

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

April 21, 2025

Planting Onions, Buying Seedlings

With the recent warm up, the cool tolerant vegetables can be seeded or set out any time: cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, salad greens, radishes, peas, potatoes. But if you haven't planted those yet, not to worry—there is plenty of time for them to produce in our growing season so planting in April or May works fine. For warmth loving plants (tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucumbers, melons, corn, beans), however, don't be in a rush. Their cells simply do not function in cool temperatures so wait until May to plant these. Gardeners in the rest of Canada will be planting tomatoes on the May long weekend and that date works well for coastal gardeners too. In more protected or warmer gardens, tomatoes and zucchini, which are the most robust of the heat lovers, may go out earlier, especially if covered with cloches, temporary tunnels or floating row cover. The more delicate plants (cucumbers, melons and sweet basil) need consistently warm weather. I often can't set them out in my garden until late May (or even June in cold, wet springs) and I just leave the sweet basil in my greenhouse for the summer, along with the sweet potatoes, so they can enjoy serious heat. Timing depends on the weather, of course, so be prepared to cover plantings if the weather turns chilly (below 15oC daytime, below 10oC at night).

One group that must be planted now is the onion family. Onion varieties for northern latitudes form their bulbs in response to the long days/short nights in the weeks around June 21st. To grow good-sized onions, plant as early as possible so they have time to develop a good root system before they start to make bulbs. Onions planted too late (after mid-May) often won't make bulbs at all. The tricky part is that onions are biennial plants so if planted too early they can respond to a period of cold spring weather by going to flower in the summer instead of making bulbs. Given the soil temperatures now, however, it should be safe to plant them out now if you haven't already done so. If you bought vegetable starts that are already sending roots out the drainage holes in their containers, then they can't stay any longer in those pots. Plant them out or pot them in larger containers.



If you are pushing the envelope with early plantings because you don't have anything to harvest in the garden right now, you might want to join me for an online workshop on April 27th 3:00-5:00 pm *Take Control of Your Food Supply! Grow the Most Food in the Smallest Space All Year Round*. How to prepare fertile soil, plant for year-round harvests, intensive planting, best winter-hardy vegetables for our climate, protecting crops from cold and hot weather. This is a pay-what-you-can fundraiser to support Transition Salt Spring who are doing an amazing job in our community to help us address climate change. A Zoom recording will be available to participants. Limited spaces left! Register: <https://revenue-can.keela.co/linda-gilkeson-webinar-registration-apr25>

Buying veggie starts: Avoid buying starts showing signs of stress or of damage (frost, sunscald, inadequate watering) as they will not do as well as seedlings that never experienced a setback. Avoid plants that have:

- wilted or have leaves that are a lighter colour than they should be,
- plants that have grown leggy leaning toward the light,
- lower leaves turning yellow or orange ,
- leaves with shriveled or brown tips (an indicator they may have suffered lack of water as some point),
- roots trailing out of the drain holes in the pot.

These are signs of stress from poor growing conditions or from being held too long in a small pot. If you see plants of the same variety but different ages for sale, always go for the youngest, smallest plants rather than the older, larger ones. Be ready to transplant them as soon as possible so that they don't become stressed after you take them home. If you can't plant them within a week or so of taking them home, plan to move them into larger pots with good soil to allow their growth to continue unchecked.



Poor quality seedlings to avoid.

Recycling corner: Rather than rewriting information from previous newsletters, here's a timely one you can read in the archive on my website: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

- April 21, 2023: Grow your own onion sets; The carrot conundrum (how to get a good stand of seedlings)
- ABCs of Gardening Series: Beginning gardeners and new subscribers might want to review the basic information included in these sections in my newsletters from December 21, 2023 to June 2024. Topics covered over the 8 months: Designing beds, compost, lime and other soil amendments, irrigation, weeding, mulching.

Dropped off my list? I have heard from a lot of people lately that they are no longer receiving my emails (so they won't be getting this one either), but if you happen to know of someone that mentions that, please pass along the following information. Spam/junk filtering by service providers seems to have changed over the last year and for those on Rogers/Shaw it has become particularly erratic. My messages might be intercepted in a spam/junk folder in the webmail and are not being sent to the email program on your computer or device. Designating this address as "not spam" in your email might help Lindaslist@lists.resist.ca but if emails are being intercepted by the service provider you will have to login to your webmail to designate this address as safe/not spam. I have no idea how to solve this problem otherwise so any advice would be welcome. My past newsletters are archived on my website at: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html