

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

September 6, 2025

Surplus Fruit, Pruning, Pinching, Late Sowing

Many gardeners are handling a big crop of fruit this year due to the mainly dry, sunny weather we had during the spring pollination period. If your crops of pears, apples, plums, etc. are getting out of hand, there are 'gleaner' programs in some communities that can arrange to collect surplus fruit (and other crops in some cases) and distribute it to food banks, other charities and those in need. These are really valuable projects for reducing food waste while improving food security for people; some programs also provide helpers to pick the fruit:

-On Salt Spring, contact the Farmlands Trust

<https://www.ssifarmlandtrust.org/foodshare>

-In the greater Victoria area, contact Lifecycles

<https://lifecyclesproject.ca/our-projects>

-In the Comox Valley, contact LUSH Valley

<https://lushvalley.org/fruit-tree>

These are just a few I know of, and there are certainly others in other communities.



Pruning and pinching? This is the week to prune back the flower clusters forming on indeterminate (vining) tomatoes in the garden. Those flowers would set fruit too late to become pickable tomatoes so cut back new shoots with flowers now to force the plant to ripen the fruit it has already on the plant. If tomatoes are in a greenhouse, then you can wait another month or so to prune back the flowers. Indeterminate or bush tomatoes usually don't need pruning because they have come to the natural end of their flower production, but if they are continuing to flower, then prune them too. And about those late ripening tomatoes: yes, a lot of people say their tomatoes are ripening later than usual this year. There were quite a few pretty cool nights early in the summer and even later on, between the heat waves, cooler weather that would slow the growth of warm-loving plants.

The 'pinching' applies to Brussels sprouts: It is time to pinch out, or snip off, the tips of plants to stimulate sprout production on the rest of the stem. You just need to remove the growing point at the top so the plant concentrates on plumping up good-sized sprouts by the end of October. If you have early plants that already have nice sized sprouts, you don't need to pinch the tips, but it does ensure full development of sprouts on the upper part of the stem where sprouts are last to form. If your plants are just showing little pea-sized sprouts now, that is perfect, as they will respond quickly to pinching with sprouts expanding quickly. By now, Brussels sprout plants should be half a meter to a meter tall (20-40 inches). If your plants are a little smaller than that, it would still be worth pinching the tips to see if you can get a small crop to form. Sadly, for gardeners who set out Brussels sprout seedlings in August, if plants are less than a foot high at this point, they won't produce a crop.

In case you are wondering, there is no need to prune off new flowers of cucumbers, zucchini or other summer squash. They grow fruit to an edible size so quickly that flowers all this month should produce harvestable fruit this fall. If we have a warm fall, they might just go on to the end of October or later!

Late sowing: If you have a cold frame, tunnel or greenhouse, you can still sow leafy greens, such as hardy lettuce, spinach, Chinese cabbage, leaf mustard, radishes. You can plant seedlings outdoors if you can find plants, but it is too late to sow seeds of these crops outdoors for fall harvests. You can seed corn salad outdoors now as it is hardy enough to actually grow [slowly] during the winter. Pull back any mulch and sprinkle seeds under tomatoes, peppers, beans and other plants that will be finished over the next month. Every year I also like to sow frost hardy lettuce varieties (e.g., Winter Density, Rouge d'hiver, Arctic King, Continuity, Merveille des quatre saisons) at the end of

September for harvesting in the spring. The tiny plants grow a little in the fall, but the goal is a surprisingly early lettuce crop starting in March. Be ready to throw a tarp over the lettuce bed to protect lettuce from cold snaps during the winter. You can also sow lettuce, spinach, dill, cilantro, even radish seeds, on the surface of the soil in November, which is late enough that the seeds don't germinate until early spring. Protect the beds with chickenwire or wire mesh covers to prevent birds from scratching up the seeds over the winter.



Sow corn salad this month for winter harvests

Recycling corner: Last year at this time, I discussed some common pest and disease problems that have cropped up in some gardens again this year. See my Sept. 5, 2025 newsletter at http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html for eggs laid by climbing cutworm moths, sooty black smudges on garlic skins (a largely harmless fungus!) and fall webworms. Also tips on how to determine whether your winter squash is ready to harvest.