

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

January 10, 2014

Seeds, Sets and Saturdays

My favourite activity this time of year is reading seed catalogues, choosing new things to try, sorting my seed collection and dreaming of the best garden yet. One new thing I want to try this year is growing my own onion sets.

Onion sets (those miniature onions you buy for spring planting) are sown thickly so they stay small, then cured like storage onions and kept for planting the following spring. I used to grow my own sets many years ago, but stopped when sets became readily available in nurseries. Now I find that prices for commercial sets are high, selection is limited, they are not organically grown and there is always the risk of importing *Allium* diseases (particularly the dreaded white rot). If you want to try this yourself, get seed for onion cultivars noted for long storage and good keeping ability. Sow mid- to late May (not earlier), to give sets some exposure to long days/short nights so they make a tiny bulb. Sow densely in a very small bed, 1-2 seeds per square centimetre and don't fertilize with compost or high nitrogen amendments (e.g., alfalfa or blood meal) this year. The aim is to keep the bulbs tiny (under 1 cm/1/2 inch diameter) because larger sets readily bolt to seed. I would expect the tiny onions to be bulbed up enough to pull and cure in August, but I am not sure of this timing since I haven't tried growing them in this climate.

While on the subject of seeds, here are some local and Canadian seed sources:

West Coast Seeds: www.westcoastseeds.com/ Catalogue expands every year; tested cultivars for this region

Salt Spring Seeds: www.saltspringseeds.com/ Includes dry beans and grains for this region you won't find anywhere else

Full Circle Seeds: www.fullcircleseeds.com/ Carries my all time favourite leek cultivar: 'Unique'

William Dam Seeds [www.damseeds.ca/] Interesting Dutch and European hardy vegs, some certified organic seed

Omega Blue: http://vanislepoultryconservation.org/images/Seed_Varieties/Retail_Seeds_Catalogue.pdf

Eagleridge: www.eagleridge-seeds.com

Most of the local vendors listed above will also be at various Seedy Saturdays around the region (see below).

Seedy Saturdays

The Seedy Saturday schedule kicks off this year with January 25th on Denman Island. I really enjoy Seedy Saturdays and highly recommend you take in an event near you. They feature seed suppliers and garden tool vendors, seed exchanges and most events have a program of speakers or workshops. I will be speaking at the Denman Island Seedy Saturday and at the Victoria event on Feb. 15.

January 25: Denman Island

February 1: Qualicum Beach

February 8: Salt Spring Island

February 15: Victoria, Ladner;

February 22: Vancouver; Sooke

March 1: Courtenay; North Vancouver, Richmond, Lillooet

March 2: (Sunday): Nanaimo

March 8: Powell River

March 29: Port Alberni

April 5: Surrey

For updates to this list and links to more information for each event, see the Seeds of Diversity web site:

<http://www.seeds.ca/ev/events.php>

Still a few spaces left! in both of my Year Round Harvest courses at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific. Classes are held Sunday afternoons, once a month from January to October and there are two courses running this year. For more information, see: <http://hcp.ca/events-functions/year-round-harvest/> and to register, call HCP: 250-479-6162. Note: the dates shown on the web site are for the first course; the HCP office will provide the schedule for the additional course.

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

And of course, all of my books are in stock again for the new gardening year--just waiting for your order!

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