

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

August 9, 2012

Last chance to fill every space

With that brief but brutal heat wave over, conditions are perfect to finish filling the garden with winter crops. If you haven't done it, now is the time to seed spinach, hardy lettuce and the smaller, quick growing greens (arugula, Chinese cabbage, leaf mustards, leaf radish.) For bigger plants, including kales and Swiss chard your best bet now is to buy started plants because it is too late to grow large enough plants from seed for a useful winter crop. I hate to say it, but we are running out of growing season, with days noticeably shorter and cool weather of fall right around the corner, SO don't wait to plant these last crops.

For Salt Springers: Foxglove Farm & Garden Supply (Atkins Rd.) has in a great selection of good quality seedlings, some they grew in their own nursery: Kales, Mizuna, Komatsuna, Swiss chard, hardy lettuces, Purple leaf mustard, purple sprouting broccoli (including the 'Red Spear', which has been consistently the most productive PSB in my garden), 'Galleon' cauliflower, etc. There are also a few seedlings still at the Chorus Frog Farm stand on Rainbow Road.

Unfortunately, some suppliers continue to put out summer varieties for August planting so be sure to look for winter hardy varieties when buying. Grocery stores are usually the worst offenders, but I hope that gardeners who see the 'wrong stuff' being sold anywhere will mention it to the retailer. While any kale, spinach, chard and most Chinese greens are fine for overwintering, stay away from summer lettuce, broccoli and cauliflower (such as 'Snowball'). The best cauliflower and broccoli to plant now are the overwintering varieties, such as purple sprouting broccoli, 'Galleon' & 'Purple Cape' cauliflower, and broccoli raab. Readers with particularly sheltered gardens and those farther south in Washington can get away with planting green sprouting broccoli (e.g., 'Italian Sprouting'), which is a hardier summer broccoli.

I am sure you can find open spaces to plant in garden beds where early crops have finished. But also look for small gaps where individual plants have been removed (such as heads of cauliflower or lettuce, rows of radishes or early carrots). Crop rotation is an important consideration for cabbage family crops due to root maggots and soil borne diseases, but you can stick in these low risk plants anywhere: spinach, lettuce, chard, endive, radicchio.

New plantings at this time of year need babying in the bright sun, which quickly dries out seedbeds. Shade seed beds until they germinate and keep on top of watering until the plants are established. If there is another unusually hot spell, shade young plants in midday to get them through it as they are easily burned.

Tent caterpillar update: Yes, those shiny silvery grey patches on the branches of apples trees are the new generation of eggs. The moths have been laying eggs for the last month, but the eggs won't hatch until next spring.

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2013 Year Round Harvest courses:

For Salt Spring gardeners, I am now taking names for my 2013 gardening course offered through the SS Garden Club. Classes run once a month starting in January. If you are interested, let me know, so I can hold a spot for you as the class fills quickly.

I offer the same at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific in Victoria and they are also taking names for next year's class now. For more info, see: <http://hcp.ca/commed-year-round-harvest>

For info on my books or to check my 2012 & 2013 schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes 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