

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

February 18, 2015

Seeds to Start, Peas, Yuzu, Clean Bees

I hope everyone is being very kind to friends and relatives in the east as they suffer through historic winter weather while we watch our daffodils bloom a month early. Yes, we are that far ahead of average! Plants are rapidly losing their winter hardiness so if we do get a cold snap, be ready with mulches and covers to protect them. For now, we might as well pull back the mulch and let overwintered greens, garlic and other vegetables take off. But NOT for your overwintered carrots, beets and other root crops: when they start to grow, they use up the sugars in the roots to make a seed stalk, which causes flavour and texture to deteriorate rapidly. Keep root crops cold for as long as possible by piling on more mulch if you can scrounge some up from other parts of the garden.

Start seeds: If you are growing your own seedlings, you can start celery and celeriac indoors on bottom heat now (for more on seed starting see my Feb. 21, 2014 message: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html). Any time this month sow leeks, onions and shallots from seed, indoors, on bottom heat. Some keen gardeners start peppers and eggplants (which are rather slow compared to tomatoes) now, especially if the plants will be grown in a greenhouse for the summer. You can always try for a few super-early potatoes by sprouting a few on a windowsill at the end of February. With the variability in the weather and ever present danger of slugs and cutworms, sowing seeds outdoors or in a coldframe is an experiment at this time of year. If you have a good supply of overwintered chard, spinach, cabbage family greens in your garden, there is no need to sow more until April or May because the established plants will produce generous crops all spring.

Peas Please: Peas are beset by a couple of diseases and the continuing spread of pea leaf weevil in this region. Pea enation mosaic virus (EMV) is spread by aphids, making the pods lumpy and distorted [<http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/foilage.html#146>]; it is a common problem from mid-summer to fall. It only takes one aphid to infect a plant, therefore trying to intercept the aphids is fruitless. But there are EMV resistant cultivars among all 3 types: shelling, snap and snow peas. Choosing resistant peas is most important for late sown peas (May and June). Early peas, sown in March and April, are done producing in July, which is about when aphids tend to show up so don't worry about planting EMV resistant cultivars for these. I sow peas monthly to the end of June so I choose EMV resistant peas for the late May and June plantings.

Powdery mildew is another disease problem that plagues mid- to late summer peas. There are some PM resistant or tolerant cultivars available, but they may still show some PM on leaves and pods. I grow more shelling peas than snap peas for my late summer and fall crop, having found that even if there is PM on the pods, the peas inside are perfectly fine.

Over the last few years, pea leaf weevil has been very damaging to early peas in some gardens. The weevils overwinter as adults and crawl out of hibernation to chew on early peas and broadbeans (also clover) and lay eggs on the roots. The little notches they chew out of leaves [see: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/root_feeders.html#74] usually aren't too damaging, unless there are lots of weevils and the plants are small. The worst damage is from the weevil larvae, feeding on roots and destroying the nitrogen fixing nodules. The weevils lay eggs from March to May so early sown peas are most at risk, whereas late plantings can avoid harm. Last spring, peas I started May 10 indoors in vermiculite and set out May 25 were not attacked at all. For more on pea weevils see my last April 29th message http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html. Pre-sprouting peas works great to avoid losses from any cause therefore I routinely start all of my pea seeds indoors. You can get 25-30 seeds into a litre/quart milk

carton (laid on its side with the side panel cut out); for media use potting mix, vermiculite, perlite or sand. After 2-3 weeks gently disentangle the roots and set out the little plants.

"Say Yes to Yuzu": That was the title of an article in the Globe and Mail last weekend singing the praises of this citrus. The flavour was described as "every single universal citrus element squeezed into one". Not having yet tasted this wonder, for me the attraction is that it is much hardier than other citrus. I have now had my yuzu get through the last 2 winters at a higher elevation and some severe cold snaps. I got my plant from Fruit Trees and More, 724 Wain Rd., North Saanich <http://www.fruittreesandmore.com/> (a wonderful nursery well worth investigating for the over 300 kinds of fruit, including hardy citrus).

Time to Clean your Bee Cocoons: If you have a colony of Blue Orchard Bees/Mason Bees and haven't cleaned the cocoons yet, it is past time to get that done. With this unusually warm weather, the bees will want out soon. The reason for cleaning the cocoons is to remove parasitic mites that build up in colonies and overwinter in the bee nests. I have a small colony and prefer to just clean them up in soapy water (see instructions in my *West Coast Gardening: Natural Insect, Weed & Disease Control* if you have a copy), but if you have a lot of cocoons or are lucky enough to attend a workshop by Brian Hutchings, you can also get the mites off by 'rinsing' the cocoons through sand (see his website: Hutchings Bee Service: <https://sites.google.com/site/hutchingsbeeservice/> or look at BeeDiverse: <http://beediverse.com/>)

Upcoming Events:

I will be giving a talk at the **Victoria Seedy Saturday, Feb. 21: Do you REALLY know what the problem is?** 10:15-11:15. Victoria Conference Centre.

This workshop will help you distinguish between disorders, diseases and insect pests based on simple diagnosing rules. It will show common vegetable and fruit disorders, along with the diseases and pests they are often mistaken for and how to deal with them all using organic methods and prevention.

For Salt Spring gardeners:

I will be giving a workshop **Saturday, Feb 28: Tree Fruit Pests, Diseases and Disorders.** 1:00-4:00 pm at the Farmer's Institute, Rainbow Road.

Can you tell bitter pit (an apple growth disorder) from apple scab (disease) or from apple maggot (pest insect) damage? This workshop will help you identify disorders, diseases and insect pests of tree fruit. Emphasis will be on how to prevent problems and address them using organic methods and improved management. Also covered will be beneficial insects and how to attract these natural allies. Sponsored by the Salt Spring Garden Club; cost for members: \$25. Non-members are welcome: cost \$30. To register, contact Patsy Fisher at jenfisherssi@gmail.com or 250-931-0362.

The **Salt Spring Seed Library opens this Friday, Feb. 20:** Once again The Radicle Seed Library is open 12:00-2:00 every Friday until the end of April in the Salt Spring Public Library (Room 103). Members of the Salt Spring Seed Sanctuary (<http://www.seedsanctuary.com>), can "borrow" seeds from a selection of interesting, locally grown, heritage seeds. You will be asked to return some of the seed you save to the library in the fall for next year's gardeners to try. SSSS members will be there to help you with any questions on how to grow the crop and save seed.

See my web site <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca> for hundreds of colour photos of pests and diseases to help you identify problems (many more photos were added recently). All of my previous gardening messages are archived on my Gardening Tips page: http://lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html