

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

April 12, 2021

What to Plant, Flowers in the Garden, Gardener Resources

This colder than usual spring seems to be taking forever to warm up (I was breaking ice out of the bird bath *again* this morning!). Over the next few days, however, the forecast is for the kind of warming we have all been waiting for. Remember, though, that the soil is still pretty cold because so many nights recently have been close to freezing. Peas and early cauliflower that I planted out in in the last couple of weeks have hardly grown at all—which just reminds me of the joys of overwintered vegetables. With winter cauliflowers, purple sprouting broccoli, kale, spinach and other greens, the last of the carrots, beets and Brussels sprouts, there can still be lots of fresh veggies from a garden at this time of year.

Assuming the weather warms as predicted, I expect to be able to transplant onion and leek seedlings to the garden by next weekend. Also starts of broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage as well as lots more peas, which I am continuing to sprout first indoors in the warmth. I am not going to risk setting out my celeriac, however, because my seedlings have grown so big that they are likely to bolt (go to seed) if they experience a week or two of cool weather after planting. I will move them into larger pots today and continue keeping them warm in my greenhouse for a couple more weeks. That's the problem with trying to start biennials (e.g., onions, leeks, celery, Chinese cabbage, chard) so early. If well-grown little seedlings experience a week or two at 5-10oC [40-50oF] they may "reward" your hard work by going to seed in mid-summer. Annuals, such as spinach, lettuce, mustard greens or peas, don't do this, which makes them the best candidates for experimenting with early sowing.

On another note: it has been unusually dry over the last month and the bit of rain this week didn't amount to much in a lot of places. Be alert to watering seed beds and transplants, new fruit trees and bushes, strawberry beds, etc. Bare-root fruit trees, in particular, need generous weekly watering after planting. If the weather continues to be dry, we may have to start regular irrigation for vegetable gardens earlier than usual.

If you haven't already done so, now is good timing to start seeds of cucumbers, melons and squash indoors so that plants are ready to plant outdoors after mid-May. Zucchini is the only squash I start earlier, because it is a more robust, generally, than other cucurbits. Salt Spring gardeners looking for the parthenocarpic zucchini 'Partenon' (it sets fruit without requiring pollination), are fortunate that once again, plants are available from Chorus Frog Farm on Rainbow Road (along with many other excellent varieties not grown by the wholesalers that supply garden centres). All local garden centres I have visited recently seem to have pretty good quantities of vegetable starts this year so I hope there won't be a problem with shortages as we saw last year.

Flowers in the garden: There are many reasons to add annual flowers, such as cosmos, gaillardia, calendula, coreopsis and marigolds, to the vegetable garden: to attract beneficial insects that control pests, to feed bees and other pollinators and, of course, because they are beautiful. The fertile, well-watered soil in the middle of a vegetable bed, however, is too rich for flowers. Until I grew some cosmos among my broccoli last year I had no idea that cosmos could grow over 8 feet tall! What has worked best in my garden is to plant sweet alyssum, marigolds and other insectary plants along the edges of beds or in the pathways beside vegetable beds, where the soil isn't as fertile or well-watered as soil in the vegetable beds proper. Planting flowers in the large gaps between hills of squash plants also works for tall annuals that can grow above the sprawling squash leaves. When I do this, I only mix in this year's



addition of compost and other amendments in the immediate areas where the squash plants are to grow. I don't enrich the whole area so the flowers are growing in soil that is a bit less fertile (they can still get pretty rambunctious, however). Another approach is to have a separate flower bed in the garden so the flowers are not growing in vegetable soil at all. As long as flowers are in the same yard, they work fine to attract bees, aphid and caterpillar predators, etc. into the garden. Flowers also don't need to be showy to be valuable: the tiny flowers of dill, cilantro and parsley (which flowers the second year) as well as kale and other overwintered vegetables that flower in the spring are extremely useful. And those spring dandelions in the ditches and roadsides are among the most valuable of plants for sustaining pollinators.

Sowing reminder for onion sets: If you are going to grow your own sets this year, sow the seeds around May 1. If sown later than May 15, many fail to make bulbs, but too early and they can grow too large. Choose a good storage variety and sow seeds densely in a square foot or two of garden bed. Sow about 3-4 seeds per square inch and don't amend the soil with compost or fertilizer this year before sowing. The dense planting, late start and moderately fertile soil, keeps bulbs small. Bulbs smaller than a dime are ideal for planting next season. When the leaves wither and fall over in late summer, harvest, cure and store the teeny onions the same as for crop onions.



Sweet potato starts: If you are interested in growing sweet potatoes [AKA "yams"] this year, I was happy to hear from a reader about a BC supplier of starts for many varieties: Linden Lane Farms lindenlanefarms.ca Checking their website earlier this week, I saw that not only do all the varieties seem to be in stock, but they are currently on sale.

More resources for local gardeners. In addition to the list of resources in my March 16 message [see: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html]:

Victoria:

This is the second year for Victoria Seed Share, which has a mission to get seeds to folks in the Victoria region who might not otherwise be able to access them. Seeds are free and can be ordered from: <https://victoria-seed-share.myshopify.com/password> They are also looking for volunteers to help with this project.

For people who use Facebook and want to connect with other gardeners in the area, ask questions and share information, see the Collaborative Gardening for Food Security (Victoria/Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ) project: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/645916832912552>

Tofino:

Tofino Community Food Initiative 'Grow Local' workshops on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC071LMOzML2wqKixX_TkYpA
And the Tofino Community Food Initiative monthly newsletter: https://www.tofinocommunityfoodinitiative.com/get_involved