

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

May 2, 2013

Heat Alert

Well, this is a change! A very warm spell of weather is forecast to build this weekend and early next week, with the potential for record-breaking high temperatures. While these highs would be most welcome in June, such temperatures right now can kill tiny seedlings. The surface layer of soil gets quite hot in direct sunshine and newly sown seeds can literally cook. The roots of small plants, which are still close to the surface, can also be badly damaged. Think of such unseasonal hot spells as the summer-time equivalent of our winter-time Arctic outbreaks: they don't last long, but can kill plants if you don't take some simple measures to temporarily protect plants.

SO, this is a reminder to be on top of the situation and be ready to cover or shade beds as needed to protect them during the hottest days. Ideally, a shade of some kind of latticework is dandy because plants still gets some light, but in an emergency, sheets of newspaper or fabric, supported above young plants or laid down on seedbeds are just fine. The essential thing is to prevent overheating. Being low on light for a few days will slow the growth of seedlings, whereas sunscald can kill them. Other shade covers I use: those black lattice seedling trays, turned upside down or plant pots turned over, or set closely beside, to shade individual plants. The best protection for the roots of established seedlings is a mulch to insulate the soil, but it is pretty early to be mulching (is the rain and cold weather over, I wonder?). However, I don't want to risk losses so I am going to sprinkle a light leaf mulch over the soil in the onion and leek beds today.

On a similar subject, if you have been growing your own veggie starts under lights or in a greenhouse, be sure to get them used to full sunlight gradually. Leaves need time to form the protective waxes that protect from UV and if suddenly put out in the sun too long will sunburn. Such injury shows up in the week after the injury and looks like biscuit-coloured patches on leaves, leaf margins and occasionally on stems (in that case the seedlings will die). To see an example of what that and other sunscald injuries looks like, see: Sunburn on cucumber seedling (pg. 175 in the book) <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/disorders.html>

So get them used to direct sun, starting with an hour the first day, a little longer the second day, continuing to lengthen exposure daily.

In the event that really hot weather does materialize, sunscald injury may occur on established perennials (such as rhododendrons, acuba, citrus) because leaves are not used to the heat so early in the season. The injury may take several weeks to show up, therefore can be mistaken for damage from some other cause. Scroll down the page on my web page link given above to see examples.

Note: The UBC class this weekend is full, but I will be giving 3 workshops in Richmond on May 11th: 'Beautiful Gardens Without Pesticides'; 'Attracting Pollinators To Your Garden'; 'Healthy Lawns: Work Less and Enjoy More'. See my website for details or register at: www.richmond.ca/register

See www.lindagilkeson.ca for info on buying my books and to see colour photos of pests and diseases 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