

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Cold alert! Cover the veggies

Head-up everyone: If the extreme cold forecast for later this week materializes, it could be unusually damaging to overwintered vegetables because it is coming so late in the winter. After long periods of warmer weather and several balmy days, plants have started to grow and lose their cold hardiness. Rather than risking the rest of your leeks, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, etc. you might want to harvest the last of these crops before it gets cold again. Prepare to cover with plastic or mulch right over the top of chard, spinach, lettuce and other salad greens. They are usually damaged and often killed when temperatures drop below -5 degrees C unless they are covered--and in some parts of our region, it is currently forecast to drop below -8 by Saturday. I plan to cover my purple sprouting broccoli and winter cauliflower plants with a couple of sheets of plastic as these are now beginning to form heads and such cold will really damage them. While you are at it, check the thickness of mulches insulating beds of root crops and add more if needed (or dig up the remaining crop and store in the refrigerator).

The very early cold last November caused quite a bit of cold injury because it arrived before plants and trees were fully dormant and hardened off--and now we have this very late cold spell as a bookend to another unpredictable winter. If you have overwintered artichoke plants successfully so far, take care to cover the crowns well during this cold spell as they have also started growing and may be killed. Same goes for the half-hardy herbs, such as rosemary and bay laurel. I will be wrapping mine up in plastic and old blankets to get them through this week.

Garlic shoots poking above mulches right now should be fine (and don't worry about your emerging spring flower bulbs, either) as they are quite hardy.

Meanwhile, if you are growing your own seedlings, now is the time to sow leeks, as well as onions and shallots from seed (indoors). It is also time to sow celery and celeriac indoors as these tiny seedlings take a long time to grow to transplant size.

For info on my books or to check my 2011 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