

Gardening Diary
June 2007

The start of the summer and the garden should be ready to burst into bloom. June is a great month for flowering shrubs to show us their amazing ability to brighten up our gardens. Expect to see the rich blue Ceanothus and smell the highly perfumed white of Philadelphus. Watering, weeding and feeding are top of the agenda for the flower garden but there is still plenty of seed sowing and planting for main crop vegetables.

THE FLOWER GARDEN

Flowering plants such as delphiniums, fuchsias, dahlias, gaillardia, lupins and penstemons will need watering and feeding so that they flower in profusion this summer. The quickest and easiest way of doing the job is with a hose-end applicator that feeds as easily as it waters. So a pat on the back to the Miracle-Gro people for the new Liquafeed system. You may have seen it demonstrated on the television or you can go to www.miraclegro.eu to view it in all its glory. Much better go to your local garden centre and spend £9.99 for a great new tool that will make your gardening a joy.

Miracle-Gro Liquafeed is really simple to use. Just connect to your garden hose and twist in a bottle of liquid feed and away you go. There's a circular adjustment of the spray pattern from jet, to shower to a flat stream and a separate control that adjusts the flow from plain water to ready dissolved liquid plant food. There's no mixing, no measuring and no mess. With Liquafeed plants get the right balance of water and feed so they can grow twice as big as unfed plants. Assuming you have no hose-pipe restrictions in your area then this is a great device that will make your gardening easier and your garden even more beautiful.

Roses will be performing well whatever the weather has to throw at us gardeners. They are remarkably resilient trees, shrubs or whatever you call them. Their deep root system means they are practically drought proof in anything other than a Saharan summer, so watering is rarely needed for them to thrive. What they do need is help to ward off pests and diseases. Without protection greenfly in there thousands will suck at the sap, weakening growth and twisting stems and buds. Diseases such as powdery mildew and rose blackspot will also mar the appearance of foliage and when widespread will encourage premature leaf drop so the plant sheds its food factories that provide all the energy needed for future flowering. Spraying established roses is a necessary evil, but you can make the job as simple as possible if you select a multi-functional spray that controls pests and diseases in one application. Best known is RoseClear 3 (a concentrate that is diluted in your own pressure sprayer) or the RoseClear 3 Gun! (a ready-to-use product that comes in a handy sprayer)

If you are thinking of the future rather than admiring your existing handiwork, it's time to sow seeds of hardy biennials which promise to flower next spring and summer. Delphiniums and lupins can be sown now without any protection other than a sprinkling of SlugClear Advanced Pellets to keep the slugs at bay.

TOPICAL TIP

Seeds of wallflowers sown in June will produce plants of an ideal size for transplanting early in September in their flowering positions.

PATIO GARDENING

All pots, tubs and window boxes should be planted up with decorative flowers or bought ready planted from your local garden centre. To get the best results plant your own up using Miracle-Gro Moisture Control Compost in these containers. It holds twice as much water as ordinary multi-purpose compost and is also enriched with enough Miracle-Gro Plant Food to feed the plants for up to 6 months. You won't find a better compost for hanging baskets and other patio containers.

For a sure picking of tomatoes select a south facing wall and position your growing bags close to the wall. Nowadays the traditional sized growing bag has been replaced by the giant planter that holds twice as much compost and therefore twice as much water as the thin ordinary ones. Last year Scotts introduced a Tomorite Giant Planter that many gardeners raved about because it didn't require constant watering. Plant up with young plants of the variety Alicante for an outdoor grower of traditional size that ripens and eats well. If you prefer the cherry tomato type then Gardener's Delight or Sun Gold is for you. Plant just three plants to a Giant Planter and keep the compost evenly moist. As soon as the first truss has set fruit then start feeding every 10 days with Liquid Tomorite to ensure you get a tasty and bumper crop.

TOPICAL TIP

Check your paths, patios and gravel drives for weed growth. One application of Pathclear Season Long or the ready-to-use Pathclear Gun! Season Long will not only kill the unsightly weeds that have emerged in spring, but will also prevent the germination of new weed seeds for up to 3 months.

LAWN CARE

Keep mowing as often as you are able. The grass will be growing at a great rate as the weather warms up and intermittent showers keep the grass sufficiently watered. Mowing twice a week is not too frequent, especially if the weather is showery.

To ensure the grass is a good colour and is thick and lush a summer feed of a balanced lawn food is essential at this time of the year. Not only will this stimulate top growth it will also encourage deeper rooting, a pre-requisite to survival, if the months of August and September are going to be hot and dry.

If weeds are a problem on your lawn then a treatment with Verdone Extra will get rid of the difficult small-leaved weeds such as black medick, common mouse-ear and lesser trefoil as well as the ordinary ones such as dandelions, daisies and buttercups. If your lawn is peppered with weeds all over then buy a carton containing the concentrate, mix it up in your pressure sprayer and treat the whole area. If you only have the odd patch of weed here and there then the ready-to-use spot weeder formulation should be sufficient.

TOPICAL TIP

Use water wisely and only water your lawn if a drought is threatened and restrictions are not in force. Remember that the lawn will easily recover from a drought, especially if it has been fed during the spring with a long lasting treatment such as EverGreen “I want to feed my lawn after cutting”.

