

July 2011



Gardening in July

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Lawn Care

- Watch your lawn now for lack of water and signs of stress: like a bluish-gray color on the leaf blades or footprints that remain in the lawn after walking through the grass or even wilted, folded or curled up grass blades. If you notice these symptoms it is time to supplement water to your turf.
- Now is a good time to take soil samples from your lawn areas for testing. The results will have time to come back before you do your fall lawn renovations.
- Remember to change directions when mowing your lawn to have a more even cut. Check to see that the blades on your lawn mower are sharp.

Edibles

- Cut your basil, mint, and oregano to keep them compact and to keep these herbs from blooming and going to seed.
- Remove old fruiting canes of raspberry and blackberry plants after harvest is over from now till fall of the year. Canes produced this summer will fruit next spring.
- Make sure your tall vegetables are staked now to keep them from falling over and allowing soil to spatter up on the leaves.

Ornamental Plants and Flowers

- Stop pinching Chrysanthemums in July around the middle of the month to allow time for full bloom.

- Check for caterpillars on azaleas, cherry and pecan trees. Spray with insecticide if needed.



- Do not prune spring flowering shrubs after the middle of the month since they are now beginning to put their blooming buds on for next spring.
- Deadhead your annuals and perennials this month to encourage more bloom. Pick off the dead blooms. Where possible pinch to a node on the stem.
- Pinch off old bloom heads from Rhododendrons to encourage the late summer growth and bloom buds for next spring.

Organic Gardening

- Use the least disruptive and least polluting protections for your plants against pests. Try the following methods from least to most in the harmful range – first, physical barriers and traps; next, biological controls; then appropriate botanical and mineral pesticides.
- Using soaker hoses will deliver the water directly to the base of the plant. Doing this will help reduce moisture lost from evaporation. Watering in the morning is the best time of the day.

Getting Your Garden Ready for Vacation



We are talking about getting the garden ready for “your vacation” and not getting the garden ready for “a” vacation. We want our garden to survive while we take a break from the hustle and bustle of life. Things that will determine whether you need to worry more about more than just watering are what kinds of plants you have and how long you will be away.

If you are only going away for a day or two or maybe a long weekend, you may not need to do anything at all. Containers and small pots will need the most attention during vacation, even if your vacation or time spent away from home is short. If you are gone only a few days, the containers can be moved from a direct sun position to a shady site or even to a cool garage or carport to reduce the amount of water loss. If you know early in the season that you are going away, you can add some of the water absorbing gels to your soil mix. These are really handy with hanging baskets on a porch that usually has to be watered every day.

I am not much on self-watering containers for indoor plants due to soluble salt build-up but this is an option and is particularly popular with house plants. They consist of a pot with a false bottom where water is added that will wick up into the soil. There are other devices you can purchase that basically wick water from a bucket or a tube into the pot. There are some plastic tubes on the market, as well as some terra cotta ones that attach to a large soda bottle or other container filled with water. The water drips from the container into the soil over a period of time. If you choose to do this, do a trial run to see how long the water will last. I have found that most of these types of waterers will last at least a week.

In the in-ground garden areas themselves, watering really deep and well before you leave may last about a week depending on the weather and wind. The best thing to do is start watering early in the season deeply and not so often to train your plants to not need water



daily. This makes the roots go deeper and not grow so close to the surface. If you have lots of plants and gardens around your home, too many to have a plant sitter, then just concentrate on the expensive trees and shrubs and new plantings for this season. Adding a couple inches of organic mulch in the vegetable garden or even pine needles temporarily will help conserve moisture there.

A lightweight thin fabric, one that you would use for frost protection, placed over annuals and vegetables will help them retain moisture by slowing down the water loss from leaves and may even protect from some insects while you are gone.

Of course you may just want to invest in an automatic watering system. Soaker hoses are rather inexpensive and can be used for longer vacation trips and removed when you return. You can have a house sitter turn on the automatic water system or add an inexpensive timer device found at a local hardware store. Just add the timer to the faucet before placing the soaker hose. Do a good scouting job for insects and diseases and treat before you leave, if necessary, so you won't come home and find your plants gone from insect eating.



In addition to watering plants, make sure your lawn is mowed one last time before leaving. Depending on the weather, the mowing will last up to 10 days before getting too high. You don't want to mow extra low because this can add extra stress to the grass. It is better to have it high when you get back and mow it a couple times to get the grass height back down, than to put stress on your grass.

Just a few more reminders before you leave for vacation: Don't forget to spray that deer repellent one last time, pinch the flowers from herbs so new growth will develop while you are gone, and let the house or plant sitter harvest and enjoy your veggies while you are away. Oh and don't forget the gift for the house or plant sitter when you return!



