

July 2011 Gardening Diary

Summer at last and the weather promises some of the warmest days of the year. Lawns and patios need to look at their best as enjoying al fresco lunches and suppers become a regular thing. Biggest job of the month is to see that all your plants are watered regularly and the soil retains as much moisture as possible.

DECORATIVE FLOWER GARDEN

Creating a sensible watering regime now will help to prevent plant damage if the weather should turn hot and the rains refuse to fall. The secret of success is to get the water deep underground where plant roots can easily take up the moisture. It's no good wetting the soil surface on a daily basis. That just encourages plants to create surface roots that are more susceptible to hot sun and drying winds. It also encourages annual weeds to pop up to compete for available moisture. Instead you need to get water down to below 15cm (6 inches) from the surface. You can do this most easily if you sink a plant pot up to its rim beside shrubs and between bedding plants so that water from your can or hose is placed instantly at root level and you have a reservoir that fills and drains easily and quickly.

In this way daily watering of beds and borders is totally unnecessary. It is much better to water thoroughly and deeply once a week instead of wetting the surface every night. Your plants will grow more strongly, and you can enjoy the extra spare time taking in the perfume and colour of a more beautiful garden.

Lightly feeding of plants regularly will give your plants the strength to send down stronger, deeper roots to this reservoir of moisture. A weekly feed of half strength Miracle-Gro Water Soluble Plant Food during drought is much better than plain water. Your plants will continue to produce new stems and more flower buds instead of closing down the growth factory while it concentrates on survival.

Another beneficial action is to spread a mulch layer of organic matter such as decorative bark chips or soil conditioner over the soil surface. For best results use Miracle-Gro Moisture Control Natural Pine Bark or Levington Water Saving Decorative Bark. These long-lasting chips will help soil to retain moisture six times longer than ordinary garden soil.

Sweet peas will be producing new flowers every day and will need to be cut regularly to fill your home with delicious scents of summer. If you leave plants for a few days to set seed then they usually stop producing new buds and flowers. So keep those scissors handy and feed these plants over the foliage and around the roots with Miracle-Gro Liquafeed.

Watch for pests attacking new plant growth and treat them as soon as the first culprits are noticed.

Red lily beetle adults and their grubs will be a summer nuisance. As soon as you see the first adult spray with BugClear Ultra Gun! – just one treatment will protect your lilies for up to three weeks. You can use the same spray on all your decorative flowers including roses, philadelphus, lupins and other plants that are susceptible to aphid (greenfly and blackfly) attack.

Roses may be showing the first signs of powdery mildew on new buds and leaves. If that's the case spray them with a systemic fungicide such as Rose Clear Ultra Gun.

If you allow weeds to take over the gaps between flowers, shrubs and annual bedding you will be encouraging competition that will rob these wanted plants of soil moisture, soil nutrients, space and light. To see off the weeds without back-breaking hard work spray them with Weedol Max Gun! or Weedol Rootkill Plus. Weedol Rootkill Plus is best for weeds that have deep or wandering roots such as bindweed, couch grass, dandelions and nettles. But if you've only got small annual weeds such as chickweed, groundsel and meadow grass then Weedol Max Gun! will give a fast-acting kill. In fact on a warm day you will see the weeds begin to wilt and die in just one hour.

Dead head flowers such as old fashioned pinks, fuchsias and pansies to encourage further flowering. For monster heads of dahlias pinch out some of the buds to leave a 'king' flower that will draw energy and grow really large. Pinch out the top of the main shoot of chrysanthemum and dahlia plants so they grow bushy and produce many more side shoots – up to ten per plant if you are lucky.

TOPICAL TIP

It's time to sow seeds of foxgloves, sweet Williams and Canterbury bells for next year's display. Make a shallow drill in moist soil and sprinkle the seeds thinly along the row. Cover with more soil and label so you know what plants you need to transplant in early autumn.

