

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Mulching, staking, covers

I hate to be too gloomy, but any day the weather could turn really nasty and cold, instead of being merely gray and wet. So it is time to make sure the vegetable garden is safely tucked up for winter.

Mulching: If you haven't finished putting a layer of mulch around plants and over the soil, now is the time to get that finished so that everything has some insulation. Try to put on a layer a couple of inches thick using unshredded leaves, straw or other fluffy material (you don't want material that will pack down in the rain for this). When there is a forecast of really cold, freezing weather, I add another 2-4 inch layer of mulch around everything and completely covering over the tops of carrots. The more erect leaves of beets and celeriac will stick up through the mulch, so make sure the 'shoulders' of the roots and the bulb of kohlrabi are well covered up. Stuff a good layer of mulch around and between the above-ground plants, such as leeks, leafy greens and cabbage family plants.

Staking: Tall and top-heavy plants such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and Brussels sprouts need support to prevent plants from being broken or uprooted by wind or the weight of wet snow. Drive in 3 or 4 stakes, branches or bamboo sticks around each stem or carefully slip a tomato cage over smaller plants.

Plan for covers: If you don't have your leafy greens under plastic tunnels or in coldframes for the winter, make sure you have a stockpile of plastic sheets or tarps and a supply of rocks, bricks or boards to hold them down. That way you will be prepared if/when we get a sudden Arctic outbreak (bringing temperatures below -5 degrees C) that would damage leaves. I don't worry about kale, parsley or corn salad, but lettuce, spinach, chard and others will appreciate covers if it gets that cold. For temporary covers you don't have to bother with supporting the plastic on hoops or frames (though it would be a good idea if you want to bother). I used to worry about plants getting squashed with the weight of rain on the plastic, but have found that even flattened plants pop up again a few days after the plastic is off.

Upcoming events:

Salt Spring, Nov. 30: Anniversary birthday bash for the Salt Spring Abbatoir. Celebrate a notable achievement in wrenching back control of local meat production after provincial regulations nearly put island livestock producers out of business. The evening includes a dinner of local foods, live entertainment, cash bar, auction, magic and other delights. 6PM – 10PM at the Farmers' Institute. Tickets: \$35 from Salt Spring Books or by email: plan2farm@gmail.com

Year Round Harvest 2014 at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific: The first class is full, but enough people have registered to run a second class. Classes are held on a Sunday afternoon, once a month from January to October. For more information, see: <http://hcp.ca/commed-year-round-harvest/> Note: the dates shown on the web site are for the first class, which is now full. Most of the dates for the second class are next Sunday; the HCP office will provide the actual schedule.

Gift books: If you are thinking of giving my gardening books to anyone this year for Christmas (hint, hint!), I need to receive your order no later than Friday, November 29. To order books, see: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/books.html>

2014 is booked solid already! Check my speaking schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area: www.lindagilkeson.ca

All of my previous messages are archived on my web site under the Gardening Tips page and are also available through the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website: www.saltspringenergystrategy.org