

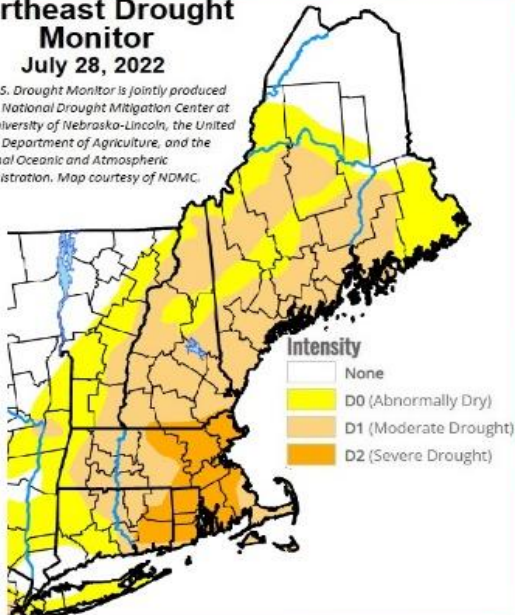
Garden Club Horticultural Hints

August 2022

A little rain would be very nice...

Northeast Drought Monitor July 28, 2022

The U.S. Drought Monitor is jointly produced by the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Map courtesy of NDMC.



The drought is getting worse. It's official now: it is dry, dry, dry. Much of New England is classified as being in a severe drought, with no relief in sight. What does a gardener do? First, respect watering bans. Towns are worried about having enough water for people—to drink, cook, shower and flush. Minimize your home water use any way you can. When you water outside, water early in the day when the air is coolest to lose the least to evaporation. Don't water at night when water left on plant leaves can promote fungus diseases.

Hand-water only, and do so only where there are plants



Save Our Monarchs. Some very nasty weeds are coming into seed at this time of year. Swallowwort is a relative of milkweed and often confuses monarchs 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 the toxic leaves. If you see the plants in bloom (photos of each) or with seed pods, cut down and bag it 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.

Prioritize your watering. Water your vegetable garden: it contains the annuals that are feeding you and your family so it should top your list. Most towns exempt vegetable gardens from watering bans so long as all watering is done by hand. If it is allowed, water new trees, shrubs and perennials. They lack an established root systems and need the water you can give them now. Now is not the time to fertilize your lawn, trees or shrubs. Fertilize in the fall if we get sufficient rain.



A monarch caterpillar on milkweed

In the vegetable garden...

Keep up with the harvest in the vegetable garden to keep plants producing. Few things can compare with fresh-picked corn or tomatoes still warm from the vine. Excess produce can be shared with friends, frozen or canned. Green peppers left on the plant will become red peppers but cucumber and green beans become overly large and inedible. Harvest tomatoes and corn as they ripen (does there anything say summer better than fresh tomatoes and sweet corn?) Watch for nasty bugs and diseases, but treat them organically – you’ll be eating the fruits of those plants! When onion tops go limp or begin to dry out, it’s time to pull your crop. As you pull spent vegetables, plant lettuce, spinach, arugula and other ‘leaf’ vegetables for a fall harvest. In mid-August, consider planting new rows of beets, lettuce and other greens, chard and radishes. These cool-weather vegetables will keep growing as the days shorten and the cool weather begins, giving you a fall harvest.

When your onion tops go limp or start to turn brown, it’s time to pull the crop



Remove spent flowers from perennials and annuals. Your goal is more flowers, not seeds. Keep the flowers coming by encouraging the plant to use its energy to set more buds. Keep your garden looking at its best by cutting back any plant that has finished flowering, leaving enough foliage to add energy to the roots but allowing space for the late bloomers to shine. If you are growing basil, keep pinching off flowers at the top of the plant. You want the leaves; the basil plant wants flowers. Once those flowers are pollinated, the plant considers its work done.

Basil plant flowers are very pretty, but keep pinching them back as soon as they appear. When the basil flower gets pollinated, the plant stops directing its energy to producing new leaves.

If you spot early or late blight on your tomatoes – characterized by leaves turning yellow with black spots – trim them off with pruners that you wipe frequently with sanitizing hand wipes or dip into a solution of alcohol in order not to spread it. Place all clippings in trash bags and send them to the dump. Diseased plant material should never be composted or left in the garden where it will winter over to attack your plants next year.



Too many vegetables? If your town has a food cupboard or a senior center that takes fresh food, contact them to see if they would like your overflow. Chances are, their response will be an enthusiastic ‘yes’





Whether it is jonquils for spring or paperwhites for the holidays, this is the time to order bulbs.



The calendar may say August, but it's the time to **order spring bulbs** while supplies are at their best. Check out catalogs from established producers such as Scheepers and Brent & Becky's for high quality and great selection. If you wait until it's time to plant (October), you will find a much reduced supply and many fewer varieties. Early bulbs, such as crocus, snowdrops (*galanthus*), rock garden iris, Glory of the Snow (*chionodoxa*), and striped squill (*puschkinia*) provide the first evidence that winter is breaking and spring is near. Pick out places in flower beds, then use golf tees or other unobtrusive markers so you can plant without disturbing the roots of sleeping perennials. And when you order, don't forget to include paperwhites and amaryllis for indoor winter blooms.

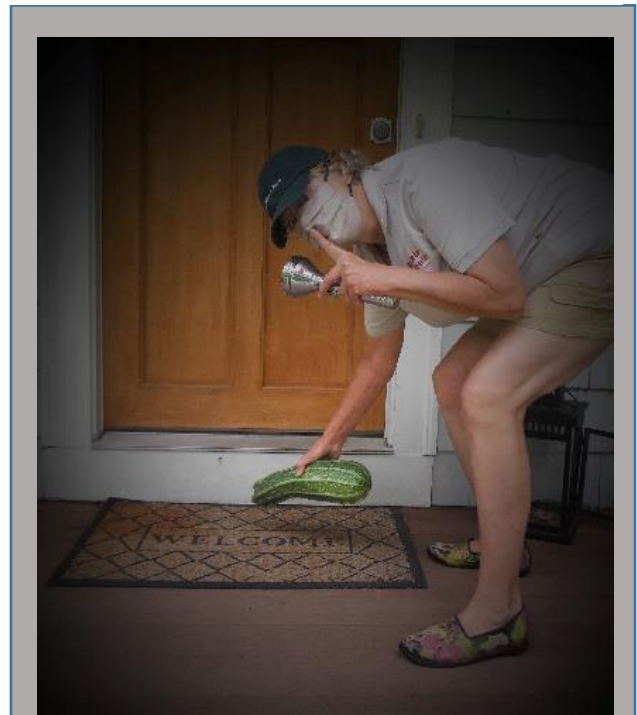


Keep weeding! Weeds allowed to set seed ensure that you will be working harder next year – pull them or dig them out and, because they may have seeds already, bag them and put them in the trash, not compost to ensure they don't get a second life.

Make certain drying herbs have good air circulation.



Begin harvesting herbs for drying on sunny days. Cut herbs in the morning after any dew has dried off for maximum freshness. 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.



Don't forget! Monday, August 8th is National Sneak Some Zucchini Onto Your Neighbor's Porch Night! With everything we've been through over the past few years, we all need a gardening tradition that we can celebrate; 'just because'.

Written and created by Betty Sanders. For more horticultural suggestions for August and throughout the year, please visit www.BettyOnGardening.com