

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Fall leaves, garlic & Brussel sprouts

That nice spell of warm weather was just what we needed to bring on the last growth of late crops. Here are some things to do—and not do—right now:

Keep insect covers on until the end of October. A perennial question is when to take off the netting or row cover protecting carrots, winter radishes, turnips, and small cabbage family greens from root maggots. There are still lots of adult flies floating around, laying eggs on unprotected plants. Give the covers another month or until the first heavy frost, whichever comes first. Rinse the covers to clean them and store until next year.

For you eager Brussels sprout growers: It is time to pinch or cut out the centre top-knot of leaves to force the plants to develop sprouts. If your plants already have nice-sized sprouts, this is optional. Plants set out later may just be showing the first small sprouts on the bottom third of the stem. These benefit from stopping the top growth to hasten sprout development. I am still hearing from gardeners who put in plants so late that there is no sign of sprouts now. If plants are small right now they likely won't have a crop, but it won't hurt to pinch the tips out anyway and see what happens. Brussels sprouts are biennials, which means if they don't make sprouts this fall, they won't make them in the spring, because their attention turns to growing flower stalks (these are edible, just are not what you were expecting).

Plan for leaf gathering: Fallen leaves are the best mulch for summer and winter and they are free, weed-free and relatively easy to move around because they are light weight. Collect enough to mulch the garden and flowerbeds for winter and put aside a supply for next summer when we will all be scrambling to find enough mulch for the dry season. I stockpile leaves I collect in dry weather for next summer and store them where they stay dry (in giant plastic bags, under a tarp, etc.) so they won't decompose. Wet leaves are excellent for immediate use as winter mulch because they stay in place better when it is windy. If you can get lots of leaves, also layer them into your compost pile or make leaf mold by composting whole bins of leaves. Despite what you might have read, all leaves are excellent with the only questionable leaves being those of black walnut trees, which should be well composted before they go on a garden. Tomatoes, apples and a few other garden plants can be sensitive to a compound called juglone in the leaves (other walnuts are not a problem). Don't shred leaves for winter mulches because we want a fluffy insulating layer. The bigger the leaves, even huge ones from big-leaf maples, the less they are compacted by rain. If you are collecting leaves for compost, however, shredding them or running a lawn mower back and forth over them first will make them decompose more quickly.

Hold off on planting garlic: A few people have asked about planting garlic in September. Until recently I haven't thought that would be a problem, but that was before I researched information for a write-up on garlic root rots that occur in this region. I learned that to avoid Blue Mold Rot (*Penicillium* spp.) it is best to plant later in the fall, rather than earlier. This is one of the most common fungus diseases of stored garlic and onions. It overwinters on infected cloves, not in the soil, and it infects in warm 22-25oC (72-77oF), dry conditions. If you plant healthy garlic cloves (inspect each carefully for signs of the characteristic blue-green mold) and plant after the soil has become cold and wet (later October) there is

little likelihood of infection. Apparently all you procrastinating gardeners have been doing yourselves a favour....

2017 Year Round Harvest courses: If you are interested in taking my 10-month organic gardening course now is the time to register. The class in Victoria at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific is pretty much full, but you can ask to be put on the wait list and may get in as not everyone that signs up is able to attend. To read more and sign up: <http://hcp.ca/year-round-harvest/>

There is also a Year Round Harvest course on Salt Spring, sponsored by the SS Garden Club. We have one class a month on a Thursday evening starting in January and running to October. Topics include feeding and preparing soil, year round planting schedules, how to grow a variety of vegetables and fruit, preserving, seed saving and managing pests and diseases. For a schedule of dates and topics and to register, contact me: gilkeson@shaw.ca Priority for spaces goes to Salt Spring Garden club members, but you can join online anytime at: <https://ssigardenclub.wordpress.com/>