

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

June 15, 2024

Garlic, What to Plant Now, Weeding Tips

The garlic is alright! Some people have been surprised by how big their garlic plants are and some have been concerned because their hardneck garlic sent up scapes (flower stalks) so early. Keep in mind that it was a warmer than average winter—from the garlic's point of view. Buried in the soil, the bulbs wouldn't have experienced that spell of extreme cold in January so with a generally warmer winter, plants likely have grown a bigger than usual root system. While the cool weather we have had recently is making our melon and cucumber plants wobble, it has been perfect for garlic growth. For most garlic, it may mean an earlier harvest this year, which is all to the good as it frees up space for planting fall and winter crops.

What to plant now: From now to the end of June is the time to sow seeds of overwintering broccoli and cauliflower. These are biennial varieties that form their heads after they experience the cold chill of winter. These varieties are getting hard to find as seed companies drop them from their listings (the BC coast is the only region in Canada that can grow these crops so we don't make much of a market, I'm afraid). Overwintering broccolis are mostly purple varieties, but there are also some annual purple varieties, so read seed descriptions carefully to make sure you are planting a winter variety. The BC Eco-Seed Co-op has 2 varieties, Territorial Seed lists 2 varieties, Salt Spring Seeds lists 1 variety of winter broccoli. The winter cauliflower situation is even worse, with BC Eco-Seed Co-op listing 'Galleon' and West Coast Seeds listing 'Walcheren'; if you can find 'Purple Cape' it is an excellent winter cauliflower.

You can plant seeds directly in the garden or in seedling flats. With slugs, birds and insect pests lurking out there, I find it works better for me to start seeds in flats. They germinate safely indoors, then I set the trays out in the sun during the day, but bring them indoors in the evening before cabbage root maggot flies lay eggs at dusk. When the seedlings are big enough to transplant into the garden, then I put the protective barrier around each stem to repel egg-laying by root maggot flies. The barrier is a 15 cm/6 inch square of thin, flexible, water resistant material, such as freezer paper or plastic from bags that held potting soil or compost. Cut a slit to the centre of the square and slide the barrier around the stem of the seedling so the barrier lies flat on the soil with the seedling poking up from the centre. If necessary, put a pebble or two on the barrier to hold it flat and to hold the slit closed around the stem. Mulch over the top of the barrier and leave it in place for the season. These work because the adult fly only lays her eggs at the base of the stem of cabbage family plants. As long as there is a tight fit between the barrier and the base of the little plant there won't be anywhere for the fly eggs. So far this spring I have heard from quite a few gardeners about damage to early cabbage, broccoli, collards, etc. from this pest so don't underestimate their effect! They are always present as there are 2 or 3 generations of these flies over the season.



If you want to start cabbage family seeds directly in the garden, cover the bed with insect netting or floating row cover before the seedlings come up to prevent the root maggot flies from laying eggs around the tiny plants. Later, when the plants are big enough you can take off the cover and put a barrier around each stem (if you are growing small plants in the cabbage family, such as radishes, leafy greens, just keep them under the insect netting until harvest as it isn't practical to try to use the individual barriers on these).

Keep on planting: There is still time to plant or replant many vegetables in the event of failures, disasters (raids by deer, rabbits, quail...escaped chickens) or to replace spring greens and radishes that are now going to seed. You can plant peas up to the end of the month (peas can be planted later, but as the summer gets hotter, they become less likely to succeed). There is still time to plant bush beans, summer cauliflower, even zucchini. I sow an early zucchini variety (45-50 days to harvest) on the last day of June to have a couple of young, vigorous plants that will resist powdery mildew infection in late summer and produce well into the fall. Also, check that you have enough seeds of carrots and beets on hand for the last plantings of these crops during the first week of July.

ABCs of Gardening: Weeding

This section contains notes especially for beginning gardeners. The series started with my December 21, 2023 message: http://www.lindaqilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html

Weeds in garden beds compete with crop plants for soil moisture, nutrients and sunshine. Even weeds such as dandelions, mustards, or wild carrot that attract and feed beneficial insects, are detrimental when they grow among the vegetables. Since any plant that is growing where it isn't wanted is a "weed", that also applies to food plants, such as kale, dill, lettuce, and others that were allowed to produce seeds. Some self-sown plants may be welcome, but control them where they would interfere with the growth of other plants.

Soil contains lots of weed seeds that have been deposited over the years. Some remain viable for years, ready to sprout after soil is disturbed, bringing seeds to the surface where conditions stimulate them to germinate. Prevent this seed bank from sprouting by minimizing soil disturbance; the longer the seed bank remains undisturbed, the more seeds in the soil lose viability. Some soil disturbance is inevitable in the process of preparing a seed bed or harvesting crops, but avoiding deep cultivation (e.g., deep digging, rototilling) avoids bringing large numbers of seeds to the surface. Pulling or cutting weeds while they are very small and have shallow roots also minimizes disturbance to deeper soil that would also bring more seeds to the surface.

Another effective way to control weeds is to use mulches on the soil surface. This excludes light, which prevents seeds at the surface from germinating and also smothers any seedlings that have sprouted. Keeping empty beds covered with a thick layer of mulch until it is time to plant is extremely effective at controlling weeds. In the spring, as soon as garden plants are well established and the weather warms, start mulching between plants to cover the soil and prevent seeds from germinating.



The first years of a new garden, especially if it is where there used to be a lawn, can be especially weedy as the seed bank germinates. Over time, however, as weeds are removed or smothered, you should find fewer weeds to deal with each year. Use mulches most of the year to suppress germination and pull or cut weeds before they flower to avoid producing another generation of seeds. As long as they don't have seeds, pulled weeds can simply be left on the soil surface to join the rest of the mulch and feed the soil.