

Gardening Notes for July



Begonia grandis



Rhododendron prunifolium



Borago officinalis

Fnally, the hazy, lazy days of summer have arrived – something many of us longed for during those snowy days last winter! The temperatures are warm, the days are long and hopefully the rain is ample! Your favorite plants are strutting their beauty, such as the leaves of Hardy Begonia (*Begonia grandis*), the orange to pink flowers of the native Plum Leaf Azalea (*Rhododendron prunifolium*) or the beautiful and edible flowers of Borage (*Borago officinalis*). The heat and humidity have certainly returned too, so try to garden during the cooler temperatures of the early mornings and evenings. Keep records on daily temperatures and rainfall, since summers' heat and night-time temperatures impact a plant as much as winters' cold. AND, don't forget the sunscreen, to check for ticks and to drink plenty of water while you garden!

Things to do:

Garden

- Weed and water your containers. The plants are now nearing their mature size and it is important to keep them well fed and hydrated. Water as needed, which is usually once per day. However, if the pot has become rootbound and the temperatures hot, some containers should be watered twice daily.
- If you replaced the soil in your annual containers, it most likely already contains slow-release fertilizer and addition feed may not be necessary until August.
- If your container soil is recycled from last year, make sure to add some slow-release fertilizer pellets over the top of soil as per directions. Also remember, most fertilizer pellets only last 2 or 3 months and the rate of release increases as the temperatures rise above 85°F, meaning they may need to be replaced in 1-2 months. For heavy feeders, like *Brugmansia* (picture above) you should supplement slow-release feed with liquid fertilizer to provide adequate fertility to support flowers and growth.
- Some annuals, such as Coleus, Plectranthus and Persian Shield (*Strobilanthes*) would benefit from an occasional pinching of the tip, allowing lower buds to



break dormancy and grow (as seen at right for Persian Shield). This allows the plants to become denser and prevents them from becoming leggy or so large they overwhelm neighboring plants.



- Most hanging baskets should receive a serious cutback in order to renew the plants for a late July through September display.
- Most hanging baskets also benefit from receiving liquid fertilizer every other week with a 50% dilute fertilizer.
- Irrigate perennial and annual gardens for long periods, ensuring a deep penetration of water into the soil should rainfall become less than ample.
- Reapply mulch to retain moisture should it have become thin or disturbed through replanting of annuals or perennials or from weeding. Mulch only needs to be a total of 2-3" thick including mulch from previous and new applications. Of course, properly spaced plants should be covering the ground or 'self-mulching'!
- For repeat blooming Shrub and Tea Roses, deadhead (remove the old flower blossoms), give them a light feeding to encourage rebloom. Remove any leaves from the plant or the ground that have blackspot, in order to reduce future outbreaks.
- Any Japanese Beetles on roses or other plants can be destroyed by flicking them into soapy water.
- Some perennials can be lightly trimmed such as the early blooming Salvias (*Salvia nemorosa*) while other plants can be cut back more heavily such as Catnip (*Nepeta faassenii*) and Ribbon Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacea* var. *picta*) to initiate prolonged blooming or attractive new foliage for the fall. *Nepeta* 'Walkers Low' is photographed at right 2 weeks after being cut back, with an unpruned specimen behind. The trimmed plant is much denser and compact. Make certain you provide adequate irrigation if you cut the plants back hard if rain is lacking.
- Not all plants should be cut back hard. I prefer to leave the dried flower heads of Yarrow (*Achillea*) and Astilbe on the plant, as they look attractive come fall and winter. The drawback is you may get unwanted seedlings.
- Early July is the latest point to pinch back unruly Asters and Chrysanthemums, since pinching any later will delay bloom time too far into the fall for the blooms

