



# NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

## Garden Tips August 2020 (July 25, 2020)

by Peyton Ellas, UCCE Master Gardener

August is one of the few months with fewer "must do's," so if you're the kind of gardener that thinks it's way too hot to work by eight A.M., relax and wait for next month to do many of our summer chores. But there are some things you can do if you're like me and can't *not* work outside at least part of everyday.



Are you one of the thousands of Americans who started vegetable gardens for the first time this spring, or got back into it after many years' break? How is the garden going? If you have had some challenges and unexpected problems, please do know that you are in good company! Even the most experienced gardeners have issues almost all the time. I've been growing edibles since I was a toddler (that is five decades of experience!) and here are some of my troubles so far this year:

- 1) Squash bugs try to take over the zucchini. Boy, they are smelly when I squish them, but that's the best way for me to quickly rid my squash of the hundreds of nymphs (babies). Better still, find their yellow egg clusters on the undersides of leaves and smash those.
- 2) Striped potato beetles all over the tomatillos. They are harder to squash because the adults can fly away. But again, finding the eggs on the undersides of leaves is very efficient. I practice a sort of yoga to bend over and look up to the undersides. I'm sure this looks very odd, but no one else is ever around watching me work in my private vegetable garden. And I can decimate the pest population in a few days, although I keep my watch up all season. It's very satisfying to find and destroy egg clusters.
- 3) Elaborate time-consuming structures built to keep deer and rabbits out of the fruit trees and vegetables in our little farm. So far so good, but the real, hungry deer browsing season doesn't start until late summer here in the low foothills. I've given the Asian-pear tree up to the black bear that visits every fall. One must choose one's battles.
- 4) Gophers. Always. Gopher-caged my raised containers. They still find sneaky ways.
- 5) Leaf-footed beetles in the chard. Really?!?? One mass of adults and nymphs. I wadded them up in between chard leaves, gave the mass a good squish and tossed it over the pasture fence. They haven't been back. Yet.
- 6) Blossom-end-rot on the peppers. Difficult to eliminate. Doesn't hurt the fruit that isn't brown, so I just cut that part off and use the rest. Uneven watering is the most common cause, but since the garden is on a timer, it's a problem only when the temperature fluctuates a lot, as it had during late spring as the fruit was setting.



Even with all of this, I persist. Why? The harvest, of course! We always celebrate our first home-grown tomato of the season as if it's the first tomato of our lives. Don't we?

Here is a quick list of other things you could do in the garden this month:

**PLANTING:** Seeds for cool season vegetables: Asian greens, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, leek, lettuce,

pea, spinach, Swiss chard are some examples. Plant more beans in the ground, and short-season corn (check the package). Wait until cooler weather for ornamentals, including trees.

**MAINTAINING:** Much of the attention this month, just like in July, is focused on making sure your plants are getting the right amount of water. That means avoiding over-watering as much as under-watering. It's okay for the first few inches of the soil to dry out. The soil surface needn't be wet all the time. Better yet, either add mulch now or plan to do it in the fall so watering is less of a finely tuned issue. Mulch holds in water and regulates soil temperatures, making for healthier plants year-round.

Spider mites love dusty plants. If you see cobwebs on plants, it's time to hose things down. In gardens with drip irrigation, this is a big problem, because overhead sprinklers aren't washing plants off. Follow your water district's guidelines but go ahead and play in the water this month.

Divide your iris if you haven't already do so. You can prune apricot, olive and oleanders in August, but avoid pruning so much you get sunburn on newer branches. Continue to deadhead roses and remove suckers and unwanted branches. Open rose bushes up to increase air circulation through the shrub. Continue to prune hedges. Keep your pruning tools clean and sanitized. Clean up fallen fruit and support heavy, fruit-laden tree branches. Remember to use BT (mosquito dunks and their ilk) anywhere there will be standing water, even in plant trays, to avoid mosquito breeding.



**CONSERVING:** For most of the insects I've mentioned, our UC website has excellent easy-to-read Pest Notes. Find the full list here: <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/index.html>.

Before using the using broad-spectrum pesticides, do a little research and try to use a less toxic method. As the labels indicate, broad-spectrums kill as many beneficial insects as pest insects. Insect populations and species are in severe decline worldwide. That means butterflies, earth worms and bumblebees as much (or more so) than aphids and earwigs. You probably do not see most of the insects in your ornamental or edible garden. Most insects are beneficial or neutral to human activity. Scientists cite many factors in the fall-off of the world's insect populations, but chief among them are the ubiquitous use of pesticides, the spread of monoculture crops such as corn and soybeans, urbanization, and habitat destruction.

How can each of us help slow this decline? We must control pests, but can we do it in a way that doesn't decimate our pollinators and our neutrals like praying mantis, assassin bugs, damsel flies and dung beetles? What else can we do? Use more compost, less fertilizer; continue to be water-efficient even when we've had a good precipitation season; learn to live with bees and spiders and even some bugs you can't identify.

In my edible garden and at the farm, we've managed to plant a lot of annual flowers among the vegetables, and some hedgerow shrubs to attract birds and butterflies. It's worked! What a joy to look across the rows of plants and see all that happy life, including healthy plants.

Happy gardening, for life!

**In accordance to the Shelter-at-Home guidelines, the Master Gardeners have cancelled all public events at this time, but if you leave a message on our phone lines, someone will call you back!**

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