

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

July 12, 2025

July Planting, Heat Wave Reminder

From now until early August, there are a lot of vegetables that can be started from seed to produce crops in time for winter harvests. BUT the next few days promise to be pretty hot so take special care to shade seed beds and seedlings (for a list of what to do to protect vegetables during heat waves, see the list in my May 10, 2023 message http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html). I was thinking of sowing more lettuce and salad greens this weekend in the newly vacated area where I just harvest garlic, but am going to put it off for a few days until it cools a bit. Lettuce really doesn't germinate well in very warm soil and it takes a lot of vigilance to ensure seedbeds don't dry out. It seems like we should have all summer ahead of us, but actually the end of the growing season is in sight: if a planting fails now there won't be enough time left in the season to replace some vegetables from seed. I am sowing some plants (chard, kale, Chinese cabbage) indoors this week rather than directly in the garden. Indoors, there is no risk of them being fried in the heat, they are easy to keep moist and they are safe from slugs, pillbugs, birds and other slings and arrows of garden misfortune—but of course seedlings do require babysitting (moving seed trays outdoors for the day, indoors at night) until they are big enough to transplant.

Here is a list of leafy greens you can grow from seed now: arugula, winter lettuce, mizuna, collards, kale, leaf mustards and mustard spinach/Komatsuna, Bok choy, Napa cabbage and other Chinese cabbage varieties, spinach and broccoli raab/rapini. You can also sow winter radish/daikon and hardy onions (sweet Spanish onions, scallions) by the end of this month. The onions are not for fall harvest as they will be small seedlings over winter that produce bulbs early in the spring. The onions are very fragile, however, so if you live where there is periodic snow in the winter, the onions should be protected under a tunnel, in a coldframe or unheated greenhouse because they are easily crushed by a blanket of wet coastal snow. You might get away with sowing beets this late, but make sure you thin them promptly and don't let them lack for water so they grow as quickly as possible.

You can still sow early cabbage varieties that grow quickly (55-80 days to harvest), such as the small, pointed sweetheart cabbages ('Caraflex', 'Jersey Wakefield', 'Greyhound') or other early cabbages. For cabbage varieties that take longer than that to develop, look for starts to transplant as soon as possible to give them time to make nice sized heads by October. It is too late to start winter broccoli and winter cauliflower from seed now, but several local nurseries are now selling seedlings of good varieties for our coastal winters (listed below). Note: Although you may see Brussels sprouts seedlings for sale, it is really too late to plant small seedlings now because they just won't have time to make sprouts. If you planted out Br. sprouts starts last month, they should do fine, but keep them well watered and shade them in heat waves so grow as fast as possible. Unlike winter broccoli and cauliflower, which only need to be 1-2 feet high by fall because they produce heads in the spring, Brussels sprouts have to reach full size and produce their sprouts before October (if they don't make sprouts this fall, they won't make them at all because the plants flower after winter).



Sweetheart cabbage grows quickly.

Local sources of "the right stuff" for winter harvests on the coast:

Chorus Frog Nursery, 190 Jasper Road, Salt Spring, open daily 10:00-5:00 has a large selection of winter vegetable starts for sale including purple sprouting broccoli, 'Galleon' cauliflower, kales, cabbage and winter greens <https://thequarryfarm.ca/chorus-frog-nursery> They also have Purple Moon cauliflower, a heat tolerant variety for summer production.

B. Dinter Nursery Ltd., 2205 Phipps Road, Duncan, has an impressive list of winter vegetable starts that they have grown, including purple sprouting broccoli, 'Galleon' cauliflower and many kinds of hardy lettuce and leafy greens, cabbage, kales, sweet onions. www.dinternursery.ca

Victoria Compost Education Centre, 1216 North Park Street, Victoria is selling winter vegetable starts August 13-16, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. They will have purple sprouting broccoli, 'Galleon' cauliflowers, kales and other hardy plants www.compost.bc.ca

Russell Nursery, 1370 Wain Road, North Saanich, will have starts from wholesale distributors with the addition of purple sprouting broccoli that they grow themselves. <https://russellnursery.com/>

See my June 15, 2022 message for information on winter varieties to look for http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

Soil fertility: At this time of year, especially in a new garden or with container plants, you may see growth slow as the more readily available nutrients have been taken up by plants or leached out of the soil in irrigation water. Topdressing (spreading a layer on the soil surface) with compost will improve soil fertility over time, but for a quicker boost, apply nutrients in water. You can buy liquid concentrates, such as fish fertilizer products, dilute them according to the label and water plants once a week. Or put a shovel of horse manure or good compost in a big bucket of water and soak for a day or two—not longer. Fish composts, such as those from SeaSoil, OlyMountain, are especially good, but homemade compost can certainly be used. The water turns brown with readily soluble nutrients soaked out of the compost. Dilute it to a pale tea colour and use that to water plants weekly. If, after 7-10 days, plants have greener leaves and new growth, it shows that they had indeed been running out of nutrients. Continue liquid fertilizing for the rest of the crop or season as needed to keep plants growing, but make a note to increase the amount of compost and complete organic fertilizer added to the soil before your next planting. After a couple of years, with a good nutrient bank built up in the soil from regular additions of compost and other organic amendments that release nutrients slowly, garden plants should have enough nutrients available for the whole season. Plants in containers, however, usually do continue to need liquid fertilizer, weekly to monthly over the summer, because soil volume is small for the roots and plants are watered more often than in garden beds. Whether in gardens or containers, a thick summer mulch of leaves, straw, garden waste, etc. will reduce the amount of water required and reduce the loss of soluble nutrients from the soil.

Anniversary! Last week marked 17 years (!) since I started sending emails to gardening friends to remind them when to sow winter harvest crops. There are now over 10,000 people on my list—who knew that word would spread so widely!? Since the beginning of this year, however, some people have not been able to receive my messages and there seems to be no explanation: they are still on my active list of addresses, but my messages simply are not reaching their email folders, not even their spam/junk folders. If you are still getting these messages, DO feel free to forward them to anyone you know who is no longer getting them each month. All of my messages are archived on my website under "Gardening Tips" and you might want to look through them for messages from past years because I don't always cover everything that might be relevant each month.