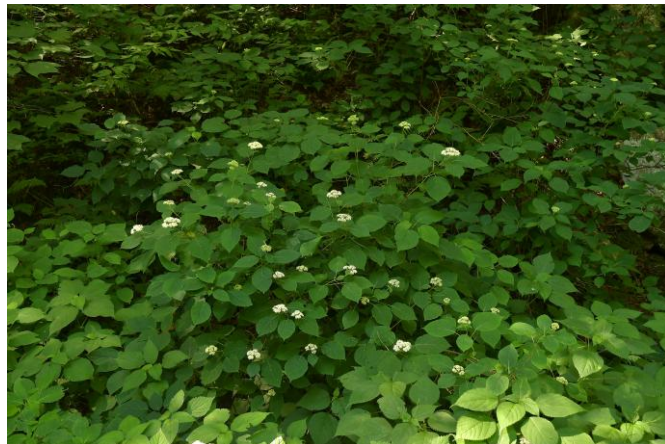


to be effective. It is already too late to pinch overly exuberant Sedums like 'Autumn Joy' as they will be producing flowers by month's end.

- Weed! There is always an endless supply of weeds. It is best to get them young before they become too noticeable and the root systems become too established. Worse yet, try not to let them seed, as the average lifespan of a seed is 7 years which equates to 7 more years of weeding! Mulching heavy does not equate to less weeds either, and will lead to more issues in the future since excessive mulch is not healthy for plants.
- Provide a light pruning and training of rampant growing Wisteria stems, stray stems of Clematis, and other vines. For Wisteria, I generally prune to the second or third leaf along the viny new growth. A heavier pruning will invigorate excessive vegetative growth and potentially less flower bud development. For Wisteria, look for and remove vines running along the ground before they invade unwanted parts of the garden.
- Train the growing stems of rampant annual vines like Firecracker Vine (pictured at right) or Cardinal Vine. Often the stems will start to twin around unintended neighboring shrubs rather than the intended support.
- Prune water sprouts and suckers on small trees and large shrubs before they become too large and potentially begin to deform the plant.
- With young ornamental and shade trees, you may wish to prune off or thin the lowest drooping branches if you have not already done so, as they will hang increasingly lower until growth ceases towards mid-month. These low hanging branches provide excessive shade for plantings beneath, block important views of the garden and make walking about difficult. Remember to cut branches back to – but not into – the branch collar at the base of the branch.
- Continue to visit local garden centers as new materials are continuing to arrive and you may see some great summer bloomers like *Cephalanthus occidentalis* (Buttonbush, pictured at right) that you may have overlooked in May. There may even be a couple of mid-summer sales beginning!
- For the more adventurous, visit National Parks and study our native floral. It is interesting to see where it is growing and what other plants are growing in the local community. I recently visited Shenandoah National



Park and was intrigued to find *Hydrangea arborescens* (Smooth Hydrangea pictured at right) growing happily with *Rubus odoratus* (Flowering Raspberry) on sloping terrain! The *Rubus* is seen in the closing image and is also thornless! The Hydrangeas have entirely fertile florets and lack the ring of showy sterile florets typical of Lacecap Hydrangeas!



Vegetables

- Peas, radishes, lettuce, spinach and other cool season crops need to be removed, composted and replaced by beans, beets or any preferred 80-day to maturity crop. Thin carrots to roughly 1" apart and beets to 2" to allow room for proper root development. For beets, the greens can be used to garnish a salad!
- Come July, summer squash and cucumbers are beginning to come of size; harvest them small (6-8" for squash, 3-5" for cucumbers) and frequently to ensure continued yields and tenderness. If you planted potatoes, they can also be harvested starting in mid-July. A second crop of cucumbers can be planted in early July to extend production as those planted earlier will begin to lose vigor come late August. Make sure to irrigate cucumbers and squash during droughts.
- When watering tomatoes, make certain that the fruit remains dry in order to reduce the occurrence of blossom end rot. Keep the tomatoes staked (as seen at right). By positioning poles along a row of tomatoes and holding the tomatoes upright between two strings (marked by the arrows), the fruits can be kept off the ground and air can circulate through the plant. It reduces disease risks and the ripened fruit can be more easily seen.
- Of course, you may just have one or two tomatoes and a simpler staking method is desired. In a display at Willowwood Arboretum (as seen below) several bamboo poles were fashioned around the plants to keep the plants growing upright while looking attractive at the same time!
- Check parsley for Black Swallowtail Butterfly eggs or caterpillars. You may wish to allow them to develop!



