

Gardening Diary August 2010

The children may have forgotten schools for several weeks and you may be preparing for a fortnight's holiday, but no garden can be neglected without suffering. While there should be time enough for enjoying the views and entertaining friends in the garden everything needs to be kept clean and tidy so you protect your investment.

Beds and Borders

Flowers that should be in prolific bloom in August include blue agapanthus, pink and purple monarda, pink echinacea, fiery red crocosmia and yellow heliopsis. Some form of staking may be necessary if the plants are not propping each other up.

Now is the best time to take cuttings of geraniums and pelargoniums. If these shoots are rooted now rather than in September the new plants will stand a much better chance of overwintering because they are bigger and sturdier. Select strong, short-jointed side shoots and cut just below a leaf joint so the cutting is approximately 6cm (4") long. Remove the bottom leaves and stipules, dip into rooting powder and push your prepared cuttings around the edge of a pot filled with Levington Multi-Purpose Compost. Water with a fine rose and cover the cuttings with newspaper for a week or so until they pick up. Follow the same sort of procedure with cuttings of fuchsia, osteospermum, aubretia, dianthus and helianthemum using fresh compost in clean pots.

Unfortunately summer is the time when pests and diseases are a big problem in most gardens and treatment is advisable to make sure your investment in time and money is not ruined by pesky problems. In the flowering decorative garden you probably only need a couple of controls to keep most pests at bay. Few gardeners can survive without some form of slug control and SlugClear is safer than blue pellets. This liquid concentrate is so easy to use, Just dilute in water and wet the leaves and around the roots with a watering can. It's great to keep the foliage of hostas and bedding plants free of slug and snail damage as it even controls those slugs that may be hiding underground.

The other control that you may need is a spray that will control sap-sucking pests such as greenfly, blackfly, caterpillars, whitefly and red lily beetles. Just one spray of BugClear Ultra Gun! will kill the pests you have wetted and the sap-sucking ones that are hiding away on the underside of the leaves. In fact this systemic insect killer makes the whole plant insect proof for a week or so, even controlling new pests that fly in after you've sprayed.

Roses, especially those planted up against walls, and possibly other shrubs may be showing signs of powdery mildew on foliage. If you spot the first signs of this white powdery disease on plants such as phlox, lilac and monarda you do need to take immediate action. Watering the roots thoroughly will give the plant some much needed strength, but to prevent the disease spreading you will need to spray with a fungicide such as FungusClear Ultra or RoseClear 4 Gun! You may also notice the signs of blackspot disease on the leaves of roses. This descriptive disease that shows first as brown smudges that develop to turn the leaves yellow and to fall off

prematurely needs a systemic fungicide to halt its spread. A spray every fortnight with FungusClear Ultra or FungusClear 2 Gun! will halt the spread of the disease, although it won't rid your roses of the unsightly spots. To have healthy roses that are completely clean you will have to remember to start spraying your plants next year with your chosen fungicide just as the first leaves begin to unfurl and to repeat the spray every couple of weeks to protect new foliage as it grows.

Cut lavender heads and tie into decorative bundles using purple ribbon. Cover the seed heads in muslin bags and use under pillows for more restful sleep or placed in underwear draws or wardrobes to deter moths and to slightly perfume the contents.

Topical Tip

Plant up colchicum and autumn flowering crocus to give you a fantastic flower display in September and October. When planted in clumps under trees in an otherwise bare bed, Colchicum 'Innocence' will provide a dazzling white contrast to dark soil or Miracle-Gro Moisture Control Natural Pine Bark.

Patio

Tidy up your pots to ensure a full flower display for the rest of the summer. Trim back straggly growth, especially on trailing petunias to encourage new side shoots. Surfinia petunias and other similar trailers such as calibrachoa and petunia millions bells do not set seed and the only way you can keep plants from your favourite varieties is to root cuttings for overwintering indoors. Do this now by taking some of the tips, and placing the cut end around the edge of pots of Levington Multi-Purpose Compost.

The nutrients in your compost will only last 6 to 8 weeks maximum, so plants in hanging baskets and patio pots will need feeding every week to have the energy to keep green leaves and to produce more flowers. The easiest way to water and to feed at the same time is with the Miracle-Gro Liquefeed system. Just clip to the end of your water hose and screw in a bottle of concentrated Miracle-Gro Liquefeed Plant Food. The watering and feeding device will automatically dilute the feed so that you can feed the average sized garden in about 10 minutes.