THE VEGETABLE PLOT

The boom in vegetable growing has been very obvious to retailers in the gardening world. The public are becoming more and more aware of the benefits of home-grown against shop bought and that's not surprising, because there are many. Perhaps this is not the space to talk about carbon footprints and the miles some supermarkets fly their vegetables even when home-grown farm foods are available in season, but its one consideration. Another is the positive benefit to children of helping to grow vegetables that they are subsequently encouraged, bribed and variously cajoled into eating.

Every initiative in this direction is to be applauded, so it was fascinating to see that 50 or so top garden centres throughout the country are encouraging pupils of their local schools to grow carrots in pots to win prizes for themselves and their schools coffers. Thompson and Morgan are supplying free Sugarsnax carrot seed (a really sweet and tasty variety), the garden centres are supplying free Multi-Purpose Compost and Miracle-Gro are supplying the prizes for regional and national winners. Judging will take place at the end of June and we expect to rustle up about 50,000 entries – a huge amount of carrots for the primary school children and their families to be eating.

Everything we can do to encourage children to grow and eat home-grown vegetables is a step in the right direction. And you can do your bit, by sowing seed in small garden areas or even in pots on the patio. To get the most from your vegetables improve the soil with bags of Miracle-Gro Eco Sense Soil Improver or Levington Soil Conditioner. Dug into the top 15cm (6in) of soil this will help to break down heavy clay soils and improve the water-holding capacity of light sandy soils. The humus that is supplied in this way will also act as a reservoir for any plant nutrients that are provided, so the plants are able to produce a bumper crop.

Follow the instructions on the packet so that the seed is positioned at the right depth. The usual rule is the larger the seed the deeper it is planted, so carrot seeds are just covered with a very thin layer of soil, whereas French bean seeds go in a drill 5cm deep so they are underground by about twice their length.

You will need to protect most seedlings as they emerge with some SlugClear Advanced Pellets otherwise slugs and snails will eat the tender new shoots before they have time to develop. Once established keep weeds under control so your seedlings are not fighting for space, light and nutrients. With small seedlings, hand weeding is essential close to the wanted plants, although between rows can easily be weeded with a fast-acting weedkiller such as Weedol 2 applied through a narrow sprinkle bar.

Feeding is the next essential to a healthy bumper crop. To encourage regular involvement by the children and to provide some extra water along the rows, use a soluble plant food

such as Miracle-Gro that can be added to a watering can every 10 days or show them how to use the Miracle-Gro Liquefeed system. It's best to apply all liquid feeds early in the morning or in the evening when the sun is low so that you can safely wet the leaves as well as the roots. This reduces the chance of leaf scorch.

TOPICAL TIP

Watch out for caterpillars on any cabbages, broccoli or other brassicas such as wallflower plants. If you spot the yellow eggs of the cabbage white butterfly laid on the underside of leaves, rub these out with your fingers. If you see the caterpillars themselves, spray the plants with BugClear, BugClear Gun! or Nature's Answer Natural Bug Killer.

WEED CONTROL

At this time of the year deep-rooted weeds such as ground elder, couch grass, brambles and dock weed have produced enough leaf growth to be easily killed with a spray of Roundup GC or Roundup RTU. Choose a calm, dry day when rain is not expected and spray all the weed leaves you can reach lightly but thoroughly. Avoid spray drift onto any wanted plants as the systemic weedkiller glyphosate can kill wanted plants just as easy as it kills the weeds. All ready-to-use formulations of Roundup RTU are fast-acting and you will see the weeds begin to wilt and die in just a couple of days. The concentrate form that you mix up yourself and apply through your own pressure sprayer is the most efficient and economical product to use but does not show effects quite so quickly. In fact it's just as effective, but takes a couple of weeks before you will see the weeds start to change colour and die.

Here are a few tips for the most effective way to kill weeds with the Roundup family of weedkillers. See that the soil is moist before you treat them. Some weeds, especially ground elder, are so efficient at drawing up moisture from the ground you will often find the soil is bone dry at root level. If this is the case thoroughly water the weed patch a couple of days before spraying. This will ensure the weeds are moving sap around the plant and that the weedkiller ingredient, glyphosate, is moved right down to the ends of the roots to kill the whole plant, roots and all.

With horsetail you are dealing with a different plant altogether. This one is pre-historic and doesn't have leaves at all so it is much more difficult to get the weedkiller inside the plant. For the Roundup to work you first need to bruise the plant greenery to open up lesions in the outer covering. In early spring, walk over the greenery and then spray thoroughly.

Bindweed is a strangler that can quickly envelop a whole shrub if left untreated, but it is not difficult to eradicate. Forget digging out the roots, these are brittle and will always break into smaller pieces that will generate a new weed plant. Instead you need to separate the climbing bindweed stems by unwinding them from around your wanted plants and position them so that the weed leaves can be easily sprayed without the spray touching the wanted plant. An easy way to protect your wanted plant is with a sheet of cardboard.

ALWAYS READ THE LABEL. USE PESTICIDES SAFELY.

Information supplied by the Scotts Miracle Gro Company UK Ltd

BugClear™ and BugClear Gun!™ contain bifenthrin. Nature's Answer Bug Killer contains pyrethrins. Pathclear® Season Long and Pathclear Gun!™ Season Long contain glyphosate, oxidiazon and diflufenican. Roundup GC and Roundup RTU contain glyphosate. SlugClear® Advanced Pellets contain metaldehyde. Verdone® Extra and Verdone Extra RTU contain fluroxypyr, clopyralid and MCPA. Weedol® 2 and Weedol 2 Gun!™ contain diquat.

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