

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

January 31, 2010

Starting leeks; heading for Seedy Saturday

Well it's official: The warmest January on record - and I have the purple sprouting broccoli to prove it. This year, Extra Early Rudolph purple sprouting broccoli was able to excel at being truly extra early. In most years, March is when we would expect to start picking on Salt Spring. What a difference from last year! Although the cold spell in December damaged greens, such as Swiss chard and lettuce, in colder gardens, you should start seeing them sending up new leaves about now.

Working in the garden this week I was startled to see how advanced buds are on tree fruit (somehow January went right by me this year...). So if you haven't started, it is time to work on pruning your fruit trees--especially peaches, plums and cherries that have the earliest flowers.

Seeds and seeding: I find that a mid-February seeding date (indoors) is good timing for producing large, tender leeks for next winter's harvest. February is also a good time to start onion seeds, again in flats indoors. I start red torpedo and sweet Spanish onions as well as special storage varieties that are not available later in the spring as onion sets. To grow good seedlings indoors you need to provide the highest light levels you can manage. If you don't have special equipment, such as a greenhouse or indoor grow-lights, this means a south-facing window that receives full sun or a sunroom. If you are starting seeds on a windowsill, the individual pots or flats need to be right up against the window. As soon as the weather permits, move seedling trays out during the day to a coldframe or a sunny, warm spot outdoors. You will need to bring them indoors at night to keep them warm. It works fine to sow leeks and onion seedlings quite densely in small flats (I recycle 4x6 inch plastic trays or use a milk carton on it's side). That way, the whole garden's worth of seedlings fits into a couple of containers on my one brightest windowsill.

While you are buying and trading seeds for your summer garden, get the seeds for the crops you want to sow later in the summer for winter harvests. It is a good idea to obtain as many of those varieties now, when seed supplies are at their best. In mid-summer, supplies of seeds are often low and many of the best varieties are sold out by then [just a couple a years ago there wasn't a carrot seed to be found for sale on Salt Spring in July]. So check out your local Seedy Saturday, coming very, very soon to a venue near you.

Here is the list of 2010 Seedy Saturdays on the BC coast (all are 10:00 to 3:00 pm, except as noted)

Feb 6: Qualicum Beach Civic Centre. Schedule: <http://www.qbseedysaturday.com/> Contact: joy.smith@mac.com

Feb. 13: Lilloet Friendship Centre

Feb 13: Salt Spring Is. Farmer's Institute

Feb 20: Victoria Conference Centre <http://www.jamesbaymarket.com/seedysaturday/seedysaturday.htm>

Feb. 27: VanDusen Botanical Gardens, Vancouver 10:00-4:00. Contact: NTL234@telus.net

Feb. 27: Sooke, SEAPARC Leisure Complex, 2168 Phillips Road 10:00-2:00 . Contact:

jessicaboquist@gmail.com

March 6: Courtenay, Florence Filberg Centre. Contact: kapteink@shaw.ca

March 13: Powell River, Arbutus Room, Recreation Complex. Contact: kevin.wilson100@shaw.ca

March 13: Cobble Hill: Cobble Hill Hall. Contact: go.mum@shaw.ca

April 10: Surrey, Stewart Farm 11:00-3:00 Contact: 604-591-4789

Head for your local event to buy seeds, see demos and talks. I will be speaking at 7:00 pm on Friday Feb. 6 and also 10:30 Saturday morning at the Qualicum Beach Seedy Saturday; also at 12:00 at the Salt Spring Seedy Saturday.

More information on most of these is available on the Seeds of Diversity calendar:

<http://www.seeds.ca/ev/events.php>

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

www.lindagilkeson.ca

PS: My 2010 Year Around Harvest courses on Salt Spring and at Glendale Gardens are full for the year.

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

www.saltspringenergystrategy.org