A large pot or two containing attractive and useful herbs will be a delight if placed near the barbecue or the kitchen door. For a decorative display that will also get your taste buds tingling buy ready-grown pots of aromatic basil, golden thyme, red-edged sage, curled leaf parsley and spiky chives. By mixing together different leaf colours and shapes you will be adding to the attractiveness of your whole garden.

If you are going away for the weekend, move containers into the shade to prevent them from drying out too quickly. If you are going on holiday for a fortnight place the pots on a waterproof sheet and set an automatic watering system to water the pots at regular intervals while you are away. The battery operated Hozelock AutoKit is the one I use and it is reliable and efficient. Just set up the system a week or so before you go on holiday to ensure you have the settings of volume of water and frequency of water flow about right.

As the weather warms up, so ants become a regular summer pest of gardens, kitchens and patios. They may not be directly harmful to garden plants but they are more than a nuisance when they trail through the kitchen or across the patio searching for food.

If ants find a good source of food then they will tell all the other 'workers' from the nest where it's found and soon you will be plagued. Keeping the kitchen and patio clear of food debris is a good place to start, especially sealing away sugary foods such as biscuits and breakfast cereals.

Once ants are spotted you will need to take immediate action if they are to be controlled effectively. While ordinary contact powder insecticides will kill the worker ants they touch, they do little to control the whole nest or eliminate the pest problem. What you really need is a simple to use treatment that will get rid of the nest, the queen and all her helpers without dusting harmful powders around.

That's where the superior technology behind modern granules comes into its own. Home Defence AntStop! Granules contain a 100% natural active ingredient derived from soil bacteria that kills ants and their entire nest with one application. It's versatile and easy to use - just sprinkle around nests, along runs or water into nests.

AntStop! Granules are a highly attractive bait that ants take back to their nest to kill the whole colony from one application. These dust-free granules have been formulated with an irresistible sugar based carrier that actually attracts ants. It kills by contact, ingestion and by being taken back to the nest. Spinosad also forms a long-lasting barrier against future attack. These granules are versatile and easy to use. They can be sprinkled onto surfaces indoors and outdoors where ants are running or diluted in water and washed into the nest.

This advanced formula is not designed to kill ants instantly. Instead they take the Ant Stop! Granules back to the nest to kill the queen, workers and immature larvae. In this way the whole colony is destroyed ensuring 100% effectiveness.

Stop feeding ericaceous shrubs such as rhododendron, azalea and camellia by the end of the month. The plants will have already formed their buds for next year's display and further feeding into the autumn may encourage the plants to drop these essential buds. Just keep the compost evenly moist using rain water wherever possible.

Topical Tip

Watch out for patio plants such as fuchsias that are struggling to survive. If the leaves are turning pale and wilting despite your regular watering, this could indicate the presence of vine weevil larvae nibbling away at underground roots. Knock out the root ball and investigate for U-shaped white larvae with brown heads. If you spot them, drench the compost in a solution of BugClear Ultra Vine Weevil Killer and treat other pot plants to prevent damage.

Lawn

Continue to mow weekly, especially if the weather is showery and the grass is growing strongly. If the weather turns hot and we have a week or more without rain you should start leaving the grass clippings on the lawn to reduce evaporation from the soil as much as possible. If you are allowed, start watering your lawn before the drought takes hold. Forget daily dribbles as they only encourage grass plants to produce extra roots in the top 2cms of soil. Instead water thoroughly once a week so the soil is moist down to deeper levels. To check how much water your lawn sprinkler is delivering to any specific area set out a few jam jars or other containers to catch the falling water. When the jars show the capture of around 2cm of water then your treatment is sufficient to water deep enough to last for at least the next week.

To reduce the competition from weeds that can use up valuable moisture that would otherwise be used by grass, use a selective weedkiller such as Verdone Extra that does nothing to harm the grass. This unique formula will not only knock out the large leaved weeds such as dandelions, plantains and white clover, but will also get rid of the more difficult weeds such as lesser trefoil (yellow suckling clover), black medick (a small leaved clover), common mouse-ear chickweed, yarrow and daisy.

During hot, dry weather of summer feeding of pale tired lawns is always possible as long as the nutrients are applied in liquid form rather than is dry granules. Dissolving blue crystals of Miracle-Gro Soluble Plant Food in a watering can is possible. But for a tonic that shows results in just a day or so and that is easy and quick to apply try EverGreen Spray & Feed. This is a ready-to-use hose-end feeder that automatically dilutes the high nitrogen feed it contains so that you can treat an average sized lawn of 100 sq. metres in about 12 minutes. Best of all you will start to see results in 24 hours that get gradually darker green over the next week.

