

## Gardening Notes for June



*Penstemon digitalis*



*Allium sphaerocephalon*



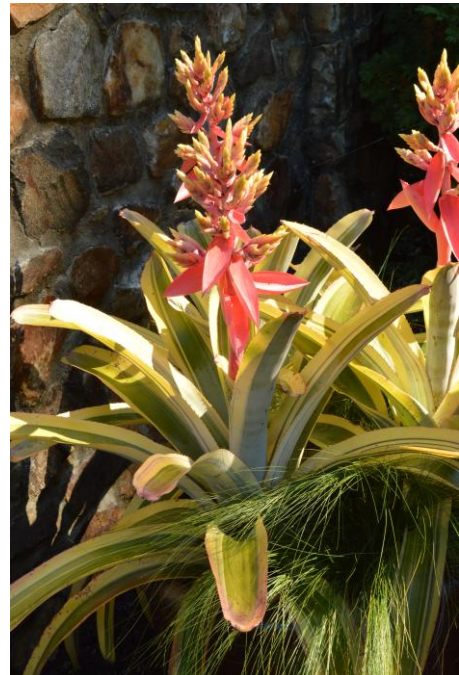
*Hydrangea quercifolia*

Summer has arrived! The days are wonderfully long, rain has mostly proven to be adequate while the temperatures promise to be more summer-like. The June blooms of Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), the late blooming Drumstick Allium (*Allium sphaerocephalon*) and Oakleaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) are giving the garden great color. As the temperatures rise, enjoy the coolness of the early morning and evenings for those tasks requiring the most exertion, with the heat of the day reserved for lighter duties. Try to water in the early morning as well, since evening watering promotes diseases and a morning drink prepares the plant for the heat of the mid-day hours! Don't forget your hat and sunscreen and finally, remember to sit down with your favorite cold beverage as you write in your journal and enjoy the fruits of your efforts!

### Things to do:

#### Flowers

- Finish decorating containers and mixed borders with annuals and tropicals. The cooler weather of May has pushed back the planting of some tender plants to late May. Do not be bashful about using larger and bolder plants such as Banana (*Musa*), Canna, Elephant Ears (*Alocasia* or *Colocasia*) or even some of the larger Bromeliads such as *Aechmea* 'Harvey's Pride' as pictured at right. The bolder foliage adds a wonderful textural impact as well as foliage color.
- Fertilize annuals with a liquid feed once per week through June to give them a good initial boost. If you used slow-release granular fertilizer in your containers, use a 50% dilute solution of the liquid feed in addition to the granular feed. During hot periods, containers may need to be watered twice per day, especially if they are in the sun and the pots are shallow or smaller than 12".
- If you have deer, apply a deer spray weekly or after a heavy rain. It is best to rotate to a different type of spray from one week to the next for best effects.



Generally, rotate between two to three different types of sprays.

- Deadhead May blooming German Iris to reduce the occurrence of the Iris borer as pictured at right. Cut the flower stalks as close to the rhizome as possible since the borer will enter and tunnel down the stem and into the rhizome.
- Study the blooms of your Bearded, Siberian or Japanese Iris; if the blooms are few and the foliage is limp or dying out in the center, the plant either needs division or to be moved to a sunnier location. If it needs division, August is the best time to divide.
- Weed! The rain and cool weather from May have created abundant growth and many spring blooming weeds are about to go to seed. Remember, weed seeds last an average of 7 years! Also, do not be afraid or feel bad about removing seedlings of more aggressive perennials. *Brunnera macrophylla* (pictured above right) is a beautiful spring blooming plant, but can certainly monopolize a garden with seedlings after a few years!
- Deadhead hybrid Peonies as they finish blooming. However, do not deadhead the Woodland Peonies (*Paeonia japonica* or *Paeonia obovata* as seen above right in September) since the seed pods are highly ornamental as they split open. Plus, they lightly self-sow!
- Lightly fertilize repeat blooming daylilies and Roses at the end of the month for a good August and September bloom.
- Plant native plants like the *Spigelia marilandica* (Indian



Pink) as seen in the closing image!  
Native plants help feed our butterflies, moths, native bees and caterpillars – and they are gorgeous! We need our insects to thrive so we can too!



- As I always say, consider reducing the amount of unneeded turf and replacing them with groundcovers. Plants like *Diervilla lonicera* (Bush Honeysuckle) pictured above and a closeup of the flowers at right, is a great underused shrubby groundcover that smothers weeds and is drought tolerant. It is also native!
- Pinch back plants that can get unruly and too tall, or those plants growing in soil that is too rich. Often the plants tend to collapse as they stretch to unnatural heights. Some plants to consider pinching are Tall Tickseed (*Coreopsis tripteris*), *Sedum* ‘Autumn Joy’ and many of the Asters. *Sedum* ‘Autumn Joy’, as pictured at right has yet to get floppy but without an early June pinch, the excessive growth from the fertile soils will encourage the plant to flop as it starts to bloom.
- Move your houseplants outside! I always joke that just because it is called a houseplant does not mean it cannot leave the house. Jade Plants (*Crassula ovata*), Snake Plant (*Sansevieria* species), *Aloe* and even Air Plants (*Tillandsia* species) truly benefit from spending a summer outside. For Air Plants, tie them into the branches of trees where they will receive indirect sunlight. Most plants will appreciate a location with morning sun and protection from the scorching afternoon sun.



### Bulbs

- As mentioned in previous months, if your Daffodils failed to bloom well this year, dig them up, divide and replant so the bulbs are 6” deep. If they were planted too shallow,



they produce offsets that are too small to produce flowers.

- Resist the urge to remove the yellowing foliage of Daffodils and other bulbs until it has totally turned brown. The foliage is producing the carbohydrates that are stored in the ‘bulbs’ to ensure a good floral display for next year.

