

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

August 26, 2015

Wet forecast, last seeding, powdery mildews

Okaaaaay....once again a forecast with rain over several days....who knows, maybe this time our rain dances will be answered?

In case it does drizzle, trickle, spatter, shower or (dare I dream?) actually rain for 4 or 5 days, this is a quick note to remind you to keep tomato plants dry to avoid late blight. A simple sheet of plastic suspended between poles or laid over tunnel hoops will suffice if winds are not too strong. Be sure to leave the sides and ends of covers wide open for maximum ventilation. You don't want any moisture to condense on the underside of the plastic and wet the leaves or you will have defeated the purpose of keeping the rain off. If your tomatoes are in pots, trundle them under the overhang of the roof if you can.

If you have plums or other soft fruit ripening right now, a good soaking from rain, especially after this prolonged dry weather can make the fruit split. I have mid-season plums ('Victoria') ripening right now, so on Friday I will pick everything that is ripe or starting to soften. Once fruit splits, it is ruined if you leave it on the tree. You can pick and process splitting fruit immediately, but the situation can get rather fraught as hordes of yellowjackets and other insects, desperate for sweet liquids, may compete with you for the fruit. Fast ways to use up damaged fruit: dehydrate slices or fruit leather, make juice, jam or chutney. You can always freeze the fruit too, including mashed up to make into jam later (measure mashed fruit into recipe-sized quantities before freezing).

What to plant right now: The weather this weekend should be ideal for transplanting winter greens to open spaces in your garden. Seedlings are still for sale in nurseries and farm stands or you may have your own seedlings in beds sown earlier. You can still seed winter lettuce, corn salad and annual arugula up until early September. You can also broadcast these seeds under tomatoes, peppers, squash and other maturing summer crops that will be coming to an end in the fall. I pull back the mulches around these plants (much of it has disappeared over the summer) and lightly press the seed into the soil so as not to disturb the roots of the growing plants. It can take corn salad awhile to germinate as it prefers cool soil, but by the time tomatoes and other crops are finished, the soil will be covered with greens.

Corn salad is a dual purpose plant in that it provides an excellent, lettuce-like salad green all winter, but it also has a dense root system and can be used as a cover crop to protect the soil from winter rains. In early September, I scatter seeds anywhere there are gaps in plantings. There will be more than I can eat over the winter, but the plants can be turned under next spring (I do save a small patch of plants to grow out for seeds so I have lots to broadcast). When you harvest corn salad, cut it below the crown and leave the roots in the soil to feed the beneficial soil microbes. It is much easier to wash and handle these small plants while the leaves are still attached at the crown.

Powdery mildews are making their annual appearance. Lots of different plants get some kind of powdery mildew (there are many species of fungi involved, most unique to certain plants). If you see dusty white patches, spots or a thin whitish coating on leaves in late summer while the weather is still dry, that's it. Squash, cucumbers, peas, chard, kale and other cabbage family plants, even tomatoes in some cases, are developing powdery mildew this year. The fungi will continue to

spread until the fall rains begin in earnest and deter the spores from germinating. For photos of powdery mildew on a variety of plants, see my web site: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/foilage.html#147> There is detailed info on what to do about it in my Sept. 10, 2012 message: *The Fungi of Fall* . One thing I would add to the information in that message is that the biological control product 'Natria', which contains bacteria that attack fungi, is registered for control of a variety of powdery mildew species. I have not tried it, so I don't know how well it works, but it is widely available at garden centres (the product used to be called 'Serenade').

See my web site <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca> to buy books or check out hundreds of colour photos of pests and diseases to help you identify problems. All of my previous gardening messages are archived on my Gardening Tips page: http://lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

My teaching and talk schedule for 2016 is rapidly filling up, so check my schedule on my web site for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area.