

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Last Sowing for Winter, Summer Fruit Tree Pruning

The date to sow spinach in my garden is approaching fast: August 12 just seems to work out best so that's become Spinach Day at my house. It is late enough in the season that the rapidly shortening days prevent spinach from flowering despite any hot weather the seedlings may experience. Spinach sown at this time of year will be ready for fall and winter harvests, and, even if beaten up by a cold winter, usually comes back from the roots with a big crop in March and April. You can also sow arugula and hardy varieties of winter lettuce over the next week or two since they grow quickly. Lettuce sown at the end of August, however, would be best grown in cold frames, tunnels or unheated greenhouses to give them a bit longer growing season. Sow corn salad (mâché) for winter salads can be sown directly in the garden by the end of August. I scatter the seeds on the soil surface under squash, tomato, pepper plants where they wait until it is cool enough to germinate. By the time the warm season crops are finished, the soil is covered by small plants of this extremely hardy salad green.



Corn salad for mid-winter salads

This week is also the last planting window to grow the larger hardy greens and other crops from seed: mizuna, collards, kale, Chinese cabbages/Napa cabbage, leaf mustards, mustard spinach, broccoli raab, winter radishes/daikon. These should be sown by mid-August to have enough time to grow to a useful size in time for winter. Vegetable seedlings can be transplanted this month, too. The cooler weather this week is ideal for getting new seedlings off to a good start, but be alert to hot weather and prepare to shade seedbeds or protect seedlings from the heat (described in detail in my June 28, 2024 message: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html)

There is one last sowing period coming, late October to early November, when you can sow seeds of lettuce, salad greens, even radishes, that will germinate next spring. While not always reliable, really late sowing usually works (be generous with seeds) to get hardy crops growing surprisingly early, before the soil is dry enough to work in the spring.

Pest protection for new plantings: Plants in the mustard/cabbage family (daikon, kale, Chinese cabbage, etc.) need protection from cabbage root maggot until the end of October. Cover seedbeds with insect netting or floating row cover to prevent the adult flies from laying eggs around the roots. These barriers work very well if they are securely in place (edges well held down to the soil) before the seeds sprout. If they are put on too late, however, and maggots get into the roots, nothing can

be done to save the attacked plants as the maggots destroy roots over the winter. If there is another really hot spell this month, lay shade cloth on top of the insect barrier to cool the seedbeds.

Thinning: Now is a good time to make sure carrots, beets and other crops sowed last month are weed-free and thinned to their final spacing. Crowded seedlings stunt each other's growth, which we want to avoid as there is limited time left in the growing season. Don't worry about root flies attacking when you take insect netting off of carrots or cabbage family plants: carrot rust fly and cabbage root maggot adults fly at dusk so you can remove the cover for an hour or two in midday to work on the beds. Just make sure beds are covered up again as soon as you finish.

Fruit tree pruning: If there are long, leggy branches on your fruit trees you can prune these back at this time of year. Peaches, cherries, sometimes plums may grow so vigorously that they put on a yard (or two!) of new growth. Such trees can be pruned in August to reduce the amount of food they store in the roots before winter, which will help reduce their vigour next season. Winter pruning, when trees are dormant, stimulates growth, therefore trees with a history of rampant growth should not be pruned in winter. Pruning in the fall doesn't help to slow vigorous trees so prune now if it is needed.

You can also cut back branches of pear and apple trees in early August to keep trees within bounds and to cause some leaf buds to convert to flower buds (this doesn't work for other kinds of fruit). This increases the amount of fruit on a branch, which is especially great for trees in limited spaces as it increases the yield without increasing the size of the tree. Cut back $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ of the length of pear and apple branches, but not until the newest leaves at the tip of the branch have fully expanded. The leaves at the branch tip should be the same size and dark green as older leaves on the branch. If you cut back branches too early—while the newest leaves are only partially expanded—it can stimulate several buds to produce new shoots at the tip of the branch. These shoots will have to be pruned to a single shoot later and are can also be at risk of cold injury because they may not be hardened off before winter. My apple and pear trees are a bit later maturing their youngest leaves this year, but are finally ready to prune this week.

Summer pruning is for rampantly growing trees such as this crazy peach →

