

# Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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## Move mulch, start seeds, learn beekeeping

**Mulches:** Here are some mulch manipulations you might want to do this month:

**Uncover:** If you haven't done so already, pull the mulch back from garlic shoots, leafy greens, strawberries, artichokes and other plants that need to see the light of day to let the soil warm up.

**Cover:** In contrast, it would be good to renew a thick layer of leaves or straw over any remaining carrots, beets, parsnips, celeriac and other roots still in the garden. We don't want them to know it is spring, because then they will start to grow again using the sugars in the roots to send up a seed stalk. Right now the soil is cold enough that a good insulating layer of leaves completely covering over the plants will keep them in good condition. I usually dig all remaining roots by the end of March to make sure I get them before their flavour starts to change.

**Starting Seeds Indoors:** If you are going to grow your own seedlings this year, now is a good time to start seeds of leeks, onions, shallots and other alliums from seed. Also celery and celeriac, as these tiny seedlings take a long time to grow to transplant size.

Seeds are best germinated on bottom heat, such as a special seed starting heat mat, or any other really warm spot in your house. They don't need sun until they germinate, but as soon as the tiniest bit of green shoot shows, move the pots to the brightest, sunniest south windowsill you have or under grow lights if you have such a set up. On sunny days, a little later in the spring when it is warmer, you can put the seedlings out in a cold frame or unheated greenhouse during the day (but bring them back indoors every night).

For leeks to harvest over next winter, look for really hardy cultivars such 'Unique' (Full Circle Seeds: <http://www.fullcircleseeds.com>), 'St. Victor', 'Durabel' and others. There are other leeks for fall harvest, but they won't survive colder winters.

You can start all kinds of onions from seed that you can't get from nurseries as seedlings or onion sets (those tiny little onion bulbs). I like big sweet onions (such as 'Walla Walla', 'Sweet Spanish', 'Ailsa Craig') and Italian red torpedo onions ('Tropeana Lunga'). I also like to grow the big shallots (such as 'Ed's Red', 'Ambition') from seed too, so am starting all of these this week.

**Do you want to learn beekeeping?** Salt Spring Island Beekeepers is offering courses by Brenda Jager, Master Beekeeper: A 15-hour Beginner Beekeeping Course, Feb. 22-24; and a 6-hour Intermediate Beekeeping Course, April 10 & May 8. For more info and to register, see: [www.ssibeekeepers.com](http://www.ssibeekeepers.com) under "Membership" and "Courses".

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See [www.lindagilkeson.ca](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca) for info on my buying books, to see the colour photos from the new edition of *Natural Insect, Weed & Disease Control*, or to check my 2013 schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area.

You can read all of my previous messages on the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website: [www.saltspringenergystrategy.org](http://www.saltspringenergystrategy.org)