

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Our first Arctic outbreak of the season is forecast for later this weekend. Such cold snaps can dip quite low, but usually only for a couple of days. The Islands and Victoria have forecasts of lows around -3 or -4 degrees C, but it could be colder at higher elevations and up the valley east of Vancouver. With luck, the snowfall expected Friday night may remain on the ground to provide the best insulation for gardens--at least for we who garden at the higher elevations.

To prepare:

Finish mulching around the base of all of your vegetables and strawberries with leaves, straw, bracken ferns, or other fluffy mulches. Increase the mulch over beds of carrots and other roots, completely covering the tops with a 20 cm (6-inch) thick layer of leaves. They will be fine no matter how cold it becomes.

Find your sheets of plastic, tarps, or other temporary covers and cover lettuce, chard and other leafy crops now (or as soon as the snow stops this weekend). Weigh down well with stones or boards as high outflow winds often accompany this type of weather. Most hardy greens are fine for short periods of -5 degrees without protection, especially if there is some snow cover. If it looks like it will dip below -10 degrees—which is rare but can happen—covers will ensure that leafy greens survive and are also a good idea to minimize damage to some varieties of leeks.

If you have artichokes, cut back stalks or leaves and mulch well before it gets really cold. I have had good results covering each crown with an overturned plastic pot (the largest size) and then adding another layer of leaves to cover the whole thing. I drive a garden stake or two through the drainage holes in the pot to keep it in place. This protects crowns from heavy rain, as well as frost, which is a key to success with artichokes in this climate.

Here's a thought for the next cold, snowy day: It will soon be time to order seeds!

You can read all of my previous messages on the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website:
www.saltspringenergystrategy.org