

June 2010 Gardening Diary

The longest of days and the brightest of sunshine make June a delightful month in which to enjoy strong plant growth and colourful flowers. The danger of frost is a thing of the past and it's safe to plant outside all manner of exotic summer bedding and tender fruit and vegetables such as tomatoes, runner beans, sweet corn and squash.

DECORATIVE FLOWER GARDEN

Deciding which types of summer flowers are best for each area of your garden will ensure they grow much better and need less care and watering. For example if you have areas that get full sun for most of the day, then you need to plant out bedding that can cope best with dry conditions such as petunia, phlox, French marigold (tagetes), verbena, salvia, ageratum and alyssum. For shady areas choose plants that flower without too much sun such as busy lizzy, lobelia, nemesia, aster, pansy and antirrhinum.

Before you start planting clean and improve your soil by digging over the soil to remove all weeds and roots. Alternatively save yourself the backache and time by spraying existing weeds with Weedol Rootkill Plus. This new weedkiller will show quick results in just a few days, just like all Weedol products, but this time it kills the roots as well as the top growth so the weeds can't come back. Just one light spray to thoroughly wet the leaves of dandelions, ground elder and bindweed will see them slowly disappear for good. And best of all you don't need to dig out the weeds. Just leave the weedkiller spray to dry on the weed leaves and then plant up your summer bedding. While the weeds are gradually dying your flowering plants will gradually fill in the bare patches where they will flower to their hearts content in clean soil that contains no competition.

You can encourage bedding plants to grow fast and bloom profusely if they are given a weekly feed with a soluble plant food such as Miracle-Gro. For smaller gardens a box of the traditional blue crystals and a watering can are very economical. Although for some people the new ready-measured sachets of the plant food sold as Miracle-Gro Singles is even better. With these handy sachets, there's no measuring, no mess and your fingers stay clean. Simply tear open the top and pour the crystals into a watering can. Top up with a gallon of water (4.5 litres) and you have an ideal feed to apply over the leaves and around the roots of your tender young bedding plants.

If you have a larger garden then the watering can method usually means a lot of hard work. But nowadays carrying full watering cans can be eliminated with the help of the Miracle-Gro Liquefeed system. This clever device fits to the end of a hose and you screw in a bottle of concentrated liquid Miracle-Gro plant food. Turn on the tap and the hose-end feeder automatically dilutes the feed so you can feed the whole garden in just a few minutes.

Avoid feeding or watering when the sun is high in the sky or you can scorch the leaves through the tiny water droplets. For safest feeding, wait until the sun is low on the horizon in the evening.

While fast growing bedding plants appreciate liquid feeding, your roses, shrubs and trees get longer term benefit from granular plant foods such as Miracle-Gro Rose Plus or Miracle-Gro Slow Release Rose & Shrub Plant Food. One sprinkle will feed your flowering plants for the rest of the season. Care of roses and shrubs such as mock orange (philadelphus), ornamental cherry, viburnum and euonymus entails more than just feeding. They also need to be kept clean of pests such as greenfly and blackfly (aphids) or the stems get twisted and foliage gets covered in sooty mould. To kill off existing colonies of aphids plus other pests such as whitefly, caterpillars, mealy bugs, red spider mite and scale insects simple spray thoroughly with BugClear Ultra or BugClear Ultra Gun! These modern pest killers are systemic so one thorough spraying will get inside the sap stream to make the whole plant free of sap sucking and leaf-eating pests.

TOPICAL TIP

Plant out dahlia tubers now that the soil is warm and growth will be quick. Improve soil below the tubers with Miracle-Gro Growing Compost so roots can delve into a reservoir of moist, nutrient-rich organic matter.

PATIO

After planting up hanging baskets with Miracle-Gro Moisture Control Compost, place them on a pot at ground level for a couple of weeks before hanging into position. Keep the baskets in a sheltered spot away from harsh sun. This will harden off the growth and make watering the compost easier and help the plants establish quicker. A favourite plant on most patios is the fuchsia, as it flowers non-stop all season and comes in so many different forms and shades. The trailing forms with blooms that resemble ballerinas' dresses are ideal for displaying in hanging baskets or other raised containers where they look great trailing out of wall baskets and tall patio pots. Wherever you plant them use Miracle-Gro Moisture Control Compost in the container as it can hold twice as much water as an ordinary multi-purpose compost and will provide a certain amount of plant food that is released gradually over six months. When you are growing fast-growing fuchsias in containers, or hanging baskets with several plants crammed in together it is always advisable to provide some additional feeding with a soluble plant food such as Miracle-Gro Plant Food every couple of weeks.

