

# Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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## Last Call for Carrots & Get Ready for Greens

Well, the window for planting roots to feast on this winter is about over. If you didn't get carrots, beets, rutabaga and other roots in last week, right now would be good. Gardeners in the warmest, southern parts of the coast might get away with planting by July 15<sup>th</sup>, but the rest of us shouldn't wait.

In hot spells, you will find it saves a lot of watering to cover seedbeds with newspaper, burlap (old beach towels are great) until the seeds germinate. Remove the cover as soon as seeds sprout. Beets will come up in about 6 days, carrots will take about 10 days. Especially if you are planting late, ensure plants grow as fast as possible by thinning them as early as possible. No matter how carefully you place beet and Swiss chard seeds, you will still have to thin them because these have several seeds inside each shrivelled up 'seed' (botanists call it a seed ball).

Several people have commented that they have had trouble growing good sized beets, which is often related to low pH. Beets need well-limed soil and a neutral pH. Most soils in this region are naturally acidic so in the absence of a soil test, most of our soils could do with about half a kilogram of lime per square metre (about 1 lb. per sq. yard). Better yet, get a soil pH test done and apply lime accordingly. Salt Spring has an excellent soil testing lab: Agrichem Analytical (they also service all of BC by mail-order). Their soil pH test costs \$15. Check out their web site for instructions and prices:  
[www.agrichem.ca](http://www.agrichem.ca) Phone 250-538-1712.

Coming soon: Be thinking about where you will plant hardy greens in a couple of weeks. The last week of July through the first week of August is a good time to plant arugula, mizuna, collards, kales, leaf mustards, Komatsuna (a wonderfully robust, hardy leafy green for winter), spinach, Swiss chard and leaf beet, Chinese cabbage and other Asian greens. Good idea to get your seeds in hand right now as, once again, suppliers are struggling to keep racks stocked. The most common varieties should also be available as transplants from nurseries and garden centres next month.

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I regret to say that I haven't been able to keep up with answering all of your e-mails about garden questions--there are now nearly 500 people on this mailing list! I apologize to those whose messages are going unanswered, but I will try to answer the most common questions in this column as they come up.

For those of you inquiring about buying my books, there is ordering information posted on my web site: [www.lindagilkeson.ca](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca)

You can read all of my previous messages on the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website:  
[www.saltspringenergystrategy.org](http://www.saltspringenergystrategy.org)