

Garden Club Horticultural Hints July 2022 Everything's in bloom! Hooray!

A summer drought is taking hold. The latest Drought Monitor shows almost all of New England to be abnormally dry, and parts of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine and Rhode Island to be in a moderate drought.

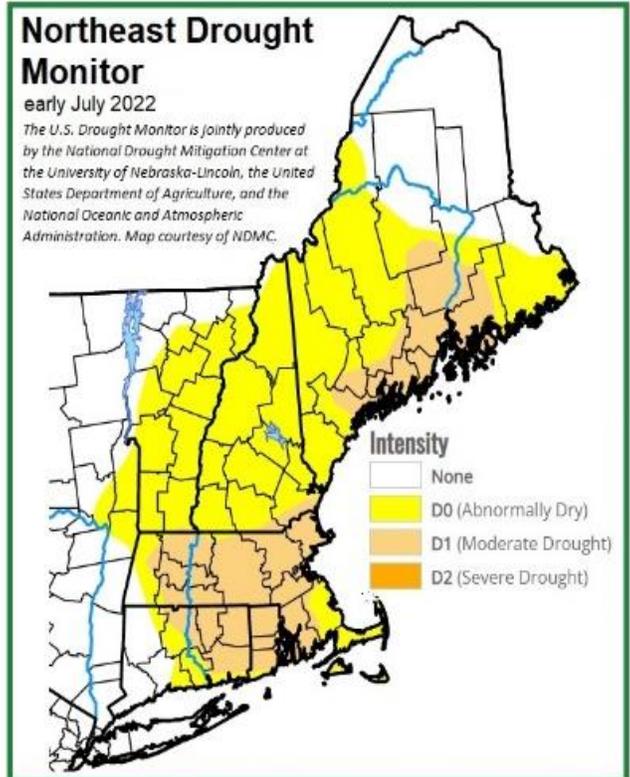
What should you do? Water *only what requires* supplemental moisture: vegetables, annuals, and newly planted perennials and shrubs. Your lawn is a hardy perennial that *wants* to go dormant in summer heat. Let it go brown; it will be back in the cooler autumn, undamaged. Similarly, established trees and shrubs have root systems that tap underground moisture reserves.



Clethra alnifolia, better known as summersweet, is a native shrub with fragrant spikes of white or pink flowers. Below: *rhododendron visconum* or swamp azalea.



Think beyond the usual suspects. While there are lots of blooms in the garden in July, you may not include a number of flowering woody natives. Swamp azaleas (*Rhododendron viscosum*) blooms in early July when other rhodies are past flowering. Oxydendron (sourwood tree) surprises in mid-July with white flower panicles that stay on into winter. And, in late July, summersweet (clethra) blankets itself in fragrant flowers loved by the bees and butterflies. All of these plants also tolerate at least some shade, making them adaptable and valuable additions to New England gardens. And once established (a couple of years in the ground) they can, under most conditions, dependably take care of themselves.



Deadhead now, see the benefits in August. Deadheading and pruning spent flowers can seem like make-work, until you realize that it will lead to more flowers, as well as a more attractive garden. Remove fading flowers from annuals, perennials and bulbs, putting them into your compost pile provided there is no sign of disease.

Save household water whenever you can. For example, station a bucket next to your shower and collect the cold water that initially comes out of the shower head. That trick alone can produce up to two gallons of water. Similarly, you'll save electricity if you run water (again, into a bucket) to get it hot before starting your dishwasher. Use those buckets of water on vulnerable outdoor plants. Finally consider adding rain barrels around your home. The water off your roof can fill a 50-gallon barrel with as little as a quarter inch of rain if your downspouts direct the water to them.



Time to pinch. If you missed your Fathers Day pruning of plants such as chrysanthemum and asters, start with an early July pinching. This leads to later flowers, but bushier plants with more blooms and a tidier habit. Consider cutting back balloon flower (Platycodon) and bee balm (Monarda), dianthus, coneflower (Echinacea), Helenium, and veronica. By pinching or trimming back one or two leaf sets of the plants at the front. You'll get an early bloom from the untouched stems at the rear and a later, bushier bloom from the remainder. It keeps your garden going stronger and longer.



This chrysanthemum will bloom later and bushier if you pinch it back now.

In the vegetable garden. Squash vine borers (below, right) are coming! A treatment that will not poison anything is a product called 'Surround'. Sprayed on stems, it forms a clay coating the borers cannot penetrate, while allowing the plant to thrive.



Aphid control. A strong spray from a hose will knock aphids (above, left) and other insects to the ground where they often become someone else's dinner. Spraying with pesticides should always be the last resort – and done with great caution because they will kill many beneficial insects and are harmful to other animals (including humans). Remember that over 90% of all insects are beneficial or benign so don't pull out the toxic spray at the first sight of bugs. Are they doing any damage or are they just scary to look at? Can you live with the amount of damage they are doing — a few holes in leaves? Have you tried that jet of water or a nontoxic spray? Learning to live with the other creatures in the garden that are doing little or no harm is an important step for everyone.

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