

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

July 20, 2012

Winter greens, winter squash, garlic rust

I was pulling out the spent vines of early peas this morning, figuring out where the rest of the crops for winter will go and just realized it is time to sow leafy greens!

There are many hardy leafy greens, such as kale, Swiss chard, leaf beet (AKA perpetual spinach, a type of chard with a finer stem), collards, Chinese cabbage and other Asian greens, mustard spinach (Komatsuna), mustard greens (purple and green), leaf radish, leaf turnip (mizuna). If you already have kale and chard in the garden from earlier plantings, these will overwinter fine--but you might want to grow some additional plants for winter harvests. Since growth stops in the winter, having a larger area of these leafy greens will enable you to keep harvesting through the months when plants are not replacing leaves. Of course, in the spring, when growth starts again, you will have greens coming out your ears.....

Leafy greens fit in nicely after the early peas and lettuce are finished, after garlic is harvested (which most people will have done by now) and in any other spots where a crop is finished or failed (e.g., eaten by rabbits/slugs/pillbugs....sigh). It is getting too late to plant carrots, but if you got onto seeding today, you could have nice beets for this winter, also daikon or winter radish.

On Salt Spring, a good selection of seeds are available at Foxglove Nursery, including West Coast Seeds, Salt Spring Seeds, Eagleridge Seeds and McKenzie seeds.

If you didn't sow your own purple sprouting broccoli, winter cauliflower and winter cabbage, you can buy started plants to set out. Right now Chorus Frog Farm stand (on Rainbow Road) has some excellent quality plants for winter harvests left: purple sprouting broccoli, winter cauliflower and cabbages, as well as kale, Swiss chard, and other greens. Foxglove nursery will have plants in early August.

Squash notes: While you might have plenty of summer squash flowing into the kitchen now, keep an eye on your winter squash to make sure the flowers are setting fruit. Winter squash fruit need a long growing season to mature properly and our season is too short, bees too scarce and weather too unpredictable to let nature takes its course. For all but the smallest fruited varieties (e.g., Festival, Delicata), vines should have fruit set by early August. With our cool summers, it is a good idea to only allow plants to keep 2 maturing fruit per plant; remove later fruit to allow the vines to put all their energy into ripening the earlier squash. If your vines need some 'help' in the fertility department, check each morning for flowers. Pick a male flower (the one with the yellow dust in the centre) and dab the pollen onto the centre of the female flowers (the ones with the miniature fruit at the base of the flower). For more on the finer points of squash pollination, see my July 1, 2011 message:

<http://www.saltspringenergystrategy.org/docs/Winter%20Gardening%202011%20-%20July%201.pdf>

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Garlic and leek rusts: Sadly rusts on *Alliums* are now widespread in the region, with gardens all over reporting infected garlic, leeks and occasionally other onions and chives. Research in California shows there are several types of Allium rust. One type infects garlic, onions and chives and a different type infects leeks, elephant garlic (actually a kind of leek) and garlic, but not onions or chives (go figure!). You may be interested in reading more in this article on pg. 2 of:

http://vric.ucdavis.edu/pdf/county%20newsletter_NR/MontereyCropNotes_newsletter_2011_JanFeb.pdf

For those with infected garlic, you might have harvested a nearly normal or only slightly reduced crop. Destroy all the foliage (don't compost), but keep the bulbs: they should be fine to eat, store and even to plant this fall since the rust apparently doesn't spread on the bulbs. The picture for infected leeks, chives and perennial onions is more dire because those plants should all be removed from the garden by fall (sooner if you can bear to do it) so there is no foliage for the rust to overwinter upon. This will help break the chain of infection, both in your garden and for other's gardens as spores spread widely on the wind.

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