

# Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

March 7, 2012

## Chitting potatoes and pre-sprouting peas

Well, I wonder if the season is warming up enough for early peas and potatoes?

Sometime later this month, some you will likely want to try putting in a few early potatoes. In preparation, I always do the time honoured practice known as chitting: set the (uncut) seed potatoes on a sunny windowsill for a couple of weeks to develop stubby, dark green sprouts. If you are cutting up larger seed potatoes before planting, don't do it until a day or two before you plant. This gives time for the cut surfaces on the chitted potatoes to seal over, but isn't long enough to shrivel the cut chunks.

I will be starting the first planting of peas seeds indoors later this week. Even though they can germinate (slowly!) at low temperatures, the best germination temperature for peas is actually 24oC. Starting the early planting indoors in vermiculite on a bright, sunny windowsill works beautifully. I find I can fit about 30 pea seeds into a 1-litre milk carton filled with vermiculite (lay the container on the long side and cut out the top side to make a big container); be sure to punch some drain holes in the bottom. There is enough food in the seed itself to sustain the seedlings for a couple of weeks so they should be ready to set out by the end of the month. And don't worry about separating the roots--they are surprisingly wiry and easy to disentangle for planting. Meanwhile, I will rake the mulch off the future pea bed and cover it with clear plastic to help warm the soil. [Yikes! I had better get this year's garden plan done....]

**Seeding indoors:** Time to start peppers and some people will have started their tomatoes indoors by now. There is still time to started leeks and onions from seed too, but get onto it as soon as possible. Unless your tomatoes and peppers are going directly into a greenhouse in April or early May, be prepared to keep moving the plants on to larger pots before the roots get crowded. It will be months before they can go outdoors.

**For Salt Springers:** I am presenting a workshop called *Troubleshooting Town Hall: Get Ready for Your 2012 Garden* for Transition Salt Spring on Saturday morning, March 24. It is open to everyone; admission by donation. Time 10:00 - 12:00 at the Lion's Hall, 103 Bonnet Ave. If you plan to attend and have a particular question you want to be sure I address, send me an e-mail ahead of time (with photos, if possible). For more see my web site.

**For Victorians:** I am giving the same workshop on Sunday March 18th, 1:00-4:00 at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific, 505 Quayle Road. There is more information on my web site and on the HCP web site. Admission for HCP members \$25.00/Non-HCP Members \$35.00. Call to register: 250-479-6162

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**Other gardening courses:** It seems that quite a few people were turned away from my overfilled gardening courses this year, but there are still some one-day courses with space left for participants: I have classes scheduled in **Duncan** at VIU (March 17 and May 12), for the City of **Richmond** (April 21) and at the **UBC Botanical Garden** (May 5). Details and contact info on my web site.

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For info on my books or to check my 2012 schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area see: [www.lindagilkeson.ca](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca)

No need to copy and save all these messages: you can read all of my previous messages on the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website: [www.saltspringenergystrategy.org](http://www.saltspringenergystrategy.org)