

July 2009

Vegetable and Herb Gardening Tips

Culture

- Perpetual spinach, Malabar spinach, and Swiss chard are good heat tolerant salad greens for Maryland. ‘Grand Rapids’, ‘Red Sails’, ‘Deer Tongue’, ‘Slobolt’, ‘Bronze Arrowhead’ and all oak-leaf type lettuces are some of the heat tolerant looseleaf lettuce varieties that can be sown now. Keep them fertilized and watered and covered with a shade cloth, or floating row cover. Grow them in containers in the shade if possible.
- Its time to begin thinking of fall vegetables, seed for fall crops of broccoli and cauliflower should be sown in containers by the 3rd to 4th week in July. Late crops of squash, beans and cucumbers can be direct sown through the end of July.
- A large supply of rainfall coupled with an overabundance of nitrogen from manure or fertilizer can cause tomato plants to grow rampantly with few fruits on the lower half of the plant. Do not fertilize healthy tomato plants that have large, dark green leaves. Lop off the tops of tomato plants that grow out of bounds. They will produce lateral branches and fruit later in the summer.

Insects

- Squash vine borers are hatching out and boring into squash and pumpkin vines. Monitor plants for signs of wilting and entrance holes on lower stems. You may see sawdust-like frass around the hole. Stems may contain more than one larva. They can feed inside the stems for up to 2 weeks. The easiest and surest method of control is to cut a slit above the hole with a razor, remove the 1 inch long white larva with a brown head, and mound up soil around the wound.
- The adults, larvae and eggs of Mexican bean beetle can be handpicked. The adults have 16 spots, coppery-colored wing covers and resemble ladybird beetles. The adults and larvae skeletonize bean leaves. A parasitic wasp, known as *Pediobius faveolatus*, is an excellent biological control agent for the Mexican bean beetle. You can actually purchase these beneficial insects from the Maryland Department of Agriculture and release them into your garden. Call 410-841-3920 for more details.

Disease

- Blossom-end rot of tomato, pepper, squash and watermelon may be observed now. The bottom (blossom) end of the fruit bottoms becomes brown and rotted. Promptly remove any fruits that have blossom-end rot or are badly malformed. This nutritional disorder is caused by a lack of calcium in developing fruits and is brought on by dry conditions. Water your plants deeply and regularly and keep them mulched. Tomato plants may need 1-2 gallons of water each at least twice a week during droughty periods.
- Early blight of tomatoes can appear now. Small, irregular brown lesions with a yellow halo develop on lower leaves. The spots have a bulls-eye pattern. They will enlarge and entire leaves will turn yellow and then die. Defoliation can then lead to sunscald of tomato fruits. Remove badly infected lower leaves, keep a thick organic mulch around plants and avoid overhead watering. Applications of tri-basic copper will slow down severe infections.
- Are your cucumber vines beginning to wilt and die? They could be infected with bacterial wilt, a fatal disease transmitted by cucumber beetles to cucumber and muskmelon plants. Cucumber beetles are either yellow with 11 black dots or yellow with 3 black stripes. They have a wide host range and begin to feed on all plant parts of all members of the cucumber family as soon as plants emerge. There is no cure for the disease. Pull up and dispose of vines. Controlling this pest early in the season is very important. Row covers can be used to cover plants to deter cucumber beetles or you can apply a labeled insecticide. Remove row covers when cucurbit family plants begin to bloom. ‘County Fair’ is an excellent hybrid variety with in-bred resistance to bacterial wilt disease.

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Herbs

- Cut back herbs through the summer to keep plants bushy and productive. Essential oils are most concentrated right before bloom. Now is a good time to propagate herbs by stem cuttings.
- Japanese and June beetle adults are now feeding on basil foliage. Try to keep the basil picked and sweep off beetles into containers of soapy water. You could also try placing a row cover on the plants to prevent feeding damage.
- Mediterranean herbs, such as sage, lavender, tarragon and rosemary and thyme will grow best in full sun in gravelly, well-drained soil. These herbs tend not to grow or over winter as well in fertile soils high in organic matter. They may also wilt and succumb to root rots if grown in poorly drained soil. Avoid heavy organic mulches and over-watering.
- July is the month for southern blight. This is a damaging soil-borne fungal disease, that attacks a wide range of herbs.. Lower stems turn brown or black and plants will wilt and eventually dry up and die. You may also notice a white fungal mat growing over the infected stems along with brown dots the size of mustard seeds. In some cases only the plant tops are killed- you can cut back the affected parts and expect re-growth. In other cases the crowns are killed and plants need to be removed. No chemical controls are available.

Have a pest or gardening question? Call the Home and Garden Information Center

800-342-2507 www.hgic.umd.edu