

# Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

[www.lindaquilkeson.ca](http://www.lindaquilkeson.ca)

## April 29, 2014: Warm Weather & Pea Leaf Weevils

A brief, but unusually warm, couple of days is forecast for later this week with the potential for inland areas to reach 24-26oC (nearly 80oF). Last year we had a longer heat wave during the first week of May, which damaged a lot of plants and killed germinating seeds. This week it sounds like we are only expecting a couple of days of unseasonably warm weather, but keep an eye on the forecast so you can protect seeds and seedlings from the sun if necessary.

In a heat wave the top layer of soil gets quite hot in direct sunshine and seeds can literally cook because they are so close to the surface. The roots of seedlings, also close to the surface, also fry. SO be ready to shade beds during the hot days or at least during the hottest part of the day. You can shade beds with any kind of latticework (I like to use those black plastic seedling trays with the lattice bottoms, turned upside down) or shade cloth. It is less important to let in light than it is to protect from heat, so use whatever you have on hand, such as newspaper, old bed sheets, curtain material, burlap, etc. Support the material above young plants or lay it down on the soil of seedbeds to keep it cool. Being deprived of sun for a few days will do less damage than overheating, which can be fatal. Last year some people tried to use floating row covers (such as Remy) to shade beds and fried their plants (row covers are designed to keep plants warmer). Lacy curtains from the thrift shop, on the other hand, are great....and the strange finery lends an oddly festive air to the garden...

Planting now: Many gardeners have started squash and cucumber seeds by now if they are growing their own, but it is certainly not too late if you haven't started yours yet (but do get to it this week). The most productive plants come from seedlings grown quickly (i.e., in warm conditions, bright sun and good soil) and transplanted outdoors before they experience a slowing of growth from being held too long in their pots.

I am trying again to repeat my personal best for an early zucchini harvest, achieved last year on May 18th (thanks to last May's heat wave). I started the parthenocarpic zucchini 'Partenon' (from William Dam Seed <http://www.damseeds.ca/productcart/pc/viewCategories.asp?idCategory=2171>) last month. ['Parthenocarpic' means the flowers set fruit without having to be fertilized so I don't need to wait until male and female flowers are both present--or worry about having enough bees around]. I will set out the my very large plants in the warm weather later this week, using floating row covers for cool weather, and see how it goes.

My usual timing is to set out other squash plants in mid-May and cucumbers in late May or even early June if the weather is still cool. Most cukes don't have much will to live so need really warm conditions; an exception are the delightful old open-pollinated lemon cucumbers which are vigorous and put up with more adversity (they are round and yellow, not lemon flavoured). Gardeners in the warmest areas of the coast or with inland, protected gardens should be able to set out squash a couple of weeks earlier. Tomatoes can go out outdoors in early to mid-May in protected gardens, but beware of possible late May frosts in low lying gardens and cover plants overnight if necessary.

If you haven't planted potatoes, strawberries or onion sets yet, it isn't too late, but do get at it--the selection of berry plants is diminishing at nurseries, the potato sets are sprouting and the later we plant onions, the smaller the final bulbs will be. Sow more peas (but see below), lettuce, radishes and Chinese greens, spring carrots, beets, Swiss chard can go in any time now. The few days of really warm weather this week should help warm up the soil so seeds germinate quickly.

Pea leaf weevil: Unfortunately, more gardeners are reporting chewing on the leaves of their early pea plants right now. The damage looks like tiny notches in the margins of the leaves (see: [http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/root\\_feeders.html#74](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/root_feeders.html#74) ) and is done by a tiny, grey weevil. These weevils fly very well and have been moving around the region, expanding their range. The adults only chew on leaves, but the worst damage comes from the larvae, which are tiny white grubs that feed in the roots on the nitrogen fixing nodules. The weevils also feed on broad beans, vetch and clover.

Adult weevils overwinter in plant debris and become active in March. They feed on leaves and lay eggs in the soil beside the plants from March through May. The larvae feed on the nitrogen nodules in the roots until June, then pupate for 2-3 weeks. New adults emerge in July and feed on leaves of legumes until August, but they don't lay eggs then. Where there are high number of overwintering weevils in early spring, they can seriously stunt or kill early pea seedlings and broad beans sown the previous fall or in very early spring. As the larvae eat the root nodules it deprives the plants of their nitrogen supply.

At this point, having tried several things (sprays don't help nor does covering peas with floating row covers), I think the most practical approach is to plant peas late to miss the peak of pea weevil feeding and egg-laying. The later you plant peas\* (late May and June) the less damage the plants will suffer because the roots are developing around the time weevils stop laying eggs. I routinely start peas indoors in vermiculite or Perlite (or you could use sand or a soil mix) to give them 2 to 3 weeks of growth before putting them into the garden. You can keep peas and broad beans that have been attacked growing normally by supplying a nitrogen rich fertilizer to compensate for the loss of their nitrogen fixing nodules.

If you have severely attacked pea plants in the garden right now, you could go a long way toward reducing the number of adults in the next generation by removing those peas, roots and all, and destroying them to kill larvae. Also, it would be advisable to stop using clover or vetch as a cover crop and I have been eradicating clover from around my garden area to remove an alternate food supply for the weevils.

\*For late peas, it is a good idea to sow varieties listed as resistant to pea enation mosaic virus, which can be spread by aphids in mid-summer (for a photo see: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/foilage.html#146>). EMV resistant cultivars include: snap peas ('Cascadia', 'Sugar Ann'), shelling peas ('Aladdin') and snow peas ('Oregon Giant').

For Salt Springers: Our Seed Library is open every Friday until the end of May from 12:00 to 2:00 at the Salt Spring Public Library. Sponsored by the Salt Spring Seed Sanctuary (<http://www.seedsanctuary.com/>), this is a way for you to try out seed from interesting, locally grown varieties while learning to grow your own seeds. Come, see what we have and become a member!

#### Upcoming workshops:

Saturday, May 10th: My series of workshops for the City of Richmond continues, this time held at the Thompson Community Centre. Schedule: 9:30-11:00 Beautiful Gardens without Pesticides; 11:30-1:00 Pollination, Pollinators and How to Attract Them to Your Garden; 1:30-3:00 Healthy Lawns: Work Less and Enjoy More! The workshops are free, but pre-registration is required: <http://www.richmond.ca/parksrec/about/registration.htm>

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See my web site [www.lindagilkeson.ca](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca) for hundreds of colour photos of pests and diseases to help you ID problems, to order books or check my 2014 schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area. I am totally booked for 2014, but if your group is interested in a presentation, 2015 isn't full....yet....