Some pests such as lily beetle are very specific to their host plants. You may have seen these bright red adult beetles, but missed the larvae stage that hide themselves under a mound of black excrement. To kill off both stages simply spray your lilies with the ready-to-use BugClear Ultra Gun! This insecticide gets inside the leaves to make the whole plant pest-proof for a few weeks, so even new larvae that hatch from eggs within the next fortnight will be controlled.

Vine weevil pests are not so easy to spot. The adult is nocturnal and the creamy grubs with toffee coloured heads hide in the soil or compost where they devour the roots of plenty of pot plants. Favourite hosts include busy lizzies, heucheras, fuchsias, begonia and sempervivum. You may also see the leaves of evergreens such as camellia showing irregular notches around the edges – a sure sign of vine weevil adults. Thanks to new systemic pest killers controlling vine weevil in potted plants is a relatively easy task. Simply dilute BugClear Ultra Vine Weevil Killer in water and wet the compost of the affected pot plants. This is known as a drench.

The insecticide gets into the plant through the roots to kill off any larvae that are nibbling away underground and moves throughout the stems and foliage so the leaves are deadly to the adults. Dead easy!

You will need to water patio pots every few days as plants begin to fill the containers. Remember that ericaceous plants such as heathers, rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias will appreciate soft rain water, especially if your tap water is “hard” and leaves a chalk deposit in your kettle. If watering with “hard” tap water becomes essential, add a couple of drops of vinegar to each gallon of water before watering these acid-loving plants.

Like all pot plants ericaceous plants also need feeding during the spring and summer. For regular gentle feeding add Miracle-Gro Azalea, Camellia and Rhododendron Plant Food to rainwater in a watering can every fortnight until the end of August. Stop feeding in September so that all the newly formed buds are retained throughout the winter.

TOPICAL TIP

Snap off dead heads of rhododendrons to encourage the formation of new side shoots that will carry next years blooms.

LAWN

While weeds can be dug out of flower borders, it's next to impossible to dig out dandelions, clover and creeping trefoil without making a real mess of the lawn. Cleaning out weeds from a summer lawn with a special selective weedkiller is however a simple ten minute job. Simply choose a special lawn weedkiller such as Verdone Extra that can kill broadleaved weeds without doing any harm whatsoever to the grass. There's a concentrate for overall treatment of larger lawns to apply through a watering can or your own pressure sprayer. Or you can find ready-to-use formulations in a hand gun or larger container for quick and easy spot treatment of the odd weed here and there.

Whichever form you choose, plan your weed attack between mowings. If you allow 3 or 4 days of growth after the last mowing before you apply Verdone Extra you will have a fair amount of weed leaf to aim at. Bigger weed leaves to treat with the spray mean an easier kill. Then you need to leave another 3 days or so after application so that the weedkiller has enough time to get down to the roots to kill off the whole plant. The advantage to using Verdone Extra is that it contains three different weedkillers to kill the broadest range of weeds that could possibly be spoiling the look of your lawn. So it will kill in just one application weeds with large leaves such as plantain, dandelions and docks, plus the problem ones with small leaves such as black medick (a small-leaved clover), lesser trefoil (yellow suckling clover) and mouse-ear chickweed. Don't put the cuttings from the next mowing onto your compost heap or into municipal recycling bins, but instead dispose of in household waste. Further cuttings can be composted for at least 9 months and then used as a soil conditioner.

Mowing the grass can continue every week or so after treatment when you will notice the weeds fade away to oblivion. If you are left with some ugly bare patches previously occupied by weeds, you can use Patch Magic six weeks after treatment.

Simply scrape the surface with a rake and sprinkle on the unique mix of coir compost, lawn feed and lawn seed. After you have watered the treatment, the coir acts like a sponge, absorbing 8 times its own weight in water and expanding 4 times its volume to surround the grass seed in a moist, protective layer of compost that will ensure good germination and strong growth. During subsequent days if the coir turns light brown, its time to water the patch again so that it continues to care for the seeds, providing them with water and nutrients so they build stronger roots that survive tough conditions.