- Plant non-hardy bulbs like *Gladiolus murielae*, formerly *Acidanthera murielae* (pictured above and at right) in the garden and in pots. The bulbs typically bloom around 8 weeks following planting and it is good to stagger the planting to extend the bloom period. In addition,



the plants can be dug in the fall and saved from year to year. Usually, two-year-old and older corms are larger and will provide a much fuller and slightly later display than those newly purchased! In the image of the 2 containers above, the pot with newly purchased corms is on the left and corms dug from the previous year on the right. Not only are the older corms later to bloom, they also produce taller and far fuller clumps.

- Just as with annuals in containers, make certain to fertilize bulbs in containers, including *Gladiolus murielae*.
- Don't be afraid to experiment with some new nonhardy bulbs. Last year I potted up x *Amercrinum* (pictured at right) & *Zephyranthes*. I have always seen them in catalogues and was curious if they would overwinter in a garage if unwatered. The x *Amercrinum* did but the *Zephyranthes* was not as successful!



- If your bulbs are starting to settle ever lower in their pots due to a loss of soil over time, tip the bulb and soil out of the container, add new soil at the base, tease out the bulb roots and replace the original bulb and soil. Work the new soil around the around the roots and pre-existing soil. The *Eucomis* (Pineapple Lily) pictured

above has been in the pot for 3 years. In two years, it will have produce more offsets and will be ready for a larger container!

- Don't stop visiting your local garden center since new plants are still arriving weekly and you might find that new gem you've always sought.

### Shrubs and Trees

- For small trees and shade trees, should your tree have water sprouts (essentially suckers) pinch off most (not all) of the sprouts that you see growing from branches or stems – typically they appear at points where previous water sprouts or a branch was removed this past winter. Removing them as they start to grow discourages future dormant buds to break.
- Trees with low branches may need to have portions of the lowest branches removed, as the new growth from May and early June adds weight to the branch, causing it to droop ever lower. This is a chore that often needs to be done each year until the tree is at least 15-20 years of age and the branches are of significant size to support the added weight.
- Selectively prune 1-3 stems of leggy multi-stemmed shrubs such as *Fothergilla* (perhaps due to growing in too much shade) back to 6-8" tall in order to promote new growth from the base. Early June is also a great time to prune Azaleas and Rhododendrons as they finish blooming, since it will not impact next year's bloom! If time allows, Rhododendrons can be deadheaded.
- Consider adding some fun native shrubs to your garden that will provide flowers, fragrance, glossy foliage, excellent growth in sun or light shade and of course, deer resistance! None fits that description as well as does Sweetshrub (*Calycanthus floridus*), as pictured above in August and at right in mid-May! It blooms from May well into June and over time reaches 8-10' tall and wide. I have also seen it pruned into an attractive 6' tall hedge!



### Turf

- Cut turf weekly to a height of 3-3½". Cutting the grass shorter will stress the plants if they do not receive irrigation.

- During periods of drought, irrigate the turf for extended periods in the early morning, promoting deep root growth. As the summer heat begins, raise the cutting height to 3 ½” to reduce the stress on the turf.
- By the same token, turn off your sprinklers during rainy periods to conserve our resources and adjust sprinkler heads so they are not irrigating the street!

### Vegetables

- Harvest spinach, lettuce, radishes and arugula daily. As the days become hotter, the lettuce will become increasingly bitter and less tasty. These plants will also produce flowers or ‘bolt’, after which the foliage becomes extremely bitter, so it is important to harvest while the plants are smaller. Once the plants begin to bolt, remove them and plant summer squash, okra, cucumbers, pole beans, or other vegetables that will provide a yield in 65-70 days (during September into October).

- Early June is time to thin your beets to 3” apart should you wish to harvest baby beets or 5-6” should you wish them to grow larger. Either pull out or cut off the baby foliage, should you not wish to disturb the soil. Don’t throw away the leaves either, since they are a great addition to salads!



- It is not too late to plant tomatoes. Planting in June often avoids the problems with early blight as well! If the plants are leggy, bury the stem up to the first true leaf, as the stem will produce roots and yield a sturdier plant. As the tomatoes grow, make certain that they are staked, lifting the fruit to come off the ground and reducing the chance of decay.

- As seen above, early to harvest crops can be interplanted in the rows of staked tomatoes.
- For tomatoes, it is ideal to pinch off the lower shoots up to the point of the first flower cluster (pictured at right). This will allow for a more manageable plant to train and a more sustainable crop of fruit.
- Planting tomatoes in rows with a sturdy stake at each end allows you to easily support the plants by weaving two strings on either side of the plants, connected to the stakes at either end. The weaving of the



string can be seen in the two images above and at right. As the plants grow, additional rows of supportive string will need to be to be strung to support the plant.

- Early in the month, plant Eggplant, Peppers, Okra, Basil and other plants that prefer heat of summer
- Mulch vegetables with newsprint or cardboard covered with straw in an effort to reduce weeds and water loss. This is ideal for Heirloom tomatoes since they need consistent soil moisture in order to discourage splitting of the fruit. You can also mulch with lawn clippings provided no herbicides or insecticides were applied.
- Stop harvesting asparagus and rhubarb. They need to produce stalks and leaves of sufficient size in order to develop the energy reserves for next year's harvest
- Compost! If you have yet to set up a composting bin, this is a good time to start. Not only can most weeds (without seeds) go into the bin, but so can bolted lettuce plants and greens left from the dinner table. It is a great way to do our part to help reduce landfill waste.



*Spigelia marilandica* – Indian Pink

Bruce Crawford

Manager of Horticulture, Morris County Parks Commission