

Garden Club Horticultural Hints August 2019

Hot enough for you?



A pine needle glut? Does it seem as though an unusually large normal number of pine needles are falling on your property this summer? Global warming may be affecting our gardens and forests in yet another way. According to the UMASS Extension Service, the unusually frequent rainfall we received in May, June and July, along with the warmer temperatures, has given a boost to an existing pathogen that causes pines to shed needles early. Not only does the tree lose the food normally produced by the needles, it also robs the tree of nitrogen that it would have held onto over the winter. While there is currently no practical way for homeowners to attack the pathogen, you can help your trees by providing a light nitrogen feeding now, and again in the early spring. If you have a dense stand of pines on your property, consider thinning the trees to reduce the spread of the disease.

To fertilize or not. By mid-August you should no longer be fertilizing any perennials, trees or shrubs. The new growth the plant has put out this year needs time to harden off before the cold weather begins. However, for annuals and plants in containers, keep fertilizing: you want them to bloom and grow until they're hit by frost.



Houseplants' season in the sun. If you moved houseplants outside for the summer, start moving them into shadier areas now in preparation for the move indoors (where light levels are lower) in September. Before the final move, spray plants (and their soil) to eliminate any "guests" that might also like to winter indoors.



Herb advice. Begin harvesting herbs for drying on sunny days. Cut herbs in the morning after any dew has dried off for maximum flavor. Dry the herbs where they get good air circulation but out of direct sunlight. Place the dried leaves or seeds in sealed containers to maximize freshness.



You can still be eating fresh produce well into autumn with some planning. Plant radishes (shown here), lettuce, spinach, arugula and other cool weather crops. When it turns chilly, use row covers (spun fiber) to keep the soil warmer and protect against frost,

Plan(t) ahead. Keep sowing fresh crops in your vegetable garden of lettuce, spinach, beans, beets and peas for fall harvest. While it is hot now, as the weather cools, all of these will thrive and extend your garden-fresh food until Thanksgiving – or beyond. Row covers can extend the season still further.

Also, when you have harvested your corn, pull up and chop the corn stalks. They should be put in your composter or buried in the garden where they will break down over the winter releasing their load of nutrients back into the soil.



Fungal diseases, like this black spot on roses, can be treated with an organic anti-fungal agent. Always read instructions carefully before use, and follow them!

August, unfortunately, is fungus season. The downside of this summer's wet weather is that you need to be extra vigilant in scouting out fungal diseases. These plant diseases can spread rapidly as they are propelled from one leaf to another and from one plant to another by insects or during rain or watering. Whether you choose organic or inorganic methods of treating diseases, best results occur when you begin as soon as the problem appears and continue until you are certain it has been eliminated or you have disposed of the plant. If a plant can't be saved, cut it, bag it and put it in the trash. Don't compost it (the disease may survive the process) or throw it into the woods.



Sometimes a bargain isn't one. In August, nurseries begin cutting the prices on their unsold stock. It can be a great time to add to your garden, but be cautious of late summer sales of woody plants. Particularly at 'big box' stores and discount houses, they may have been sitting in their small pots, suffering from the heat all summer long. They also will not have much time to replace the roots they are missing. Remember: a healthy tree is as large below the ground as it is above.