schedule.