

# Garden Club Horticultural Hints August 2020

Gardening: the best reason to be outdoors



**Reinvigorating annuals and containers.** To keep the annuals blooming and looking at their best until frost, you need to deadhead and keep them pruned into shape. When you water annuals, particularly those in containers, remember to add a weak solution of liquid plant food. The timed released fertilizer you added in spring or early summer has been depleted.

## *Invasive alert!*



*Put the plant food away until next year*

**Except for annuals, stop fertilizing.** By mid-August you should no longer be fertilizing any perennials, trees or shrubs. This year's growth on your plants needs time to harden off before the cold weather begins. However, for annuals and plants in containers, keep fertilizing: you want them to bloom until they're hit by frost.

**Save Our Monarchs.** A very nasty weed is coming into seed now. Swallowwort is a relative of milkweed and often confuses monarch butterflies looking to lay their eggs. While milkweed both feeds and acts as nursery for monarch butterflies, swallowwort is a death trap. Eggs laid on that plant will die shortly after hatching when they feed on its toxic leaves.

Swallowwort was imported into New England in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Today, it is becoming endemic. But it can be controlled. If you see swallowwort's unmistakable seed pods on your property, cut them down, bag them, and send it to the trash. Mark the spot and, next year, start early mowing or cutting it down as it emerges. If you keep at it, it will eventually die. Look for stands of swallowwort as you take walks. If they're not on your property, strip off the seed pods so they won't mature.

**August is when fungal diseases become a nuisance.** The downside of this summer's humid weather is that you need to be extra vigilant in scouting out fungal diseases. These diseases spread rapidly; 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. But, don't compost it (the disease may survive the process) or throw it into the woods. And, don't spread the disease – clean your clippers with a disinfectant wipe before using them again.

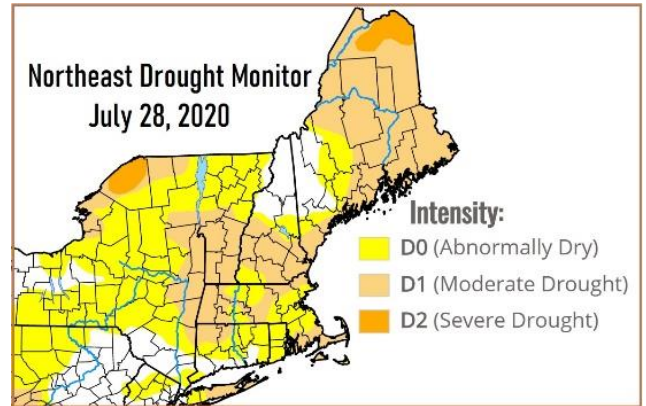


*Remove diseased leaves promptly, bag them up as trash – never add them to a compost pile. If a plant can't be saved, treat it the same way.*

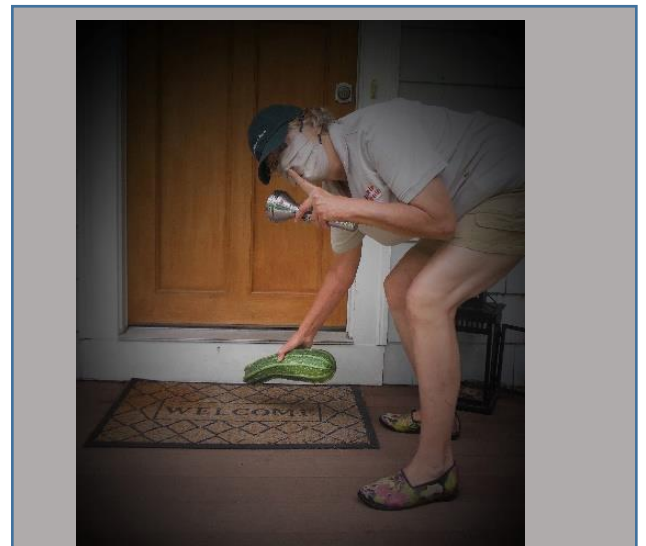
August is when we get to enjoy the bounty of our **vegetable gardens**. Regular picking is vital to keeping the harvest going as long as possible. If plants get overlooked (and oversized) they will start concentrating on producing seeds instead of more food for you. When Mother Nature is too generous, share the bounty with your friends and neighbors. And, as you pull spent vegetables, plant lettuce, spinach, arugula and other 'leaf' vegetables for a fall harvest. Of course, if one zucchini happens to 'get away' from you, you can always use it productively (see article at right).



