

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson
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Dormant Tree Tasks & Bittercress Patrol

How suddenly this dry weather and warmth (for those not in a fogbank) seems to be bringing on spring!

Time to prune fruit: If you have fruit trees and bushes, take advantage of this dry weather to get your dormant pruning done. Pruning when it is dry is particularly important to avoid spreading branch and trunk diseases. Check the bark carefully and remove diseased branches showing symptoms of bacterial canker on cherry; European canker in apples and pears or black knot on plums, cherries and peaches. For photos of all 3, see: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/book_photos.html#branch

I strongly recommend sanitizing pruning tools between trees to avoid spreading diseases, even if trees don't look diseased. Soak tools in a solution of 1 part hydrogen peroxide or chlorine bleach to 4 parts water. I made a handy container for soaking hand pruners by cutting off the top of a plastic dish soap bottle. I leave one pruner in the bottle of bleach while I use the other, then switch tools when I change trees.

Though the recent tent caterpillar outbreak has collapsed in large parts of the region, there are still some areas where they are active. Look for egg masses while you are pruning: small, grey, flattened blob of hardened foam partly wrapped around small branches (See: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/leaf_chewers2.html#30). Pick at the mass until it pops loose, then destroy it.

To spray or not to spray? is the question that always arises this time of year. I don't spray dormant oil or lime sulphur routinely because they kill beneficial mites and insects, but if a tree had a pest or disease problem in the previous growing season that could be controlled with dormant sprays, then I do spray that tree.

Mid-winter dormant oil sprays are not effective on tent caterpillar eggs, apple scab or peach leaf curl, however, they will help control scale, eggs of leafrollers (those little green caterpillars that infest buds in the spring), apple aphids and red mites (for photos of most of these see the Pest Images files on my web site).

Dormant lime sulphur sprays are effective for some problems, but the timing differs from the above.

- **Pear leaf blister mites** (http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gall_makers.html#100) Spray October/November immediately after leaves drop OR in March just before buds begin to open. Timing is important to catch the mites while they are on the bud scales. One thorough application at the right time is usually enough and it may be years before you see them again.

- **Pear scab** (<http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/foilage.html#133>) seems to be on the rise with more people reporting it. Unlike apple scab, some pear scab overwinters on the tree so sulphur sprays will help control it. Also important is destroying (shredding, composting or mowing) all fallen leaves, where fungi also overwinter. Spray as soon as leaves drop and again in late winter, just before buds swell.

- **Peach leaf curl** (<http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/foilage.html#145>). Sprays will reduce infection, though not provide total control, if sprayed when about 90% of the leaves have fallen in the fall and again in very early spring before buds swell (February for peaches)

Hairy Bittercress patrol: You know that little mustard family weed with the tiny white flowers, that snaps a zillion seeds all over the place? (e.g., see <http://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/problems/weeds/hairy-bitter-cress/471.html>) Well it is a winter annual and is growing profusely right this minute. It is easy to pull right now so get it before it sets seeds, which could be in just a few weeks. Snip the nicest leaves into a salad for a bit of a zing.

Blue Orchard Bees/Mason Bees reminder: If you have a colony of these bees and haven't cleaned the cocoons, it is time to get that done so cocoons are ready to put out by the end of February. Look up instructions in my *West Coast Gardening: Natural Insect, Weed & Disease Control* if you have a copy, or see these websites by British Columbia experts: Hutchings Bee Service: <https://sites.google.com/site/hutchingsbeeservice/> or BeeDiverse: <http://beediverse.com/>

Upcoming events: I will be speaking on Denman Island tomorrow at Seedy Saturday, visiting the Mill Bay Garden Club for a talk on Jan. 28 and will be a guest on Gardening 101, Jeff DeJong's radio show on CFAX radio, Sunday morning, Feb. 2nd.

2014 is booked solid so 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