PATIO

Watering and feeding container plants growing on the patio is a regular job. Hanging baskets may need watering daily, although large pots and containers usually hold enough compost so that they only need attention every few days. To maximise the amount of water that can be held by the compost many gardeners add water-holding crystals before planting up. For example Miracle-Gro Moisture Control Plant Food is a mixture of slow release plant food that feeds for up to six months and water-absorbing crystals that absorb 400% of their own weight in water. Mixed into standard composts this combination of ingredients allows plant roots to absorb moisture and nutrients as and when they need it and also reduce the need for frequent watering.

Dead-heading flowers will always encourage maximum blooming as this prevents the setting of seed and a natural tendency of plants to stop all further growth once they have achieved their life's ambition of producing seed for the next generation. Fuchsias produce many green seed pods that take up a lot of the plant's energy and these should be removed by weekly dead-heading. Most petunias, including the surfinia and million bells type are sterile and so do not set seed, so this is a job that doesn't have to be carried out for maximum plant vigour.

Begonias grown from tubers on the other hand produce male and female flowers. Just like the bird population the male of the species is highly decorative and showy. In begonias, male flowers are the large multi-petalled balls of colour, whereas the female flowers are small and single and carry a diamond-shaped swelling behind

each flower. To prevent seeds from sowing and encourage many more male flowers pinch out the female flowers as soon as they are noticed.

Trim back the long tendrils of Wisteria growing against walls. Cut back these wispy growths so that you leave about four buds between the stem and your pruning point. This pruning will help to encourage more flower buds for next year's display.

Weeds on gravel drives, paths or gravel edges need to be treated so they are killed and the ground made weed-free for several months. Sodium chlorate has been withdrawn from sale during 2010, but Pathclear Weedkiller LC is an economical alternative that not only kills the weeds and their roots but also prevents the growth of new weed seedlings for up to three months. The liquid formulation allows easy mixing and application through your own pressure sprayer or watering can.

TOPICAL TIP

Feed baskets and patio pots each week with a liquid fertiliser such as Miracle-Gro All-Purpose Concentrated Liquid Plant Food to encourage strong growth with plenty of flowers.

LAWN

Depending on rainfall or supplementary watering, lawn grasses should be growing fast and healthily. Mow the grass at least once a week to keep this core part of the garden looking smooth and lush.

But at this time of year regular watering and regular mowing will gradually exhaust nutrient reserves so that grass can soon look tired and pale just when summer sun encourages us all outside to enjoy barbecues and lawn games. To return the lawn to a thick, lush sward that is bursting with colour and energy it needs to be fed with a special lawn treatment. While lawn granules such as EverGreen Complete are great for spring application, the hot sun and drier soil conditions can lead to scorch if the granules are not applied correctly. Much more forgiving are lawn treatments that are applied after dilution in water. The nutrients then do not present a risk of scorching the grass if misapplied and are more quickly taken up by the grass roots because they are already dissolved in water.

Easiest and most flexible for feeding the average sized lawn is the Miracle-Gro Liquafeed system when charged with refill bottles of Liquafeed Lush lawn Food. The hand-held dispenser is attached to a hose so that you can feed and water your lawn in just a few minutes. Dilution is automatic according to water pressure and you will see quick green-up results in just a few days. Because the liquid plant food is fully diluted within the water from the hose before application, it protects against the risk of accidental scorch damage.

If you only have a small lawn, then applications of Miracle-Gro Water Soluble Lawn Food through a watering can are the simple answer to exhausted grass. Just add a heaped measure of nutrient crystals into a gallon of water (4.5 litres) and apply over the lawn. You will see the grass turn dark green in around five days.

TOPICAL TIP

If a few lawn weeds are marring the otherwise perfect look of your lawn get rid of them with one spray of Verdane Extra Ready to Use. Use on a dry day when rain is not expected.

GROW YOUR OWN VEGETABLES

Feed and water your vegetable and fruit crops to encourage fast growth that results in extra tender and tasty pickings. Runner beans and dwarf French beans grow best when watered with a solution of Miracle-Gro Fruit & Vegetable Liquid Plant Food. This rich brown concentrated plant food is 100% chemical free, only containing naturally occurring materials that provide balanced feeding for a wide range of crops. Diluted in water it is ideal for all manner of food crops including potatoes, carrots, cabbages and sweet corn.

