

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

October 10

Garlic and Last Harvests

Last planting:

Garlic: October is the ideal month for planting garlic. I make it a habit of planting mine on Thanksgiving weekend so was at that today. A couple of people have asked me if they planted too soon (end of September) and no, that's not too early. Garlic should be planted by the end of October, but even planting in November is still better than planting in the spring. Garlic makes bulbs in response to the increasing day-lengths in May & June no matter how big the root system is at the time. By planting garlic in the fall it has much longer to grow a large, well-established root system before the long days of early summer cause it to form a bulb--which is why fall-planted garlic grows bigger bulbs.

Last Harvests:

Some low lying gardens might frosted this weekend so I hope those gardeners have either covered or picked their last tomatoes and squash.

Tomatoes: Pick any fruit you want to store for later ripening before a killing frost. Mature green tomatoes can be stored for several months at 15 degrees C (a tried and true method is to wrap each one in newspaper). They ripen when taken out and placed at room temperature. Tomatoes ripen best at about 20 degrees C and exposure to light will increase the colour somewhat, but is not required for ripening. For short term storage, you can just pull the whole vine and hang it up in a shed to allow fruit to ripen (spread newspaper below to catch the ones that plop off). Check often to remove ripening or rotting fruit.

Pumpkins: If you are growing pumpkins for Jack-o-lanterns or Halloween pies, there is no need to harvest the pumpkins until the vines have been lightly frosted. The fruit will be fine for these uses even though frost has killed the vines. If you want to keep sweet pumpkins for consumption later in the winter, however, then treat them as you would other winter squash: bring them in before frost, handle them gently, cure them in warm conditions to harden the skin and store in dry, cool conditions.

Potatoes: If you haven't dug your potatoes, don't leave it any longer. Allow the dug tubers to dry for a few hours--outdoors if the weather is dry, indoors on newspapers if it rainy. Brush off the dry soil and store the potatoes in cool (10 degrees C is ideal), completely dark conditions. Burlap bags or heavy cardboard boxes are good for keeping out light.

Fruit: A lot of apples have ripened by now, though some of the latest cultivars will be ripening over the next month. If you haven't already, it is time to pick winter pears (Bosc, Comice, Seckel, etc.) and kiwi fruit. Store these in a refrigerator or under the coolest conditions you can manage. Apples are ripe when you pick them, but winter pears and kiwi won't finish ripening until you bring them out of cold storage and hold them at room temperature.

HEAD'S UP: Start squirreling away all the mulch materials you can get ahold of--leaves, straw, bracken fern, etc. for use as it gets colder to protect your winter harvests.

For those of you inquiring about my courses and talks, I have updated my schedule 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