Topical Tip

During drought periods, spike the lawn surface with a garden fork to ensure that all available moisture whether from rain or sprinkler gets down evenly to the roots rather than running off to the edges of the lawn.

Vegetables

Feed maincrop and second early potatoes with watering cans full of Miracle-Gro Soluble Plant Food. For maximum feeding wet the leaves as well as the roots to ensure a swelling crop for later harvest. Varieties of early potatoes such as Rocket, Foremost and Epicure should be dug as they are needed for the kitchen.

Salads and herbs for autumn use need to be sown now so they produce fresh growth for regular picking. Sow rows of rocket, more lettuce, coriander, flat leaved parsley and even basil.

There's still work to be done on vegetables of the onion family. It's time to harvest garlic and onions on a dry, sunny day when the bulbs can be left on the soil surface to finish their ripening. Late varieties of leeks such as Musselburgh and Winter Crop

that were sown in June will be ready to transplant into areas where you have harvested early potatoes. Enrich the soil with Miracle-Gro Organic Choice All Purpose Plant Food and make holes 15cm deep with a dibber. Drop a pencil-thick seedling into each hole and water gently to ensure all the roots go to the bottom of the hole.

Continue to feed tomatoes every 10 days or so with seaweed enriched Tomorite liquid plant food. This traditional feed is Britain's favourite tomato food as it is balanced to encourage a large crop of tasty fruits and enriched with added magnesium to help prevent leaf yellowing between the veins. Try to keep the compost in which your tomatoes are growing evenly moist, instead of fluctuating between bone dry and soaking wet. Regular watering will help the fruits to expand evenly and reduce the amount of skins that split. Erratic watering encourages cracking of skins and is a particular problem with cherry varieties like Sungold and Gardener's Delight that grow and expand quickly. Use tap water rather than rain water with tomatoes as this should contain enough calcium to ward off blossom end rot, a black rot first noticed furthest away from the tomato stalk.

For a real Christmas treat sow a row of short-rooted carrots now that will provide a tasty harvest throughout December. Try a quickly maturing variety such as Early Nantes or Amsterdam Forcing and be prepared to cover the row with fleece after October to keep off the worst of winter's weather.

Kill off weeds in bare soil with Weedol Max Gun! and immediately transplant seedlings of Brussels sprouts, winter cabbage and other brassicas to their final positions. Before planting out enrich the soil with a dressing of Miracle-Gro Fruit & Vegetable Plant Food. This will feed your plants slowly but surely for the next couple of months while they are actively growing. A physical barrier, called a planting mat, positioned around the new stems at soil height will help to deter damage from the larvae of the cabbage root fly.

Topical Tip

Cut and use green and yellow courgettes and marrows while they are still small and tasty. Leave winter squash varieties such as Butternut Squash until the skins harden and turn yellow before cutting and storing ready for use in the next few months.

Fruit

Autumn fruiting raspberries will be starting to ripen and they will need netting to protect them from birds that also enjoy these luscious fruits.

Strawberries are the easiest fruits to propagate as they produce tiny plantlets at the end of runners at this time of the year. To encourage them to root tidily, peg down the new plantlets into individual pots of Levington Multi-Purpose Compost using wire or a straightened-out paper clip. After a month or so the runners to these new plants can be cut and the rooted plants moved to a new row that has been enriched with Miracle-Gro Fruit & Vegetable Compost. Tidy up parent plants that you wish to keep with a pair of shears, cutting off all this year's foliage.

As the summer continues, so some fruit trees can become unwelcome hosts to increasing populations of aphids. In some seasons these greenfly can be a serious problem causing yellowing and curling of leaves, stunting of shoot growth and disfiguring of fruit with the excretion of honeydew. To get the aphids under control spray the foliage of apples and pears with a general purpose insecticide such as BugClear for Fruit & Veg, spraying as much foliage as the tree height allows.

Topical Tip

Continue to pick ripening plums keeping a wary eye open for wasp attack.

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ALWAYS READ THE LABEL. USE PESTICIDES SAFELY

BugClear™ Ultra Gun!™ and BugClear™ Ultra Vine Weevil Killer contain acetamiprid. BugClear™ Gun!™ for Fruit & Veg contains pyrethrins. BugClear™ for Fruit & Veg contains rape seed oil. FungusClear Ultra contains triticonazole. FungusClear 2 Gun! contains myclobutanil. Home Defence Ant Stop! Granules contain spinosad. RoseClear® 4 Gun!™ contains sulphur and fatty acids. SlugClear™ contains metaldehyde. Verdone® Extra contains fluroxypyr, clopyralid and MCPA. Weedol® Max Gun!™ contains pelargonic acid.

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