Runner beans are very susceptible to attack by blackfly (aphid) a pest that sucks the sap of many different plants. You will probably notice them first on the growing tips of the plants where stems and leaves are at their most tender for the aphids and the most vulnerable for the gardener. Left undisturbed they breed fantastically fast and cause twisted and stunted growth to stems and leaves. At first signs zap them with BugClear Gun! for Fruit & Veg. It contains a quick-acting contact insect killer (pyrethrins) that quickly degrades on the plant and does not hinder safe harvest of crops for more than a day.

Remove side-shoots on upright cordon tomatoes and tap the flowers occasionally to help set the whole truss. After the first truss has set it's time to start regular feeding every 10 days with the country's favourite tomato fertiliser – Tomorite. The high potash feed enriched with extra magnesium and seaweed extract ensures a crop of top quality, full-flavoured tomatoes. Watch out for the first attack of whitefly on tomatoes whenever the weather turns really warm. Left untreated they can multiply to such numbers that they send up a cloud of pests whenever you touch your tomato plants. Before they get to that stage spray every week or so with BugClear for Fruit & Veg. This fast-acting natural insect killer contains rape seed oil to clog up the breathing parts of many pests, but no man-made chemicals.

Continue to sow seeds of lettuce and other salads leaves such as rocket, spinach, leaf beet and mustards. You can buy these in ready mixed packets as Oriental or Italian varieties that will provide colour and taste to your salads. To protect the plants from slug and snail damage, sprinkle SlugClear Advanced Pellets along the row as soon as you see the first seedling emerge.

TOPICAL TIP

Sow seeds of herbs such as coriander, basil, parsley and chives and buy seedling plants of sage, thyme and rosemary to complete the planting of a small herb garden.

GROW YOUR OWN FRUIT

Thin apples, pears and plums if your trees have set a bumper crop of fruit. With apples first remove from any cluster of fruitlets the largest or 'king' fruit, which seldom ripens well. Also discard any fruits that are blemished, pecked by birds or diseased. At this stage it's a good idea to leave a gap of 15cm (6 inches) between each apple or pear and slightly less 5cm (2 inches) between each plum.

Pick the last of the summer raspberries as they ripen and tie in the new shoots to prevent them from being damaged by winds. When the crop has finished cut out all fruited wood so the plant can put all its energy in developing the new canes for next year's fruit.

Outdoor grape vines will need pruning and training. Leave two or three side shoots long to replace fruited wood, but cut back the remainder to around 60 cm (2 ft). Feed autumn-fruiting raspberry canes (Autumn Bliss), blackberries and loganberries now with Miracle-Gro Gro Your Own Fruit & Vegetable Plant Food granules to ensure strong growth and plenty of flowering.

TOPICAL TIP

Thin out some of the fruits of gooseberries to provide early kitchen use and to allow space between the remainder so they can swell and ripen. If you see any caterpillars on the foliage spray immediately with BugClear Gun! for Fruit & Veg.

ALWAYS READ THE LABEL. USE PESTICIDES SAFELY

BugClear™ Ultra Gun!™ and BugClear™ Ultra contain acetamiprid. BugClear™ Gun!™ for Fruit & Veg contains pyrethrins. BugClear™ for Fruit & Veg contains rape seed oil. EverGreen Complete contains MCPA, mecoprop-P and ferrous sulphate. FungusClear Ultra contains triticonazole. FungusClear 2 Gun! contains myclobutanil. Pathclear Weedkiller LC contains glyphosate and diflufenican. SlugClear™ Advanced Pellets contains metaldehyde. Verdone® Extra Ready to Use contains fluroxypyr, clopyralid and MCPA. Weedol® Max Gun!™ contains pelargonic acid. Weedol Rootkill Plus contains glyphosate and pyraflufen ethyl.
®, ™, Levington, Miracle-Gro, Tomorite and Scotts are trade marks of The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company LLC or its affiliates.