- If your Zucchini Squash was infected with borers early this season and have collapsed, consider planting some of the Scallop Squash, often called Patty Pan Squash for an autumn harvest. They mature in about 50-54 days from seed and come in solid White, Golden, and a combination of White and Green Striped. Not only are they delicious, they will add great color to the Thanksgiving Table!
- Maintain even moisture in the soil around tomato plants to reduce the risk of the tomatoes splitting. This is particularly true of Heirloom tomatoes and using a straw mulch will help maintain consistent moisture.
- Yellowing of the lowest leaves on the stems of tomatoes is often an indication of Early Blight. It is best to remove these lower leaves, such that there is no contact with the soil and reducing the threat of future outbreaks. Also, wash your hands after removing the leaves before touching other plants to reduce the chance of spreading the disease.



Houseplants

- Move some of your favorites outdoors where possible. They will love the humidity, but remember to move them into a shaded location at the start! The *Haworthiopsis* pictured at right develops red hues when placed in sun!
- If spring was too hectic and you are just getting caught up, July is a good time to up-pot those houseplants that have outgrown their container. Remember, pick a container that is roughly 2" bigger than the initial container, allowing a 1" area around the root ball for new roots to grow. Also, position the plant ½-1" below the rim of the new pot, allowing space for irrigating water and preventing it from spilling over the sides.
- If you have Air Plants (*Tillandsia* spp.) or other epiphytic plants such as the *Neoregelia* 'Tiger Cub' pictured below right, tie them into trees with twine and replace the plastic pot with a burlap wrap. It is amazing how much they grow and produce pups with a minimal care!



- Houseplants that remain indoors are actively growing during the summer and should receive a regular watering regiment of every two weeks or so and monthly fertilizing with a 50% dilute liquid solution.



Turf

- Raise the cutting height to 3" during the hot and dry months, reducing plant stress.
- If you irrigate, do so for extended periods during the early morning to encourage deeper root growth. Try not to water in the evening, since that will promote various fungal problems.
- Make certain you check and adjust the orientation of sprinklers. I am amazed at the number of sprinklers I see irrigating roadways and not the intended turf!
- Avoid fertilizing during July through mid-August as that will necessitate more irrigation.
- Consider reducing the size of turf areas if the size of the area is no longer needed. Using groundcover masses benefit native insects and reduce the negative impacts from lawnmowers, fertilizers and unnecessary irrigation.

Bulbs

- It is now ok to remove the old foliage of Narcissus as it turns brown during late June and July since next year's bulbs have fully developed. I have noticed many bulbs have gone dormant exceptionally early this year too, a response I suspect from the drier weeks of May and June this year.
- Consider adding some graceful summer blooming nonhardy bulbs such as Abyssinian Gladiolus (*Gladiolus murielae*), pictured at right. Plants will bloom 8-10 weeks after planting.
- Although July may be the month when spring blooming bulbs are furthest from your mind, bulb catalogues have been arriving at more doorstep for several weeks now! It is never too early to order and some bulbs are already sold out! For the more unusual selections, I try to get my orders in by late April (yes, I am a bulb geek) to ensure there is still an ample supply.



- One bulb I order in April is *Lycoris squamigera* (pictured below left) and *Lycoris sprengeri* (pictured below right), commonly called Surprise Lily or Naked Lady. They are shipped in June and often take several years to settle in, although the



Lycoris sprengeri bloomed for me the first season last year! What makes them truly outstanding for the garden is the timing of their bloom, which is late July through August, long after their foliage has gone dormant! The trumpet shaped flowers grow to 18-24" tall and they work well in light shade or full sun. Interplant them with Ostrich Fern (as seen above) or other strong growing perennials that will not be bothered by their dense foliage as it goes dormant in June.



Rubus odoratus

Bruce Crawford, Manager of Horticulture, MCPC