

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

July 23, 2022

Edit the Garden, Sow Winter Crops

There is a heat wave forecast for next week with temperatures rising tomorrow and staying quite high all week, especially away from the water. Regular readers will know the drill by now, but if you are a new subscriber or want to review what to do to protect your garden, see the heat alert information in my June 24, 2021 message: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

Garden editing week has arrived: Late July is a good time to take stock of your garden and “edit out” some plants to make space for fall greens and overwintering crops. Look for plants that aren’t doing well or are maturing so late they aren’t likely to produce a crop. Winter squash, sweet corn, melons, eggplant (unless they are in a greenhouse) might be in this category depending on when they were planted. Perhaps you planted too much of some things or need to thin plants that are too crowded now that they are full grown. If you have lettuce or leafy greens that are sending up flower stalks, radishes that are not making a proper root (some do, some don’t—those that don’t, never will), cauliflower that has been sitting there since spring and still no sign of a head—remove them and plant something else. The discards make excellent mulch!

Many people are concerned that their onions are small for this time of year. Like many other crops, they seem to be several weeks later than usual, so I have started boosting growth of my onions with extra watering and weekly liquid fertilizer. I also pulled a few onions to give the remaining plants as much space as possible. Thinning is very important now for all vegetables because there aren’t that many growing days left in the season and crowded plants stunt each other’s growth. Check your beds of carrots, beets and other crops sown in early July and thin them now, while they are tiny—there is only enough time for them to reach full size by fall if they have good—uncrowded—growing conditions.

If any of your winter squash plants were so set back by the cool June that they still don’t have fruit, they may not have enough time to mature fruit by October. If they haven’t set fruit by the first week of August, consider planting something else in the space. For plants that do have fruit now, to ensure these mature completely, pick off new fruit that forms on the vines in August. This is most important for pumpkins and squash with really big fruit as these take the longest to mature. If you have summer squash (zucchini, pattypan, crookneck) that aren’t producing yet, plants still have time to produce a good crop, but be on top of hand-pollinating flowers every morning and give plants extra water if possible. In new gardens or where the soil is less fertile and plants are growing slowly, a weekly watering with liquid fertilizer to deliver extra nitrogen and other soluble nutrients will speed their growth. Use commercial fish fertilizer diluted according to the label or soak a shovel full of compost or manure in a bucket of water for a day or two and dilute it to a light brown colour before watering plants with it. [In case you are considering using seaweed extract, it is low in nitrogen].

What to plant now:

In addition to planting out seedlings of overwintering crops from garden centres or other sources (the list from my July 8 message is repeated below), lots of things can be sown directly from now through the first week or two of August. Sow all kinds of leafy greens (mizuna, collards, kale, leaf mustards, mustard spinach/Komatsuna, arugula, Chinese cabbage, pac choi), also broccoli raab, daikon and other winter

radishes. Sow lettuce for late summer/fall harvests now, but wait until after mid-August to sow hardy lettuce for winter harvests. I wait until after the first week of August to sow spinach as I find that works quite well—August 12 is Spinach Day in my garden. The days are short enough by then that even a late spell of hot weather doesn't stimulate the plants to go to seed as they do in the long days of June.

Over-wintering onions for spring harvest and scallions for fall harvest can also be sown now. Sweet onions, such as 'Walla Walla', are hardy enough to make it through the winter (usually), but the leaves are fragile and easily smashed by the weight of wet snow. They work best in areas where winter precipitation is only rain or where plants are protected from snow under a tunnel or coldframe.

As always, when sowing seeds in summer, after watering well cover the bed to shade it until the seeds germinate: use burlap, white plastic [e.g., turn compost bags inside out], old beach towels, newspaper—anything you have. You can lay the cover directly on the soil or support it a little way above the soil surface by laying down chicken wire or other wire mesh. If slug numbers are still a problem in your garden, sprinkle a little iron phosphate slug bait over the new bed before covering to control resident slugs before seedlings emerge. I sow extra seeds at this time of year because there won't be time to reseed some of these crops if germination is poor or pests get them. It means more work thinning seedlings if they all come up, but insures enough seedlings are likely to survive for a crop.



Local sources for winter vegetable starts in the Salt Spring, Victoria, Saanich Peninsula and Brackendale areas:

- Chorus Frog Farm, 263 Rainbow Road, Salt Spring [until July 31, then re-locating to Quarry Farm on Jasper Rd.]
- Russell Nursery, 1370 Wain Rd, North Saanich, BC. [near Sidney] (250) 656-0384
<https://russellnursery.com/>
- Victoria Compost Education Centre, 1216 N Park St, Victoria: Annual sale of organically grown winter veggie starts is on Saturday, August 6th, 10:00 am (250) 386 9676 <https://compost.bc.ca/>
- Saanich Organics, 7900 West Saanich Rd (Three Oaks Farm of Saanich Organics). 9am to 7pm. Plants on the farmstand for month of August. rachel@saanichorganics.com
- Michell Valley Plants, 2451 Island View Road, Saanichton, behind the Michell Farm stand <https://michell-valley-plants.business.site/> (250) 886-0494
- Local Roots Farm Market, 41015 Government Rd North Entrance, Brackendale <https://localrootsbc.ca/>
- Nanaimo Community Gardens Society greenhouse - Beban Learning Garden in Beban Park, Nanaimo. greenhouse@nanaimocommunitygardens.ca 250-816-4769