

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

November 5, 2016

Cold Weather Preparations, Cutworms Again

Well, the La Nina weather pattern is certainly delivering as promised: wet and windy indeed, with a record-setting October for number of rainy days and, in some areas, record total rainfall for the month. Despite this, however, it has been warm enough for cabbages and other hardy plants to continue slow growth and for cutworms to be out and about (see below). There isn't cold weather in the immediate forecast and Environment Canada's long range forecast shows a probability of somewhat above average temperatures through January, but remember that the coldest weather we have had in the last couple of winters occurred in late November. So...just sayin'... be prepared to finish mulching by then and have some tarps or sheets of plastic handy to cover leafy greens in case of really cold weather.

The hardy greens, such as chard and leaf beet, winter lettuce, Komatsuna, Mizuna, leaf mustards and hardy Chinese cabbages are usually fine to about -5oC (23oF) without covers. At those temperatures leaves freeze solid, however, so wait until the weather has warmed up and the leaves have thawed out before you harvest. Also, when you harvest, keep picking the outer, older leaves first, which are less hardy than the younger leaves in the centre of the plants. If you are growing these in coldframes, tunnels or unheated greenhouses, they won't need additional covers unless an Arctic outbreak brings extreme cold.

If really cold weather is forecast, I lay plastic over beds of greens and hold it down with heavy rocks (Arctic outbreaks usually bring strong outflow winds to the coast). If lows look like they may go to -9oC (16oF) or lower, then I also throw a tarp over winter cauliflower and purple sprouting broccoli for the few days of the cold snap. I didn't do it one winter, though, and they looked terrible, but came through fine anyway. It has to be colder than that to daunt kale or the super-hardy 'Unique' variety of leeks, but most leeks varieties are not that hardy so would benefit from covers in a cold snap. Parsley and corn salad are extremely hardy and shouldn't need covers. The root crops, snug under a thick layer of leaf mulch well up over the tops of the roots by the time it gets cold, should be fine.

Citrus Protection: If you have lemon or lime trees planted outdoors, it is time to string incandescent Christmas tree lights (which are being sold again in stores) through the branches and cover the trees with floating row cover or clear plastic with some ventilation holes. Turn on the lights if there is a risk temperatures will go below freezing and they provide enough heat inside the covering to prevent damage. For more on this, see the Fruit Trees and More website for videos on growing lemons and other tender fruit at: <http://fruittreesandmore.com/> And a reminder while I am on fruit trees, this is the time to order all kinds of fruit trees for planting next spring from Fruit Trees and More. Send them an email and ask for the current stock list, which has everything from apples and figs to pears and yuzu. [Yuzu is a very hardy citrus with a fragrant lemony-lime flavour, much prized in Japan—so far mine has survived 3 winters outdoors up here on the mountain without Christmas lights to rescue it in a cold snap].

Dang those cutworm: In these relatively warm nights, climbing cutworms have been frolicking and doing quite a lot of damage to leafy greens. They are likely all larvae of the Large Yellow Underwing moth [photos, see: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/leaf_chewers.html#25]. The swiftest way to deal with them is to go out after dark with a flashlight and catch them. Their colours range from light green to very dark

grey; they feed on the top edges of leaves so are not hard to see. A couple of nights of checking should pretty much get them all: the good news is that once you clear them out of a bed, there won't be another generation until next summer. Which unfortunately is not the case for slugs, who are also rampaging in this weather, with lots of tiny ones being hatched. You can catch slugs at night while looking for cutworms and also put down iron phosphate slug baits (such as Sluggo and Scott's EcoSense, which can be used by certified organic growers). Just sprinkle out a little bait at a time and replace it every few days as it melts away in the rain.

Storing Apples, Onions, Squash: Last year I sent out detailed information on how to keep these crops over the winter so if you want to check out that info, see my October 25, 2015 message: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

A SWD surprise: I am still trapping that #!@#! fruit fly, the Spotted wing Drosophila, in vinegar traps in my garden. I caught a lot all through October, but was still astounded to find 143 flies in the trap this morning (Nov. 5), caught in just the last 7 days. About half were females so I am obviously still removing a substantial potential population from overwintering in my garden. So keep your traps going! I am keeping mine out until it freezes hard. Some of the most recent information on this pest is that fall trapping could be useful control to catch the flies before they find a sheltered place to spend the winter. If you are new to these newsletters and the fruit fly problem, there is more info in my June 14, 2016 message.

Check the calendar on my web site <http://lindagilkeson.ca/> for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area, also for book sales (how about Christmas gift giving?) and hundreds of colour photos of pests, diseases and disorders to help you identify problems. My speaking schedule for 2017 is fully booked and the 2018 requests are all going into a folder for now as it is too far ahead to schedule.

All of my previous gardening messages are archived on my Gardening Tips page: http://lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

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