

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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My favourite weekend of the year is here! This is the weekend of our local Seedy Saturday, which for me, signals the start of the gardening year when I can also start my leeks and special varieties of onions.

Leeks: For harvests all next winter, look for cultivars such as 'Unique', 'St. Victor', 'Durabel', 'Sigfried Frost' and others specifically described as winter hardy. There are other less hardy leeks for fall harvest. These won't survive most winters—and certainly not a winter like this year's. My 'Unique' leeks, however, have been in the garden all winter and are still in good, crisp condition, if a bit bent and battered.

I sow leek seeds fairly densely, all in one small flat, such as a cottage cheese container or milk carton (lying on one side, with the top side cut out). When the leeks come up they look like a thin stand of grass blades. I keep them in the brightest possible light on the south windowsill until the weather is warm enough to put them out in a cold frame or greenhouse. They will be ready to plant out in early May.

Onions: You can also start sweet onions ('Walla Walla', 'Sweet Spanish'), red torpedo onions ('Tropeana Lunga', 'Rossa di Firenze') and winter keeper onions ('Redwing' and many other) from seed about this time. I use the same methods as for leeks.

Salt Spring Seedy Saturday is this Weekend, February 14th, at the Farmers Institute 10:00-3:00 pm. Among the usual interesting booths and many seed suppliers, check out:

The Seed Sanctuary booth will feature a Spring Heirloom seed collection. This is a fundraiser for the Sanctuary and will be available at Salt Spring Natureworks after that. Highlights: Romanesco Italia broccoli, Tropeana Lunga red torpedo type onions (I grow these—they are my favorite onions bar NONE), Turks Cap or Turban Squash; Celtuce—and many more.

Also, the Sanctuary AGM will be held following Seedy Saturday, 4:00 pm, in the upstairs hall at the Farmer's Institute. Come to hear about the new (and exciting) projects coming up in the new year!

The Island Natural Growers seed exchange table. Come share your fresh vibrant open pollinated seeds and spread favorite varieties around to neighbours. Please pack your contributions in small envelopes or bags if you can. You don't need many seeds per packet to share the variety (30-50 is typical). Any information you can write on the package is helpful. Seeds are available by donation which goes towards funding Island Natural Growers projects on Salt Spring Island. Other garden items such as books, magazines, cuttings, plants, tools you would like to offer will also have a place at the table.

Check out my web site: www.lindagilkeson.ca

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