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In My Garden - July 2010

by Betty Coffelt, UC Master Gardener

With the summer weather the veggie garden is really stepping up production. We have dug about half of the potatoes that we have growing in the ground and they are large, smooth and beautiful. These will be great for my July 4th potato salad.

If you recall in March I mentioned experimenting with planting potatoes in containers. I took a 5 gallon plastic bucket with drainage holes and added about 6 inches of soil in the bottom and then planted several potatoes. As the potatoes grew 6 inches I added 4 inches of soil until the bucket could hold no more. Well I harvested my bucket crop a couple of weeks ago and was I pleasantly surprised! Harvest was really easy. I just turned the bucket over and the potatoes came right out! Each bucket produced a good crop. The only difference I noticed was that those in the bucket were slightly lighter red in color than those grown in the ground. They were so easy to keep watered and the plants actually did produce multiple layers of potatoes. Next year I might try a slightly larger container such as a plastic waste basket. If you have a small garden this is a very easy way to grow potatoes right on your patio.

The cucumbers have been keeping me busy with almost daily pickings. I just made l4 pints of pickles. I try to put up pickles early in the season, since the cucumber beetle, squash bug, and several mosaic viruses tend to shut down production in cucurbits as the season progresses. So far they have no problems and are looking very healthy. I usually pick 8-12 squash a day so keep family and friends supplied.

The onions are all dug and in the process of drying now so by the end of the month we will have onions to eat. Only one of the four pepper plants is ready to harvest. The others all have peppers but they are not ready yet. Also we started picking some small size tomatoes in late June.

In the orchard the donut peaches were ripe for picking on the first day of summer and are in full force now. These trees are only 6' tall and loaded with fruit. I purposely keep my fruit trees short for easier harvesting and tree care by the simple process of summer pruning. This month I cut back the new growth (the green wood) by about half of its length. Using this summer pruning method (also called backyard orchard culture) the orchard is fun, and not tons of hard work. The crop is still good quality and there is plenty to eat and give away.

I have also been busy keeping the grapevines cut back. They naturally produce too much growth and shade becomes very dense in the arbor. This promotes powdery mildew and the grape clusters don't get enough sun. I cut the rank vines back to one joint past each cluster of grapes so they can get some sun. So far I have not noticed mildew, but I did make several preventative sprays of sulfur in the spring.

Both avocado trees have set fruit and the fruit is sizing so that it is big enough to actually see now. Meanwhile the citrus trees are in the process of thinning themselves. They naturally drop a lot of small fruit for several weeks this time of year. Not to worry, there will be plenty for us to eat.

Roses need some attention in July. Some light pruning is needed to maintain the open vase shape for light and air circulation. Cut off branches that are growing toward the center of the bush. Also when deadheading, cut off the spent flower to the bud at the first outward facing five leaves. Rose bushes can use a little fertilizer boost. If you have a light colored rose that tends to fade in the heat try giving them some extra calcium and magnesium (Epsom salt) when new buds form. Lightly scatter a handful a bush.

Now that summer has arrived watering is a critical issue. The heat and wind can really dry things out quickly. Remember that when the weather is hot to deep water the trees every 10 -14 days. Of course, the more we water the more we need to weed. Keep at it on a regular basis and it is so much easier and takes so little time that it is hardly a chore.

I don't know about you, but the snails and I like to get out in the garden in the early morning hours before it gets too hot. I wrap up the evening on the backyard patio thankful I have a garden to enjoy. Happy Independence Day!

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