

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Reviving the Garden, Germination Test, Pruning, Garlic Freebie

Funny how fast those snowdrops pop up the minute the frost leaves the ground! With the going of the snow and the arrival of more seasonal temperatures, it is time to come out of hibernation.

First, I want to let everyone know that my newest publication is out and making its way to bookstores. You can also order it from my web site or get it directly from me at any of my talks and workshops.

Resilient Gardens 2017: Pollinator Gardens, Garlic Diseases, Pest Update. The focus in this publication is on how to grow safe, hospitable and abundant coastal gardens for pollinators. Topics include pollination biology and common pollinators, what to plant to feed them (and what not to plant), nest sites for bees and protecting pollinators from insecticides. The second section focuses on identifying and managing garlic root diseases in an effort to clear up confusion about the various fungal diseases that attack garlic (although White Rot is the disease everyone fears, there are other common and much easier to manage garlic diseases around). Updates are included on spotted wing Drosophila, pea leaf weevils and a new disease, downy mildew of basil.

Here's the freebie part: I have clipped out a pdf of the garlic disease section and will email it to anyone who is concerned about garlic and onion disease in their crops. If you want me to send you this file, let me know.

Overwintered veggies: It is becoming clearer what has survived the winter, but it is far from clear, yet, as to what has not survived. Right now, if you want to clean up, only remove rotting leaves and pull back some mulches to harvest carrots and beets. Don't take out any plants (if you have a neat-freak spouse do not let them near the garden!). Many leafy greens that look very sad right now will come back from the roots, particularly lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard, mustards. Winter broccoli, cauliflower, kale and other cabbage family plants may have dead lower leaves and dead patches on their younger (hardier) leaves. If the youngest leaves in the centre of a plant are still crisp and the plant stem is intact, then they plants will likely grow new leaves and produce a crop this spring. Some of them will not make it if there is an injury that allows rot to get into the stem. Your garlic is undoubtedly okay: those little green shoots are very hardy and even if the tips are nipped by cold, they grow fine. There is one other source of winter damage and that is salt injury from the runoff from sidewalks and driveways that were salted during icy weather. Where salty water runs onto plants, it damages or kills them (after all, salt is a herbicide). New subscribers might also want to review last month's message, Dec. 19, for other notes on winter survival: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

Pruning: Start any time working on fruit trees, grape vines and fruit bushes with the aim of being finished by the end of February. There are several fungal diseases and a bacterial disease that are easily spread on pruning tools so keep up good sanitation practices. Prune trees only on a dry day and if you don't see any cankers or knots in a tree, sterilize your tools before you move to the next tree. If you are pruning a tree that has European canker (on apples), black knot (on plums, cherries) or bacterial canker (on cherries, peaches), then sterilize your pruners after EVERY cut (photos of all of these diseases are on my web site to help you ID the problem <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/branch.html#155>). You can dip pruners in bleach solution (1 part bleach: 9 parts water; hydrogen peroxide bleach is fine) or by dipping or wiping the pruners in rubbing alcohol. I have 2 pruners so when working on my old apple tree that has had European canker in the past, I leave one pruner standing in a plastic bottle of disinfectant while

using the other pruner, then switch the tools with each cut. Bacterial canker is so common on cherries and peaches and so infective in wet weather in winter and spring that I wonder if anyone should risk dormant pruning those trees. If your peach or cherry trees are growing vigorously (several feet per year), then you can skip dormant pruning and just prune them on a dry day in July to early August. Not only does summer pruning reduce vigour, but it is the best timing to avoid spreading bacterial canker.

Germination tests: Seedy Saturdays have started around the region and mail order seed houses are sending orders so it is time to figure out what seeds you need for this coming season. If you are not sure whether seeds you still have will be any good this year, you can do a quick germination test to find out if you need fresh seed. Fold a few of the seeds you want to test into a moist paper towel, put it into a plastic bag or container and hold it in a very warm place. Check daily to make sure the paper stays moist and to look for tiny white root tips poking out of the seeds. Many seeds germinate enough to see the root tips in 2-4 days; a few, such as onions, take a little longer. If you have lots of seeds, shake out 20 or so to test germinate, but if you don't have many left, you can test 5 seeds. Count the number of seeds that germinate compared to the total to find out the proportion of seeds that are still viable. If less than half the seeds germinate, plan on getting new seeds. Some seeds last for years if stored in good conditions (I just checked some 2007 kale seed I saved that still has 98% germination). Other seeds don't last long: Parsnips are only good for 1, possibly 2, years; sweet corn, onions, leeks, shallots are good for 2, sometimes 3 years, but after that things go downhill fast. Beans, peas, cabbage family, squash seeds should be good for at least 5 years. Seeds that are stored in cool, very dry conditions, keep the longest. Dampness is the enemy of seeds so never keep seeds in garden sheds, outbuildings, damp basements, etc.

Seed is not cheap and you can keep seeds for years longer by storing them correctly. I sometime put bulk seed in the freezer to store it (in an airtight container), but that is for long-term storage, rather than seasonal use. Any time you take seeds out of a freezer, you must allow them to warm up to room temperature before you open the container to avoid having condensation form on the package. A much better solution for the seeds you are going to use during the current growing season is to keep your seeds in an airtight container along with a dehumidifier. You can buy a re-usable 'Silica Gel Dehumidifier' from Lee Valley Tools <https://www.leevalley.com/> to put into the container with your seeds to keep them dry. These small metal containers filled with silica gel can be heated in the oven to dry out the crystals so they last for years (I have had mine for 15 years). They sell two sizes: you only need a small one (\$11.50) for a toolbox-sized bin of seeds.

Seedy Saturdays are in full swing all around the region and I urge you to visit one or more near you—they are lots of fun, most have speakers or workshops and they all feature local seed and gardening suppliers. For a list of all Seedy Saturdays with contact information see: <https://www.seeds.ca/events>

My Upcoming Talks:

Feb. 4: Qualicum Beach Seedy Saturday. "Flourishing Food Gardens All Year Round" 10:30-12:00
Qualicum Beach Civic Centre, 747 Jones St, Qualicum Beach. More info:

<https://www.qbseedysaturday.ca/>

Feb. 12: 25th Anniversary Celebration for Russell Nursery. "Grow Your Best Organic Garden Ever". 1:30-4:00. Venue: Kildara Farms, 11293 Chalet Rd, North Saanich. Reserve your space: 250-656-0384 or russellnurseryoffice@telus.net

Feb 18: Victoria Seedy Saturday. "Vegetable Root Diseases: Getting to the Root of the Problem" 12:00-1:00 at the Victoria Conference Centre, 720 Douglas St. More info:

<https://www.facebook.com/VictoriaSeedySaturday/>