

Gardening Newsletter
by Linda Gilkeson
January 1, 2021
Seedy Topics, Happy New Year

I meant to send out a note on Dec. 21 celebrating the start of lengthening days—but a snowstorm took out the cable in my neighbourhood that afternoon so I had no internet for a few days. Anyway, here we are at the beginning of what everyone is hoping will be a brighter and better year. And now that the days really are getting longer, gardeners are looking forward to growing their best garden yet. So Happy New Year to you all!

If you haven't thought about what you want to grow this year, it is time to do that as seed suppliers are already shipping madly to keep up with early demand. While ordering, look ahead to what you will need for mid- and late summer sowing. [For those who might not have it, there is a planting chart on my home page that you can print out showing suggested planting dates for winter harvests. See: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/pdf/Linda%20Gilkeson%20Planting%20Schedule.pdf>]

Those late summer plantings would mostly be of frost-hardy varieties that can stay in the garden over the winter. For such plantings, make sure you are ordering the hardiest varieties of leeks, lettuce, leafy greens, cabbage, etc. Also, be sure order to buy enough seeds to provide a harvest all winter. For example, it takes a lot of carrots (to be sown by early July) to supply a household through the winter. Large seed packages cost less per seed than small packets and, if you store the seeds carefully in cool, dry conditions in airtight containers, most vegetables keep at least 3 years and often much longer. Exceptions are parsnips (get fresh seed every year) and onions and sweet corn seeds, which are only good for a couple of years. While I am on this topic, if you don't have a dehumidifier for your seed collection, get one! It will pay for itself many times over in keeping left-over seeds viable for years longer. These small metal boxes are filled with a silica gel desiccant that can be reactivated by heating in the oven (I have had the same one for over 20 years). You only need the small (40 g) box for a whole tote full of seeds; cost is \$15 from Lee Valley Tools: <https://www.leevalley.com/en-ca/shop/tools/workshop/tool-maintenance/53828-silica-gel-dehumidifiers>

Whither Seedy Saturdays? In other years, Seedy Saturdays, starting in January, have been a high spot for gardeners in communities all over BC, but this year, of course, events have been cancelled or altered. Some, such as Cowichan (Jan. 30), Denman (Feb. 6), Sooke (Feb. 27) plan to host a virtual event and have speakers lined up, others, including Salt Spring, Richmond and others are still working out what form their event will take. Keep checking this listing for BC Seedy Saturday updates: <http://www.bcseeds.org/seedy-saturdays-and-sundays/>

Something I am really looking forward to is British Columbia's first province-wide, virtual Seedy Saturday Conference, taking place from February 19-21, 2021. It is being delivered via Zoom and Facebook, hosted by FarmFolk CityFolk and independent community Seedy Saturday organizers from across the

province as part of the BC Seed Security Program (our US gardening friends are welcome to 'attend'). Keep updated and watch for the schedule to be posted later this month at: <https://www.farmfolkcityfolk.ca/ourwork/virtual-seedy-saturday-conference/> Seed vendors have been invited to participate so it should be a great place to learn about local suppliers you might not know about.

Growing Sweet Potatoes? If you want to grow your own starts of sweet potatoes (AKA "yams"), you will want to start a tuber sprouting this month to make sure slips are big enough to plant in May. It isn't always possible to find starts at nurseries, but you can grow quite a few plants from a tuber from the grocery store. Lay a tuber on its side in peat, coir or other soilless medium or prop one in a jar with water half-way up the tuber (like we used to do when we were kids...). Keep them very warm and don't let them dry out. When the shoots that grow from the tuber have a clump of their own roots showing at the base of the sprout, gently sever the little plant from the mother tuber and pot it up. Grow them in the warmest windowsill you have until time to plant out (May). For more details on starting sweet potatoes, see my January 22, 2018 message

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

