

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

January 9, 2015

New Veggies, Seedy Saturdays & New Short Course

A clean slate, a new year & the seed catalogues are here!

And Seedy Saturdays on the BC coast start this weekend, Jan. 10th, with the Saanich Seedy Saturday at Haliburton Farm. These events feature local seed suppliers and usually gardening presentations or workshops during the day. Such a great way to kick off the gardening year! (For more information and other dates, see below).

Interesting Vegetables: In no particular order, here are some suggestions for a few less-well known plants you might want to try:

Purple Peacock Broccoli: This is an unusual cross between broccoli and kale, which produces both sweet purple stems, reddish kale-like leaves and excellent purplish broccoli florets. An interesting "eat-everything broccoli". Salt Spring Seeds has it <http://www.saltspringseeds.com/>

Watercress: Though it grows in streams, it also grows fine in normal garden soil and is surprisingly hardy. Becoming known as a superfood, along with kale, mustard greens and Swiss chard, because of its high nutritional content, it has a peppery taste that is great in salads and on sandwiches. Seed is widely available.

Sweetheart cabbages: These small, very pointy-headed cabbages grow rapidly. The leaves are crunchy and sweet, without noticeable cabbage-y flavour and make great salads. Last year plants I sowed on March 15 (indoors) were set out in early April and I began eating them at the end of May Cultivars: 'Early Jersey Wakefield', 'Caraflex' and others. West Coast Seeds has them: <http://www.westcoastseeds.com/>

'Crispus' Brussels sprouts: Great news for gardeners with clubroot infections in their soil! West Coast Seeds is carrying the clubroot resistant 'Crispus' Brussels sprouts for the first time this year. A few local gardeners with infected soil tried it last season with excellent results. Stay tuned as WCS continues to look into other resistant cultivars for the future.

I will write more later on how to identify, prevent and manage clubroot, which is an increasing problem, especially in community gardens. For now, afflicted gardens might try other clubroot resistant cultivars sold by UK seed houses. The only one I know of that sells retail to Canada is Chiltern Seeds <http://www.chilternseeds.co.uk/> They list a resistant cabbage ('Kilaton') and a cauliflower ('Clapton').

Sweet Potatoes (AKA "Yams"): Now is the time to start sprouting plants if you want to grow a sweet potato crop this summer. Start with a small tuber of whatever kind you like best: lay it on it's side, half buried in moist peat or potting soil and keep it in a very warm spot for several weeks until you see tiny green leaves starting at one end. Then move it to the warmest, sunniest spot you have in the house. Later in the spring, you will see that shoots sprouting out of the tuber have roots attached. Carefully detach each shoot with a good root system and pot it up in good soil to grow on. I usually get 6-10 useful plants from one sweet potato. You can also grow plants from a tuber set in a jar of water, filled to the point that half the tuber is submerged.

My New, 2-Day Short Course: Backyard Bounty (Grow the most food with the least work) will be Saturday April 25 & Sunday 26, 2015, Harbour House Hotel.

Visit Salt Spring Island and learn how to enjoy fresh vegetables and fruit all year. Topics include: soil preparation and fertility; choosing cultivars; intensive planting methods; year-round planting schedules; protecting crops for winter; selecting and managing fruit tree and bushes; organic methods for managing common. Cost: \$115 per person, which includes 2 lunches. Plan to stay overnight at the Harbour House, which providing a special rate and is a short walk to restaurants, the Saturday market and bus routes. If you are interested in more detailed information and registration, e-mail me: gilkeson@shaw.ca

Seedy Saturdays on the BC coast. Most are open from 10-3:00, but for details and contact information for each event as well as updates to this list, see: <http://www.seeds.ca/events>

Jan 10: Saanich: Haliburton Farm

Jan. 31 Denman Island: Denman Community Hall

Feb. 7 Qualicum Beach: QB Civic Centre

Feb. 14 Salt Spring Island: SSI Farmer's Institute

Feb. 21 Victoria: Victoria Conference Centre

Ladner: Harris Barn at Hawthorne Grove Park

Feb. 28 Sooke: Sooke Community Hall

Vancouver: VanDusen Botanical Garden

Mar. 1 (Sunday) Nanaimo: Nanaimo District Secondary School

Mar.7 Comox Valley: Florence Filberg Centre

Richmond: Thompson Community Centre

Mar. 14 Powell River, Lillooet

Mar. 21 Roberts Creek, Port Alberni

April 11 Surrey: Historic Stewart Farm

May 10 Langley: Derek Double Day Arboretum

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

My teaching and talking schedule for 2015 is now fully booked, so check my schedule link on my web site for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area.