

# Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

September 23, 2015

## Fall To Do List

It is the first day of fall and here are some things to do in the garden:

Pinch your Brussels sprouts: To force the plants to plump up their sprouts, pinch or cut off the centre top-knot of leaves by the end of September. If your plants are large and already forming nice sprouts, this is optional. If your plants haven't made sprouts yet, then this will make the tiny sprouts grow really quickly. If plants are still quite small (several people have told me they put in late seedlings), you might as well pinch the tips out and see what happens. Brussels sprouts are biennials, which means if they don't make sprouts this fall, they won't make them in the spring either because they will grow flower stalks instead. But the flower sprouts are very tasty and tender, so don't give up on your plants no matter what size they are as there will be something to harvest.

Last chance thinning: When I checked my carrots the other day I found some were too crowded and that a flurry of remedial thinning was in order. Do check on all of your root crops and leafy greens to make sure they have space to grow while there is still a month of growing weather left. July-sown carrots should be at least as long as a finger and beets should be bigger than a golf ball at this point. No matter what size the roots are before winter, they stop growing when it gets cold. The carrots and other roots won't grow any larger in the spring because they use up the starch stored in the roots to make flower stalks. Because what you have by the end of October is what you get, make sure plants are well spaced, watered and maybe even give them a feeding or two of liquid fertilizer if they need a boost.

Give cabbages a twist. If your regular cabbages (and Napa cabbages) are full-sized right now, there is a risk they may split if they take up water too quickly this fall. Before the heavy rains come, give each head a bit of yank or twist--just enough to disrupt fine roots, but not to uproot the plants.

Keep insect covers on until the end of October. There are lots of adult carrot rust flies and cabbage root maggots still floating around at this time of year, laying eggs on unprotected plants. Wait until the end of October or the first heavy frost (whichever comes first) to remove insect netting or floating row covers from carrots, winter radish, turnips and other leafy cabbage family plants. Rinse the covers to clean them and store until next year.

MUST get leaves: I made a note last summer to remind everyone how valuable this fall's leaves will be for next summer's mulch. Don't stop at collecting enough to mulch the garden for winter: go on and stockpile enough for use next summer, too. To prevent leaves from breaking down store them where they won't be rained on all winter (cover with a tarp or stuff them in plastic bags). Of course, if you can get lots of leaves you can also layer them into your compost pile or compost leaves alone. These should be kept moist all winter so they break down into leaf mould by spring. The only questionable leaves are from black walnut trees because tomatoes, apples and some other garden plants are sensitive to a compound called juglone in the leaves. Other walnuts are fine, as are all of the other leaves from boulevard and yard trees.

**2016 Year Round Harvest:** If you are interested in taking one of my 10-month organic gardening courses, it is time to think about registering. One class runs in Victoria at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific and one runs on Salt Spring sponsored by the SS Garden Club. There is one class a month starting in January and running to October; topics include feeding and preparing soil, year round planting schedules, how to grow a variety of vegetables and fruit, preserving, seed saving and managing pests and diseases.

-Classes at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific are held Sunday afternoons. For the 2016 schedule of dates and topics, see: <http://hcp.ca/events-functions/year-round-harvest/> Contact HCP directly to register.

-Classes on Salt Spring are held one Thursday evening a month. There is still room in the 2016 class, but it is filling quickly. For a schedule of dates and topics and to register, contact me: [gilkeson@shaw.ca](mailto:gilkeson@shaw.ca)

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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](http://lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html)

My speaking schedule for 2016 is fully booked through June so check the calendar on my web site for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area.