

Garden Tips

- This is the time of year when summer annuals can be purchased at steeply discounted prices in local nurseries and garden centers. Fading foliage can be replaced for a song and you'll still get two or three months worth of enjoyment from the replanting. Just make sure not to replant during the hottest part of the day.
- Did you know that fallen rose leaves can harbor disease and insect pests over the winter if allowed to remain on the ground? They should be cleaned up, not allowed to accumulate underneath the rose bush.
- Watering in August is a critical issue. Remember that for lawns, slow, deep watering is preferable to more frequent doses. Also, morning waterings are better than evenings.
- August is the time of year to start taking cuttings from annuals you want to overwinter indoors. Your plants are healthier and will root faster now than later in the season. Some plants to consider overwintering are coleus, geraniums, wax begonias and herbs.

It's 96 degrees in the shade as I write this newsletter. The dog days of summer have arrived early this year. Did you ever see anything like the Japanese Beetle Infestation of 2007? Some old-timers call them "June Bugs." Whatever you call them, this was absolutely the worst year I've ever seen. Melissa's back porch herb collection was just about decimated. Since I love cooking with fresh basil, parsley and the like, I have been most unhappy.

Despite the temporary lack of fresh herbs, they are starting to grow back, so life is returning to normal. There's too much good stuff about summer to stay unhappy for long.

We are actually eating our own tomatoes at long last. The container variety tomatoes that we planted in large second-hand pots are maturing and are actually pretty tasty. They're not quite as good as garden grown tomatoes, but they do just fine when you don't have any gardens.

Another triumph in the wonderful world of container gardening came with our lettuce mixture. Here again, we used a second-hand pot that once held a tree from a local nursery. Melissa started arugula, mesculun and leaf lettuce seeds in our windowsills this spring. The seeds took off and we started enjoying special salads in early June.

She plans to start a new crop of lettuce seeds later this month. We should be enjoying a fine fall batch of lettuces in late September or early October.

We have completed the renovations to Melissa's office and it's a beautiful room. When you stop by, you enter the

building through her office. She has a cherry wood desk that she is just crazy about. She actually had two pieces of glass cut to size to sit right on top of the desk. She was afraid to use the desk because of scratches. Now, there's no excuse for not getting her work done.

We have managed to squeeze time in Ocean City this summer. Ocean City has been our number one vacation destination for many years now. Last month, we purchased a 1958 Spartan trailer, located on 24th Street on the Bay side. We couldn't be happier.

The mobile home is in pristine condition with the original wood paneling inside. It's like a small trailer museum. We're able to have a garden there and I am allowed to use my outdoor grill on our tiny lot. Someday, if finances allow, we will be able to remove the trailer from the space and construct a new home there. But for now, we're really enjoying our own little slice of heaven

Compost Tea Sprays

In early July, I asked our lawn care crew to spray my container plants with our compost tea solution. They also doused the small flower gardens in front of our offices.

The difference in the growth rate of our plants is enormous. Those plants have nearly jumped out of their pots since we sprayed them. The tiny bedding plants that we installed in the front gardens are now waving in the breeze. We love compost tea!

Although Japanese Beetles have harmed the plants' foliage, most plants continue to grow upward. So the sprays are beneficial, even during periods of infestation. Our tea contains diatomaceous earth which will help destroy mature insects as it is sprayed. The tea will not control grubs which is how beetles begin their life. Other types of controls are needed for grubs.

Compost tea is an aerobically brewed liquid extract made from compost. It has a pleasant earthy smell, which is not overpowering.

Bacteria and fungi grow in the brewer because the water is aerated, a food source (we use kelp) is provided and an active compost (worm castings) have been added. Our brewer is sterilized daily to prevent harmful bacteria growth. Because it contains live enzymes, compost tea has a shelf life of less than 24 hours. We first began using compost tea in conjunction with our natural/organic lawn care program. Now we also offer a spray for your landscape shrubbery and plants.

Natural/Organic Lawn Care

Although it's tempting to pretend that cooler weather will never arrive, the facts dictate a different tune. So, August is the time when landscapers need to start thinking about fall maintenance for your lawn. Were you happy with your lawn this summer? If your answer is no, we may be able to help. You may recall that we offer a natural/organic lawn care program. It is 95% non-toxic and incorporates natural insect, disease and fungus deterrents.

Mid to late August starts the fall grass reseeding season in this area. Believe it or not fall is actually the preferred time to overseed any existing lawn to make sure it looks its best. Soils are already pre-warmed in the fall from the summer's heat. And the air temperature starts to cool a bit making conditions perfect for seeding. The Mid-Atlantic region actually offers a fairly wide window of opportunity for overseeding. But there are limits to the weather's cooperation.

Grass seed generally requires that daytime highs reach about 70 degrees. When nighttime lows dip below 50 degrees, grass seed won't germinate.

The type of grass seed that is used is vitally important. I use endophyte enhanced grasses which have been bred specifically to be insect, disease and fungus resistant. These grasses "taste" bad to surface feeding insects, such as sod webworms and chinch bugs. The use of these grasses will reduce the chance of insect and fungus problems.

Our program uses a natural/organic fertilizer which does not harm the Chesapeake Bay watershed area. And, we use our own proprietary blend of grass seed which is formulated specifically for this area. Please call us for a no-cost, no-obligation consultation.

Free Compost Tea

We'll be brewing big vats of tea most days during August to accommodate our lawn care customers. If you're curious about the benefits of this wonderful soil amendment, stop by for a complimentary gallon of tea for use on a container plant. You'll see a growth spurt soon after applying.

Please call the office first to make sure we're brewing tea that day. Also, you'll need to bring a plastic jug with you for the tea. Hope to see you soon.