Growing Flowers for the County Fair



Have you ever entered your flowers in the county fair? You may have never considered this, but you should. It has been years since I have entered flowers because I am usually helping to judge them. It is easy to enter and often you have a good chance at earning a ribbon and a monetary award. You will be adding beauty for all to see. Everyone really enjoys walking through the cut flowers and containers exhibited at the fair and it seems less and less of us are spending the time to enter flowers. Do not underestimate the quality of your own flowers for exhibition! Many times, while working at the fair, I have heard visitors say, "I should have brought my own flowers or vegetables because they look just as good as the ones on display."

By following a few simple steps you will be able to pick the best quality of your own flowers for a long lasting display. These steps will also help them last if you are just cutting them to enjoy in your own home. First, find out when and where the local fair is going to be held and get a copy of the fair catalog, which can often be found at your local library. The catalog will list all of the requirements and directions for each flower category and the details, such as how to display and the possible premiums and awards available. Example: If the category calls for three stems, then make sure you only have three stems, not four and not one stem with three branches. The Dixie Classic Fair is held this year from September 30 to October 9, 2011 and their office number is 336-727-2236.

Make a list of the flowers you have in your garden that can be entered in the fair by using the fair catalog. When you visit your garden, arm yourself with some sharp scissors or pruners and take a pail of water with you. I like to use a large pail or bucket - up to 5 gallon size. It is also good to put some flower preservative in the bucket of water or have some available in the final vase or container. You can buy this, usually as a powder, at a florist shop or hardware store. It has all the ingredients to keep your flowers fresh for a longer period of time. My favorite home recipe for preservative is 2 cups lemon-lime carbonated beverage, 2 cups water, and ½ teaspoon household chlorine bleach. You should always make sure the pail, bucket, container or vases are clean, otherwise bacteria may start growing and clog up the water vessels in the flower stems. Look for flowers that are just beginning

to open. They will last the longest once cut and put in the container. For roses that open rapidly, cut them when the buds are just about to unfurl. For gladiolus, you should cut them when only a few of the lower flowers are beginning to open. Look in the garden for flowers and leaves free of spots and insect damage. Look under the leaves for signs of disease and pests. If you have live pests on your entry when you arrive at the fairgrounds, your entry will quickly be removed and thrown out and your opportunity for a ribbon will be lost. Cut off any damaged leaves, but if you enter a stem with no leaves at all, the judges might wonder what was wrong with the leaves. Make sure that none of the lower leaves on the stems are in the water of the vase you display them in. If you are concerned that the buds of some of the flowers may not open in time for judging, you can add warm water to the vase to hasten opening of the blooms. For longest vase-life of the flowers, keep them as cool as possible away from drafts and out of direct sunlight. Who knows? Maybe you will be the one to take home those blue ribbons from the fair and some extra money for seed purchases next season!



Dahlia - photo from www.flowerspictures.org

Upcoming Program

**Landscaping on a Slope: July 20th at 11:00am
at the Arboretum at Tanglewood Park: Arboretum Office**
Steep slopes can be found in many landscapes and present many challenges to homeowners & gardeners. They are often difficult and dangerous to mow, contain poor soil and suffer from erosion. This class will cover design options and plant suggestions for aesthetic appeal and to prevent erosion.

From the Master Gardener Hotline - Twig Girdlers

Bertram Lantz, Master Gardener Volunteer

The Master Gardener Hotline is staffed by volunteers from 9am - noon and 1pm - 4pm, Monday - Friday. You can reach an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer by calling the Forsyth Cooperative Extension at 336-703-2850 and ask to speak with a Master Gardener.

A recent call to the Master Gardener Hotline is as follows:

Question: Late last fall I found a number of fallen branches under my pecan tree. They appeared to be chewed in half and there were also some hanging branches. I cleaned them up and destroyed the branches, but this spring and summer I am finding a few more branches in the same condition. What do you think causes this?



Answer: It sounds like you have a twig girdler problem. These adult beetles chew off the branches and the female lays eggs under the bark. The eggs and larvae winter over in the fallen branches and adult beetles hatch in late summer and early fall. Normally there is only one hatch per year, but small amounts of larvae do not complete development until late spring and adult beetles appear at that time to cause more damage.

Twig Girdlers are typical long horned beetles 1/2" to 5/8" long with a cylindrical dark brown body. They have a wide gray band across their wing covers and also have pink, orange or yellow spots. They also have long antennae which are sometimes referred to as horns or feelers.

The most effective control is to gather the fallen and angling branches and destroy them. If you can't burn in your area, cut the branches into small pieces, put them in a plastic bag and take them to your landfill. The application of insecticides is rarely justified or practical, especially on large trees.

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