TOPICAL TIP

If your lawn is not coloured a rich dark green, feed it with EverGreen Mow It Less lawn feed. It can be applied at any time of the year and will green up in just 3 days. Best of all it won't make you extra work by increasing the mowing frequency.

GROW YOUR OWN VEGETABLES

It's said that home owners are piling into the grow your own vegetable trend and it's difficult to find many home patios that don't contain potato gro sacs, tomato planters and pots of lamb's lettuce and rocket. Out in garden borders, raised beds of improved soil are growing magnificent crops of beans, carrots and salads.

If you are not sure what to plant where and when then the worldwide web can give you lots of information. One of the best UK ones for growing advice, project ideas and a free vegetable planning guide is lovethegarden.com. You can browse for hours learning how to grow all manner of vegetables and many of the more common fruits too. It's well worth checking out.

If you need to catch up in your own plot, your local Garden Centres will have on display plenty of small seedling plants as well as seeds to get you on your way fast. Small seedlings of peas, runner and dwarf French beans will save you at least a fortnight of time in comparison to sowing seeds. Tomato plants already carrying flower buds will save you around a month of growing time and can be planted safely outside now.

For great results with tomatoes find a sunny spot against a wall to place one or two Tomorite Giant Planters. Plant three tomatoes per bag, leaving a well around each stem so that subsequent watering is easier. You should still be able to find seedling tomato plants of reliable varieties such as Alicante, Gardener's Delight and Sungold in your local nursery. If you want to grow trailing forms of tomato such as Tumbling Tom or Garden Pearl in patio pots or hanging baskets use Miracle-Gro Fruit & Vegetable Compost to get your salad fruits off to a flying start. Start feeding tomatoes with Tomorite as soon as the first truss has set fruit.

Watering vegetables may be necessary depending on the amount of rainfall that falls during June. Don't worry if the soil surface dries out – push your finger into the soil to check if it is still moist underground. But if you see plant leaves beginning to wilt then watering is essential straight away.

TOPICAL TIP

Every couple of weeks add some liquid nutrients such as Miracle-Gro Fruit & Vegetable Plant Food to the watering can to feed fast growing varieties of peas, lettuce, salad leaves and carrots.

GROW YOUR OWN FRUIT

While you may have fed your fruit trees and bushes early in spring with Miracle-Gro Fruit & vegetable Plant Food, they will appreciate another light dressing to ensure fruits ripen and growth remains strong. Once you've tickled those granules into the soil surface add a 5cm (2") mulch layer of Levington Organic Blend Farmyard Manure around the bottom of fruit canes and bushes such as raspberries, blackcurrants and blackberries as well as fruit trees such as apples, pears and plums.

While we all love ripe, sweet fruit picked fresh from home-grown plants so do pests. Strawberries and raspberries should be ripening now and will need to be protected by netting draped over sticks to keep the birds off. See that the netting is securely pinned down to the soil as blackbirds will find a way in through the smallest crack in your defences.

If the weather is wet then slugs too will be a strawberry problem unless you scatter some SlugClear Advanced Pellets around the plants and under any straw or plant collars. In some warm summers, raspberries, blackberries and loganberries are attacked by the maggot-like larvae of the raspberry beetle. Spray the fruits as soon as they start to turn colour with BugClear Gun! for Fruit & Veg to minimise the damage.

Codling moth and plum moths will be laying their eggs on fruit around now. The eggs soon develop and the maggot-like larvae start to burrow inside apples, pears and plums. You can reduce the problem by catching male adults before they mate. They are attracted into the trap by the use of pheromones.

TOPICAL TIP

Plum and damson trees can be host to leaf-curling aphids that soon make leaves crumpled and distorted. Pick off any tightly rolled leaves and spray the whole tree with BugClear for Fruit & Veg to kill off any aphids that are waiting.

ALWAYS READ THE LABEL. USE PESTICIDES SAFELY

BugClear™ Ultra Gun!™, BugClear™ Ultra and BugClear™ Ultra Vine Weevil Killer contain acetamiprid. BugClear™ Gun!™ for Fruit & Veg contains pyrethrins. BugClear™ for Fruit & Veg contains rape seed oil. SlugClear™ Advanced Pellets contains metaldehyde. Verdone® Extra Ready to Use contains fluroxypyr, clopyralid and MCPA.

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