

**Winter Gardening Newsletter
by Linda Gilkeson**

**Linda's List for Oct. 11, 2012
Garlic, Pears, Leaves**

I have been remiss in reminding that it is time to plant garlic. So, if you haven't done so, do get to that by the end of October. Later planted garlic will manage, but it may not grow as large as it would if you got it in this month. Don't be concerned if you see green shoots over the next few months (and don't be alarmed if you don't!) because garlic sprouts are extremely hardy.

Fruit: It is time to pick winter pears (Bosc, Anjou, Comice, Seckel) and kiwi fruit. These are picked before they are ripe for best quality. Pears are ready to pick when you lift them upward gently and the stem snaps cleanly off the twig. Look closely and you will see there is a seam, like a fine line, between the branch twig and the fruit stem--that's where the stem should break cleanly, leaving a stem on the fruit. Store winter pears in a refrigerator immediately or under the coldest conditions you can manage. Commercial growers actually store winter pears at -1 degree C for the best quality, so get yours as cold as possible in the back of the fridge. Winter pears finish ripening after you bring them out of cold storage and hold them at room temperature for a few days.

Some apples are still not ready to pick. When they are ready to go, they come off with a gentle tug. If you need to pull hard to get the fruit off, or if it breaks the twig from the branch, that's too much force--just give them a little longer.

Mulching time! As the leaves are finally starting to fall, be sure to collect as much as you can. You will need a lot of leaves to mulch the garden for winter and it is great to have a big stockpile of leaves to use next summer as a mulch or to make into compost this fall.

Start with mulching in between plants, being sure to apply mulch deep enough to cover the 'shoulders' of carrots, beets, celeriac, parsnips, turnips and other roots. Later, when it gets really cold, usually some time in December, I put another thick layer of leaves over beds of carrots and other roots, covering the foliage entirely in the case of carrots and turnips or just leaving the tallest leaves sticking up for beets and celeriac. For tall plants, such as overwintering broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, leeks, kale, etc. aim for at least a 10 cm layer of mulch covering the soil between plants. More is better because leaves will pack down in the rain. Also be sure to mulch the garlic bed (the sprouts will be able to poke through) and mulch any empty beds to control weeds and reduce erosion over the winter.

This is not the time for dense or soggy mulch materials (such as lawn clippings, half-digested compost) because we want insulation. Leaves are ideal, but straw, bracken fern and other stiffer, fluffier materials are fine too. Don't worry about the kind of leaves--use what you can get. The only exception is black walnut leaves because some plants, such as tomatoes, are sensitive to compounds in the leaves. I use leaves whole, even the largest, big leaf maple leaves. If you have a variety of yard leaves, mixing softer leaves, such as tree fruit leaves with some stiffer leaves, such as from oak or Arbutus, makes a good winter mulch. If you live where people collect leaves into bags for pick up you are fortunate, indeed! Just wait for your neighbors to do the work and then make off with the bags. Leaves stockpiled for next summer's mulch can stay in the bags all winter to keep them dry so they don't decompose.

PS: The rain really is coming now--do mind those cabbages so they don't split. For more info see my message of Sept. 29th or look in the archives at: www.saltspringenergystrategy.org

For info on my books or to check my 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