

**Winter Gardening Newsletter  
by Linda Gilkeson**

**Linda's List for Sept. 29, 2012  
When the rains come....**

The sprinkles are coming down as I write, which reminds me to remind you to watch out for splitting cabbage heads after heavy rain. Most at risk of splitting are fast growing cabbages, such as Savoy cultivars, and any that have quite large heads by now. If you have been stingy with irrigation water this summer, cabbages are even more at risk of cracking when they get a sudden soaking.

SO, if we start off with a heavy rain after such a long dry period, you might want to take steps to slow down the cabbage by cutting or breaking some of the fine feeder roots. You can take a spade and make a single cut down into the soil on two sides of the cabbage, about 20 cm out from the stem. Or grab the head and lift and twist it just enough to tear some fine roots--about an eighth of a turn does it. This also stops fully mature cabbage from getting over-mature and splitting during the winter. Heads that split will quickly rot, so harvest cracked heads and store them in the refrigerator.

Some of you may still have late prune plums ripening on the tree and these can also split after heavy rain. It is a good idea to pick as many plums as possible within 12 hour after a heavy rain (they will continue to ripen indoors), before they get a chance to take up too much water too fast. Other stone fruit would also split, but I doubt if anyone has anything still on trees this late. Apples and winter pears, which are still on the trees, don't seem to be prone to splitting.

And one last note--when the rains come, time to get in any last squash, pick seed heads or pods you might be saving (such as beans) that might go mouldy.

Pinching Brussels sprouts: It is time to pinch out the top cluster of leaves of Brussels sprout plants so they get to work filling out the sprouts. [Hmm, I seem to be advocating a lot of violence to cabbage crops in this newsletter!] If your plants already have well-developed sprouts, this isn't essential, though you will find the sprouts at the top of the plant will fill out quickly if you do pinch the tips. If you don't see any sign of sprouts forming along the stem yet, not to worry--you will probably see a fairly quick response after you pinch the tips.

Taking off covers: If your carrots or other plants were covered to keep out carrot rust fly, cabbage root maggots or leaf miners you can safely uncover now.

The 'ProtectNet' insect mesh I tried out this year worked beautifully, providing a better carrot crop than I have had under floating row covers (European gardeners have had several brands of bug netting for years). The distributor in Canada for this very sturdy product is changing suppliers and will let me know when they have sorted out what brand they will distribute in Canada. I will pass the information along so you can 'bug' your local garden centre to stock it for gardeners.

2013 Year Round Harvest courses:

Salt Spring: There are still some places left in my 2013 Salt Spring Island course, which is sponsored by the SS Garden Club. Classes run on a Thursday evening once a month, starting in January and continuing until October. Cost is \$185 for 10 sessions. If you are interested or want more information on dates and topics covered, let me know.

Victoria: I offer the same 10-month course at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific in Victoria on one Sunday afternoon per month. They are taking names for next year's class now. For more info, see: <http://hcp.ca/commed-year-round-harvest>