

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

February 7, 2010

What's shredding the Kale?

The Return of the Cutworms:

With the warmest January on record behind us, the leafy greens and winter broccoli are growing fast! And many people are noticing that something is chewing on the leaves of these plants, yet no obvious culprit is in sight. While slugs may be contributing, it is quite likely that the worst damage is from the invasive climbing cutworm, known in the adult stage as the Large Yellow Underwing Moth. The moth has brown front wings and bright apricot orange hind-wings. The eggs were laid late last summer and the caterpillars feed from fall through early spring, whenever there is a warm spell. The caterpillars are extremely cold tolerant anyway, but this warm winter was a picnic for them. They climb up plants to feed at night, then hide during the day at the base of plants in the mulch or top layer of soil. When they are done growing, the cutworm changes into a reddish-brown, bullet-shaped pupa (over an inch long) which stays in the soil until the moth emerges in June.

To search and destroy:

During the day, look around the base of plants, pulling back the mulch and shaking it out a bit to dislodge the caterpillars. The ones in my garden are not quite an inch long at this time so they still have a lot of growing (meaning leaf eating!) to do. These cutworms grow to be nearly 1-1/2 inches or 4 cm long. Their colour ranges from pale beige to bright green and they curl up in a typical C-shape when disturbed. It doesn't take many of these to do a lot of visible damage so you may only find one or two caterpillars for every 4 or 5 damaged kale plants you look under.

You can also go out in the evening with a flashlight and find them on foliage on warm nights (i.e., over 8 degrees C). They will be out in the rain too, so a warm, rainy night is good hunting. Look for them on leafy greens, leaves of carrots, winter broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage, even on leek foliage as reported by one gardener.

NEW Second Edition of Year Around Harvest

Well, I got it done and it just came off the press--an updated 2010 edition of my winter gardening manual: *Year Around Harvest: Winter Gardening on the Coast*. Same format and price (\$15) as the first edition, but with updated cultivars, resources and a bit of additional material in a few places where I felt there had been a lack. For more info about it, places to buy it and how to mail order it from me see my web site: www.lindagilkeson.ca

For info on my books or to check my schedule for talks and presentations in your area see:
www.lindagilkeson.ca

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