

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Last winter greens, squash, seed savers

Winter crops:

With the summer winding down, you can still seed winter lettuce and corn salad this week. Be sure to choose the hardy lettuce varieties. If you haven't tried corn salad you must give it a try this year. A small plant with rounded leaves, it is extremely cold hardy, stands up to snow and ice and the slugs don't eat it--and it excellent in place of lettuce in a winter salad. Corn salad grows quickly and does well broadcast over the soil under summer crops, such as cucumber, squash, tomatoes. Sown by the end of the month, it will be a good size by the time you take out the spent vines later in the fall (cut off the vines, rather than pulling them to avoid disturbing the corn salad roots). Or just sow it anywhere you have some space in the garden.

If you can find transplants, there is still a reasonable chance of growing decent sized plants of kale, spinach and Swiss chard if you get those seedlings into the ground this minute. Also purple sprouting broccoli and winter cauliflower seedlings. Beware the grocery store plants: Thrifties on SSI is selling good kale seedlings, but once again is selling summer lettuce and Snowball cauliflower, which will certainly disappoint you as they are not winter varieties.

Summer crop notes:

If you are growing winter squash, no fruit setting this late will mature. To make sure the ones that are already half grown on the plant do mature, it is a good idea to pick off all the smaller fruit and to pinch off the tip of the vine so the energy goes into the fruit already set. Summer squash will continue setting fruit and growing to edible size into October, but winter squash are running of out time.

Tips for speeding the ripening of tomatoes: This last burst of heat will certainly help. Pruning out all suckers and pruning back the tips also helps. I also learned recently that cutting back the watering will force early ripening as well. If you haven't rigged up some way to keep rain off your tomato plants by now, do it before this weekend's predicted showers arrive as we are now definitely in late blight season and the tangled vines are increasingly susceptible.

A note for Salt Spring Gardeners: the SSI Garden Club is holding a **Seed Saving Workshop**, Sunday August 29 from 10 am until noon. Presenter: Mark Stevens of Echo Valley Organics who is a passionate seed saver with many years of experience. Cost: \$10.00 Registration required: Contact susandann@shaw.ca

You can read all of my previous messages on the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website:
www.saltspringenergystrategy.org

For those of you inquiring about buying my books or my talk and gardening course schedule, see my web site: www.lindagilkeson.ca