

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

June 19:, 2009

Bring on the Broccoli, Prepare for Carrot Day

Seeding winter broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage by the end of June is good timing for most gardens in this region. If yours is a particularly warm microclimate, you can get away with seeding up to the middle of July. What you are aiming for is plants that are at least 30 cm (1 foot) high by fall. They don't have to be pretty, just well enough established to get through winter and resume growing in the spring. Caterpillar holes in the leaves won't make any difference to the future crop as the plant grow more leaves in the spring.

By this time you may be wondering where to squeeze in new seedlings. You can buy time by seeding them in a small nursery bed. Later, when space opens up after garlic, storage onions, early peas, radishes, lettuce, etc. are done, you can transplant them to the newly vacated area. I like to interplant cabbage family plants between hills of cucumbers and melons. The low-growing vines don't overwhelm the seedlings, yet they shade the soil, which the cabbage family appreciates in the summer. You can also interplant with lettuce as long as you don't let it get too crowded.

It is essential to plant the right varieties--these are not the varieties we grow for summer and fall harvest. Purple sprouting broccoli is the best known of the overwintering broccoli; there are also white sprouting varieties. This year West Coast Seeds has Early Red Spear, which is the earliest of the purple sprouting broccoli. It doesn't produce for long, but serves until later varieties come into production. WCS is also selling a mix of varieties to spread out harvest from early March to the end of May. One of the cultivars in the mix, Cardinal Late, is particularly robust, with large spears, and seemed to survive last winter better than other purple broccoli in a number of gardens on Salt Spring. For cauliflower, Purple Cape (actually a purple brocco-flower) is reliable, as are Aalsmeer and Galleon, which are white cauliflowers. Galleon produces outstanding heads, both in size and quality, in April and May. Of the winter cabbages, January King and Danish Ballhead are classics for good reason; also 'Melissa' and other savoy are very hardy.

Be sure to protect your plants from cabbage root maggot—with screening or floating row cover over seedlings, paper or cloth barriers around stems of transplants (see my May 30 message for details <http://www.saltspringenergystrategy.org/food.htm>)

Get ready for July 1st (AKA Carrot Day). This is a good date to sow carrots and other roots for harvest from late fall through next winter. I find that any variety of carrots can be kept in the garden over the winter in this climate so grow your favourites (or grow whatever you can find—the seed racks are getting bare!). The main requirement for successfully overwintering carrots is soil that is well-drained in the winter.

In the summer, I cover seed beds with newspapers or burlap to keep the soil evenly moist until the seeds germinate. If carrot rust fly is a problem where you garden, cover the seed beds with floating row cover (e.g., 'Remay') to prevent the insects from laying eggs on the carrots. Seal the edges of the fabric down well with boards, stones, etc. and keep the carrots beds covered until late September.

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

June 19:, 2009

For those of you inquiring about buying my books, there is ordering information posted on my web site: www.lindagilkeson.ca

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