

# Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

**August 30, 2009**

## **It's not too late (but act now); curing winter squash**

If you just came up for air after the summer's activities and realized you missed the seeding dates for winter crops, all is not lost. You can still enjoy harvests of winter greens (kale, chard, spinach, mustards) and spring purple sprouting broccoli if you get seedlings from garden centres. Or try begging some from gardening friends--so many people have planted crops for winter that your odds are better than ever of finding a gardener with a surplus of seedlings.

From now through the first week of September you can still sow corn salad, winter lettuce, cress, even cilantro (it is surprisingly hardy) directly in the garden for a successful crop this winter.

For Salt Spring gardeners: Foxglove Nursery has more transplants coming in next week. Right now they have a good supply of chard and a red winter lettuce: Rouge d'Hiver. Also, if you need corn salad seed, they just received a new supply.

For Victoria area gardeners: This week is the winter transplants sale at The Garden Path Centre, 395 Conway Road, Victoria. Sale is on until Sept. 6th from-10 am to 5.30 pm daily.

**A Note on Winter Squash:** Don't be in a rush to get your winter squash off the vine. You want fruit to be as thoroughly mature as possible. This summer has been great for squash so you might find the earliest fruit are, in fact, ready to snap off the vine by now. Just be sure the stem has shriveled and dried up completely (it will be as hard as wood). You shouldn't be able to dent the squash skin with a fingernail--but I don't use this as a test! If you try it and you DO dent the skin, you may leave a bruise that can become a rot spot later. As it gets cooler, later harvested squash will need to be cured indoors in a warm dry location for at least 10 days. Good places: on top of the water heater, on top of the fridge (old models, not energy efficient ones), on top of the kitchen cupboards, in a warm attic or sunporch. Most varieties keep 5 months or longer if cured well. Exceptions are Banana and Acorn squash which don't need to be cured, but also don't keep as long (2-3 months usually). Once cured they should be kept cool and dry. The damper the storage conditions are, the more likely they are to mould prematurely.

I don't wash my squash when I harvested them as I have read it can injure the waxy layer on the skin. Once the squash is dry, it is easy to gently brush off any soil. I know other people, however, who swear by wiping the squash skin with a bleach solution before storing them. I don't know if this is necessary or not as I find that my best cured squash are still fine the following July (by which time I am pretty tired of squash!). That said, it is a good idea to check the stored squash at least monthly and use up, or discard, any that are starting to deteriorate.

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