

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Growing Greens for Winter

Right now is a great time to seed spinach for harvest this fall. Spinach sown at this time of year usually overwinters to produce a big spring crop, no matter how beat up plants are by winter. I just seeded mine to take advantage of that spell of cooler moist weather over the last couple of day, but it should be fine to sow it up to the middle of the month. Do use burlap or other covers to keep the seedbed cool and moist in the hot weather forecast for this week. So far I have only had one variety of spinach not work on this schedule ('Melo Nero' all bolted). Though I have certainly not tried every spinach there is, I do know that Long Standing Bloomsdale, Viking, Tye and Large Leaved Winter spinach all do well. Spinach generally, however, is not happy about being out in endless winter rain and is broken down by wet snow. If you can grow it in a bed protected by the overhang of a roof or under a plastic tunnel or coldframe, the leaves will hold up better (the same goes for winter lettuce).

Other things you can seed right now: Fall/winter lettuce, mustard spinach (Komatsuna), mustard greens, leaf radish, leaf turnip (Mizuna or Namenia) and the smaller winter radishes. Whether you can grow a useful harvest of any these if you seed later than mid-August depends on how much direct sun your garden gets in late summer and fall (more on that below). You can continue to sow hardy winter lettuce, corn salad and arugula up through the first week of September.

It is getting late to sow the following, but if you can buy seedlings at local nurseries they should do fine: kales, Swiss chard and leaf beet (AKA perpetual spinach, a type of chard with a finer stem), collards, Chinese cabbages. On Salt Spring, the Chorus Frog farm stand has kale, spinach, lettuce, chard, pac choi, mustard, arugula, beet seedlings (yes, you can transplant beets—just take care to make a deep enough planting hole to straighten out the root); also New Jersey Wakefield cabbage, which has a small, quick-maturing head that works well for fall harvests. Russell Nursery on Wain Road (Victoria area) also still has a variety of winter seedlings, including well-grown plants of purple sprouting broccoli. As always, if you are buying at a grocery store or garden centre, beware of the cauliflower and broccoli varieties on offer: they often carry summer varieties, such as Snowball cauliflower, which are no use for planting this late in the season.

Timing of planting for winter: It is at this time of year that the shorter days and lower sun angle begins to noticeably cut into the hours of sunshine for most gardens. The planting chart on my home page shows timing that I know works in this region (see: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/pdf/Linda%20Gilkeson%20Planting%20Schedule.pdf>). Whether you can successfully sow later than I suggest depends on how much sun exposure your garden has and how warm or protected the location. I have mentioned before that I have been puzzled as to why some sources still recommend July sowing for Brussel sprouts, when such late planting causes so much grief among gardeners whose plants don't produce sprouts. But I was talking to a couple of growers on Salt Spring recently, who told me that a late seedling schedule does work for them. The penny dropped as we talked: their plants are growing in open, sunny farm fields with virtually dawn to dusk sunshine. With sunrise at 6:00 am and sunset around 8:30 right now, plants in an open farm field could still be getting over 12 hours of direct sun each day. In contrast, many gardens don't even see this much direct sun in mid-summer due to shading from buildings and trees. Right now, my own garden is still receiving just over 8 hours of direct sun, but that will decrease rapidly over the next months as the lower sun is

increasingly blocked by trees, my house and a mountain top. Leafy greens, which handle fewer hours of sunshine better than other crops, are widely successful in most gardens. But for the late season, large biennials, such as Brussels sprouts and winter cabbages that take 120 days to mature, a typical home garden usually doesn't receive enough sun hours from mid-August to October to produce a crop from plants started too late. Some home gardens with good sunlight because they are near open shorelines may also need extra time to mature late crops because their average temperatures are a little lower than inland. SO, tailor your planting schedules to fit the real sunlight conditions in your garden, but if in doubt, sow earlier rather than later to make sure you have a successful harvest this winter.

Planning for fruit? If you are thinking of planting fruit trees next spring, have a look at the variety available from Fruit Trees & More (724 Wain Rd., North Saanich; <http://www.fruittreesandmore.com/>). You can order this fall for good quality, bare root fruit trees to arrive next March. They list a wide selection of dwarf fruit trees, including "mini-dwarf" apples; also hardy almonds, figs, olives, citrus and many other interesting fruits that can be grown on the coast. Contact Bob and Verna Duncan: bvduncan@FruitTreesAndMore.com to receive an order list. Do plan to visit the nursery to see amazing their amazing crops!

My speaking schedule for 2016 and 2017 is fully booked. Check the calendar on my web site <http://lindagilkeson.ca/> for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area, also for book sales (including my newest: *Resilient Gardens 2016: Climate Change, Stress Disorders, Pest Update*) and hundreds of colour photos of pests, diseases and disorders to help you identify problems.

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

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