

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

August 29, 2014

Hot summer effects, last chance seeding

What a summer of hot, sunny days it has been! Some parts of the province have set records for the hottest summer ever recorded and most of us experienced many days of record setting heat. Since coastal gardeners are most skilled at getting warmth loving crops to produce well in a cool weather, this hot summer threw us a few curves--who knew it would get too darn hot to grow good tomatoes?

Greenback or green shoulders is a physiological disorder of tomatoes caused when the fruit is directly exposed to hot, bright sun. The heat interferes with production of lycopene (red pigments) and prevents chlorophyll (green pigments) from breaking down normally during fruit ripening. So you end up with green tissue usually around the top or 'shoulder' of the fruit that never turns red. When the fruit is cut open, you often see harder greenish or white tissue under this part of the skin. The rest of the fruit ripens normally. Although there may be some influence on this disorder from a potassium deficiency in the soil, the most common cause is that the fruit simply got too hot in the sun. Fruit well covered by leaves suffers least from this disorder. Of course tomato plants thrive in hot weather and we don't want to shade the leaves, but it might help to shade the fruit only with small squares of cloth, clipped to the stem of each tomato cluster. Also try different varieties, since some have denser foliage and are less prone to this disorder than others.

Loss of flowers: I lost a lot of potential tomatoes (and peppers) this year in my glass greenhouse due to high temperatures. If flowers drop off without fruit setting, this is usually caused when temperatures rise over 30-32°C (86-90°F); the heat sterilizes the pollen so fruit doesn't set. Same thing goes for greenhouse cucumbers: tiny little dead cucumbers strung along the vine can be a sign that it just got too hot. I had to install a fan this summer to keep the air moving in my greenhouse--it was getting over 40 degrees in there, so no surprise I lost flowers during heat waves.

Weird cauliflower: The cabbage family really does not enjoy hot weather. Cauliflower curds exhibit their discomfort by prematurely coming apart and becoming 'ricy' or distorted, often with a purplish tinge. Some refuse to head up at all or have tiny little heads. All of these cabbage family will be happier in the fall weather that is coming.

So much for some of the weird results this summer, but now that fall is here, what next?

If leaves of squash, peas, leafy greens and other plants have white dusty patches, it is powdery mildew. This is a common fungus disease right now and will continue to increase until the fall rains begin. For what it looks like, see photos on my web site: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/foilage.html#147> and more info on what to do about it in my Sept. 10, 2012 message: [The Fungi of Fall](#) .

A risk for some crops right now is, believe it or not, heavy rainfall. This is a particular problem in gardens kept short on water this summer: if there is a lot of rain over a short period, plants can take up a lot of water too quickly. Late ripening fruit such as prune plums and melons may split if we get heavy rain in the next couple of week and cabbages also may also split. Apples and pears don't seem to be at risk of splitting, but soft fruit certainly is. The best insurance against splitting fruit is keeping plants well watered before a heavy rain comes, if you can: many wells and water sources in the region are going dry right now so that may not be possible. It is ideal if natural rainfall comes in light showers over several

days, but if heavy rainfall is predicted just as your soft fruit is coming ripe, it might be best to pick it to get it off the trees or vines before the excess water hits the fruit. One year I lost a whole crop of prune plums after very heavy rain in early September--you would not believe the mess with all that fermenting, ruined fruit attracting swarms of yellowjackets.

What to plant right now: The cool and probably wet weather this weekend should make it an ideal time to transplant winter greens into any open spaces in your garden. You can still find seedlings in nurseries and farm stands or you may have your own seedlings from beds you sowed earlier in the month. It is too late to start the larger greens, such as chard and kale, from seed, but you can still sow small greens, including winter lettuce, corn salad and annual arugula right now. If you are short on garden space, these seeds can be broadcast under tomatoes, squash, corn and other summer crops and lightly raked in so as not to disturb the roots of the growing plants. By the time the tomatoes and other crops are finished, the soil will be covered with greens.

Upcoming Workshops:

Saturday, Sept. 12: City of Richmond, Cultural Centre. 10:30-12:00 Trouble Shooting Common Gardening Problems from 2014. 12:30-2:00 Smart gardening: Keys to Growing Your Most Successful Organic Garden Yet. 2:00-3:30pm Fall Lawn Care for Next Year's Beautiful Lawn. All workshops are free, but pre-registration is required: <http://www.richmond.ca/parksrec/about/registration.htm>

Sunday, Sept. 13: Metchosin, Down to Earth Gardens Nursery. 1096 Darien Place (off Happy Valley Rd). 9:30-11:30 Fall Harvest Workshop. <http://www.downtoearthgardensandnursery.com/> To register, contact: Louise Perron 250-391-9366

See my web site <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca> for hundreds of colour photos of pests and diseases to help you ID problems, to order books or check my schedule for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area. I am nearly booked up for 2015 so if you are interested in a workshop next year let me know soon.

All my previous gardening messages are archived on my web site *Gardening Tips* page: http://lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html