

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

June 27, 2020

Carrot Day, Winter Planting Schedules, Fruit Thinning

It's nearly here! Carrot day, which in my garden, is July 1st (sadly, not being celebrated with the usual fireworks this year due to covid). But long time readers will know that the first week of July is when to sow the last bed of carrots, beets and rutabagas for winter harvests. This gives the plants enough time to mature by the end of October when growth essentially stops. Of course carrots, etc. sown before this can also overwinter, but roots from an early spring sowing might be over-mature and rather woody by late fall.

Also due to be planted this week or next: endives, radicchio and kohlrabi. And if you want to add more Swiss chard to your garden, do it by early July. Chard sown earlier this spring provides winter harvests too, but you will need more plants to ensure a good supply of leaves in the winter, when plants are not growing new leaves. I figure I need at least 4 times more chard plants for winter picking as I do for summer picking. This is when I also sow the hardiest varieties of chard (e.g., 'Lucullus', 'Perpetual Leaf Beet'/'Bietina') that will survive if next winter turns out to be colder than usual.

Winter crop planting continues: This prolonged cool weather can jam up winter planting schedules as summer crops grow slower than usual. That means some planting beds might not be empty when it is time to sow the next crop. In my garden, it looks like my garlic will be a week or two late this year. That collides with my plans to sow chard and other hardy winter greens (mizuna, kale, leaf mustard, etc.) in that space. Planting dates for winter crops cannot be delayed or the crops won't have enough growing days to reach full size. One solution is to start your seeds on time, but in a small nursery bed and transplant them later into the main garden as space becomes available. Or start seeds in trays for later planting or purchase veggie starts. Local suppliers I know of that grow the 'right stuff' for our winters include: Russell Nursery (Wain Road, Sidney), Chorus Frog farm (Rainbow Rd., Salt Spring) and the Compost Education Centre (Victoria), which usually has a plant sale in August. If you know of other suppliers, let me know as I would be happy to promote their plants. Of course, garden centres and grocery store outlets often carry mid-summer seedlings as well, but before you buy, check that varieties are the right ones for overwintering. While any varieties of chard or spinach are OK, beware of summer varieties of lettuce, broccoli and cauliflower. These are not hardy, but are often what garden centres receive from wholesalers [who continue to supply the wrong plants to great the disappointment of customers and my perennial frustration]. For details on what to plant, see my June 15, 2019 message: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html].

Fruit thinning now: Yes, really, you do have to do it, if your trees have set a lot of fruit. This year, apples especially seem to be really loaded down as the weather was sunny and warm during the pollination period. The 'June drop' is pretty much over, which is when trees naturally shed fruit that wasn't sufficiently pollinated. Painful as it is to remove fruit, a heavy crop must be thinned to prevent overloaded branches from breaking and to ensure the tree is not too exhausted to carry a crop next year. The remaining fruit grows larger and the quality is higher because you can use this opportunity to remove damaged, misshapen or scabby fruit.

The general rule for apples and pears is to leave one fruit per blossom cluster if every flower cluster along that branch set fruit. You can leave two fruits per cluster if most of the other flower clusters didn't

set fruit. Thin plums to allow space for the plums to mature without touching each other (around 8 cm/3 inches apart). Peaches should be thinned to 15-20 cm/6 inches between fruit. Don't worry about picking off fruits that are already a lot smaller than the others: the tree will drop those. I find plums are easy to pop off with my fingers, but apples have tough stems and yanking on them risks breaking the fruit cluster so I use small scissors to snip the "thinees" off. If branches look crowded later, continue to remove surplus fruit.

If your trees are new, pick off all fruit and don't let them produce a crop at all. Most dwarf trees, if they are growing well, can be allowed to carry a small crop in the 3rd year after planting, but not before that, despite the fact that some trees might set fruit prematurely. It can really set back trees to carry a crop when they are too small, because they have to divert energy to maturing the fruit, rather than to growth.

Note that figs don't need to be thinned no matter how many there are along the branch. Table grapes are best thinned to carry only one bunch of grapes on each shoot; usually the best cluster is the first one on the shoot, but choose the nicest one to keep. Really vigorous, sturdy shoots can carry two bunches of grapes.

My webinar on Year Round Organic Gardening, presented for the West Vancouver Memorial Library is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndAxcj9Zwo8>

To see my gardening course presentations, which are open to everyone this year, go to "Course Login" and use the following passwords (after entering the password, click on SUBMIT):
mgbasic takes you to Master Gardener workshops on vegetable growing, entomology and pest management
honeycrisp to see modules from my 10-month Year Round Harvest course (a new module is added monthly until October)