*Regular picking is vital to keeping your harvest going as we get to the end of summer.*



**Our Drought Conditions Worsen.** For the past two years, New England has had above-average precipitation and well-above-average soil moisture. All that has changed in 2020. As the attached map shows, almost the entire region is 'abnormally dry' and much has slipped into a 'moderate drought'. Almost as bad, much of our precipitation in July was in the form of pop-up thunderstorms, which did not provide the deep watering our soil needs. For gardeners – especially those with watering bans – August will be a month of triage. Your priority for watering should be 1) vegetables, 2) trees, shrubs and perennials planted this year, and 3) containers. Your lowest priority should be your lawn. It may brown out now, but it is a perennial that will re-green with cooler temperatures.



**Don't forget!** August 8<sup>th</sup> is National Sneak Some Zucchini Onto Your Neighbor's Porch Night! Especially in this most unusual of years, we all need a gardening tradition that we can celebrate; 'just because'.



**Buy now with care.** It has been a bad year for nurseries. First, they could not open because of Covid-19 concerns. When they could, many people chose to stay away. Support local growers and businesses, but think twice and inspect carefully before buying any discounted trees and shrubs now. They have spent a long hot summer in small containers, probably as stressed by the heat as you. If you chose to buy, plant properly, as quickly as possible, keep them well watered until the ground begins to freeze and consider how you can add protection for them against the winter winds and storms.

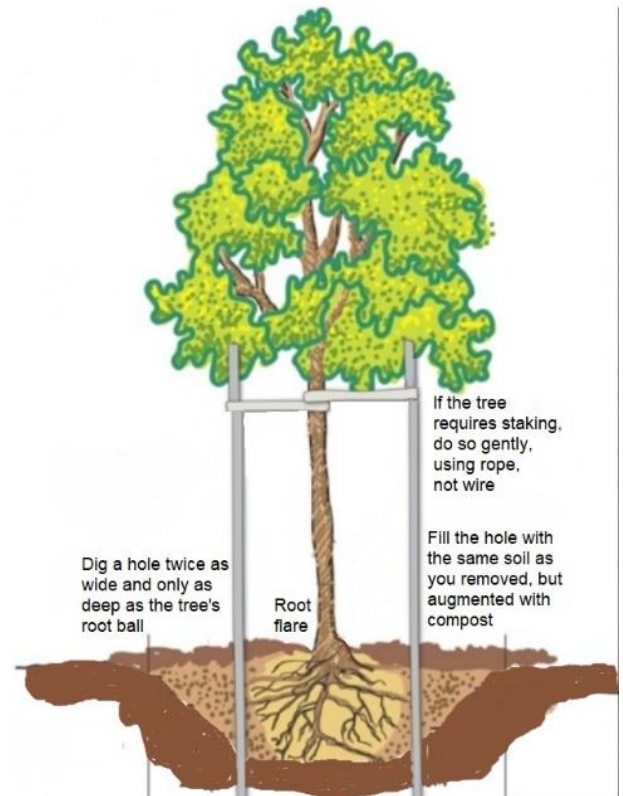
**Planting trees and shrubs this month? Here's how to do it properly.** Start with its placement – will the new plant get the sunlight it needs? Or if it prefers shade, is there sufficient shade? Will it have to fight with other trees' roots for water? Will the family touch football game run into it? And as it grows, will it run afoul of overhead wires or anything else?

Dig hole at least twice as wide and as deep as the new plant's root ball. Fill the hole with water and allow it to soak in.

Loosen all the wrappings on the root ball and remove as many as possible without it falling apart. Gently spread out any roots that you can move off the root ball without breaking. Then begin placing new soil around it. Do not fill the hole with potting mix or bagged garden soil. Use the soil you dug out with some compost mixed in to feed the new plant.

Firm the soil by tamping down with your hands—not by stomping on it or pounding it—you need the new tree or shrub to quickly grow roots into this area. When the hole is half full, water generously. Then wait for that water to be absorbed. Add more soil and water again. Finish with soil being added up to the level where the tree or shrub sat before being prepared for sale. GENTLY tamp (do not stomp!) the new soil around the tree. The tree/shrub needs air in the soil to provide oxygen to the roots and spaces water can flow through to get to the roots.

If you need to stake the tree, do it gently with ropes. (Shrubs generally do not need staking.) Soften contact



with the trunk by pieces of old hose or wrapped cloths to keep it from being held too tightly against the tree trunk. Water regularly for the first weeks to keep the new planting area moist. If you are not certain how far the water is penetrating, use a trowel to dig down gently, about halfway to the root ball and check with your fingers. Do not forget to water after the weather cools if we have a dry autumn or early winter.

*Written and created by Betty Sanders. For more horticultural suggestions for August and throughout the year, please visit [www.BettyOnGardening.com](http://www.BettyOnGardening.com)*