

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

November 20, 2015

Brace for Cold and Light the Lemons

Well, here it comes: It looks like the first Arctic outbreak of the year could be coming our way early next week. At the moment, the forecast is for the coldest weather to start Tuesday, with lows of -5 to -7°C (18 to 23°F) predicted through at least Thursday over the whole south coast. Don't be lulled by the fact that we are in an El Niño winter, which is supposed to give us a somewhat warmer than average temperatures: the last time we had a 'super' El Niño in 1997/98, there was apparently 2 warmer than usual months and one colder than normal month. We need to be ready for anything!

And here's the good news (for some of us, anyway): after next week's freeze our Brussels sprouts will be tasty and sweet...

SO, finish mulching around plants this weekend and completely cover over the tops of your root crops with a good thick layer of leaves, straw or other mulch.

The hardiest leafy greens are usually fine to about -5°C (23°F), but since the forecast for next week is for colder temperatures I am also covering my lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard, Chinese cabbage with plastic sheets (well held down with rocks because an Arctic outbreak is often accompanied by strong winds).

If lows look like they may go to -9°C (16°F) or lower, then I will also throw a tarp over winter cauliflower and broccoli and perhaps the leeks. It has to be pretty cold to daunt kale or my good ole super-hardy 'Unique' leeks, but not all leek varieties are that hardy and some might benefit from covers if it really gets cold. Parsley and corn salad are extremely hardy and don't need covers. For more information on cold precautions, have a look at my message from November 13 last year:

http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

Light up the lemons: It is time to cover and light up lemons, limes and other tender fruit trees if you are growing them outdoors, which more people are doing following the lead of Bob Duncan of Fruit Trees and More. He strings Christmas lights (incandescent, not LED) through their branches and then covers the trees with floating row cover. The lights are turned on when there is a risk that temperatures will drop below freezing. You can use clear plastic with ventilation holes, which is what I do since it is so much colder at my elevation. Bob has links to videos on growing lemons and other tender fruit at: <http://fruittreesandmore.com/>

Request for your help

I am working on a small, magazine sized journal, to be available Feb. 1, on gardening in a changing climate. Basically it is a supplement to information in my 2 most recent books, *Backyard Bounty* and the 'big bug book' (see:

<http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/books.html>). I have sections on the changing climate and what we can expect in the coastal region, how heat and drought stress affects plants and on how to adapt our gardening methods to handle the changing climate. One chapter provides new information on some key pests and diseases: clubroot, powdery mildew and spotted wing Drosophila.

What I would love to hear from you: Last summer I noticed big differences in how well different varieties of vegetables handled heat and drought (I had to keep my garden very short of irrigation water). Some varieties pooped out entirely while others grew surprisingly well (hooray for those amazing 'Unique' leeks!). If you saw clear differences between varieties I would love to hear from you what specific varieties did well and what didn't. I particularly want to hear from people whose gardens were kept short on water. Brief notes would be great, but don't forget to mention where you are. Also, did you see any differences between varieties in the occurrence of fruit disorders, such blossom end rot, green/yellow shoulders or catfacing (very weird distortions) on tomatoes? Did you see powdery mildew on your tomatoes this year and, if so, what varieties were most or least affected?

Year Round Harvest Course: My Salt Spring class is full but there is still space for more people in my 2016 course at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific, Victoria. There is one class a month on a Sunday afternoon from January to October; topics include feeding and preparing soil, year round planting schedules, how to grow a variety of vegetables and fruit, preserving, dealing with weird weather, seed saving and managing pests and diseases. See <http://hcp.ca/events-functions/year-round-harvest/> Contact HCP directly to register.

See my web site <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca> for 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 speaking schedule for 2016 is now fully booked so check the calendar on my web site for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area.