

June 2010

Plant vegetable seeds. Chard, corn, cucumber, eggplant, okra, black-eyed peas, salsify, New Zealand spinach, Malabar spinach, summer squash, winter squash, tomatillo. EARLY JUNE: Lima beans, beets..

Plant vegetable plants. Okra, peppers, tomatoes.

Prepare your pumpkin patch. The 4th of July is the time to plant pumpkin seeds if you want jack-o-lanterns by Halloween! Reserve an 8 foot by 8 foot area for each pumpkin patch. Make a hill of soil in the center and dig ample, good-quality compost into the hill. Go ahead and cover the entire area with at least three inches of mulch for now, to prevent weeds from seeding in. Right before planting the pumpkin seed (anywhere from the day of planting to a week before), gently rake off the mulch from the hill and mix in some good organic fertilizer, such as Rabbit Hill Farm's "Buds and Blooms," or Lady Bug 8-2-4 with additional rock phosphate or bone meal. Make four to six holes, one inch deep, in the top of the hill. Plant one pumpkin seed in each, and pat down the soil. Water deeply. Sprinkle a light amount of mulch over the seeded area (a half-inch or so) and replace the three inches of mulch onto the sides of the hill. After the seedlings emerge (in seven to ten days) clip all but two or three of the strongest plants. As the plants grow sturdier, more mulch can be added onto the bare soil around them, but do not pile up mulch onto the stems. Keep your pumpkin hill well-watered, since these giants of the vegetable world need plenty of moisture to grow.

Plant herbs. Artemesias (mugwort, southernwood, wormwood), basil, bay, catnip, chives, comfrey, epazote, lamb's ear, lavender, lemon balm, lemon verbena, Mexican mint marigold, mints, oregano, pennyroyal, rosemary, sage, winter savory, tansy, thyme, yarrow

Plant annual flower/ornamental seeds. Amaranthus (including love-lies-bleeding and Joseph's coat), aster, balsam, castor bean, celosias (including cockscomb), cleome, cosmos, cypress vine, feverfew, four o' clocks, heliotrope, impatiens, marigold, moonflower, morning glory, nasturtium, nicotiana, periwinkle, salvia, torenia (wishbone flower), vinca, zinnia EARLY JUNE: Sunflower, tithonia (Mexican sunflower)

Plant annual flower/ornamental plants. Amaranthus, balsam, wax begonia, blue daze, celosias (including cockscomb), coleus, copperleaf, cosmos, marigold, Mexican heather, penta, periwinkle, portulaca, purslane, vinca, zinnia

Plant perennial plants. Beebalm (Monarda didyma), butterfly weed (Asclepias tuberosa), copper canyon daisy, cupheas (including bat-faced and cigar plant), coreopsis, daisies (including ox-eye and shasta), daylily, echinacea (purple coneflower), eupatoriums (including Gregg's mistflower), gayfeather (Liatris), goldenrod, ornamental grasses, lamb's ears, lantana, plumbago, red hot poker (Kniphofia), ruellias, salvias, santolina, sedum

Plant ground covers and borders.

Fertilize established trees, shrubs, lawn, and plants. Use an organic fertilizer like the Lady Bug brand 8-2-4, Rabbit Hill Farm brand, or Bioform brand products.

Continue spraying entire landscape with seaweed solution, in the morning or evening. This is especially helpful in preparing plants for the heat of the summer, and in urging tomatoes and other plants to bloom and set fruit.

Apply Medina Soil Activator or Lady Bug Terra Tonic to soil. Applying one of these products two to four times a year does wonders to improve soil texture, stimulate microbes, and remove salts from the soil. Terra Tonic has the additional benefit of adding humates to the soil, feeding microbes with molasses, and adding hormones and micronutrients with seaweed.

Water sparingly. Water more deeply and less frequently.

Mulch all bare soil areas. Use at least three inches wherever possible to get the full benefits of holding in moisture and keeping out weeds.

Keep an eye on your lawn for chinch bug damage. The damage usually shows up in full sun areas (in hot, dry weather) as yellowing, then browning, irregular patches. Check the green areas next to the browning or yellowing areas for the tiny insects. Get a positive identification before treating with anything. Check such references as the Texas Bug Book by Malcolm Beck and Howard Garrett, The Organic Gardener's Handbook of Natural Insect and Disease Control, published by Rodale Press, or Texas Insects by Bastiaan M. Drees, Ph.D. and John Jackman, Ph.D. for identifying these and many other landscape critters. If chinch bugs are found, treat all of the lawn that is in full sun with one of the following products: (The products are listed (roughly) from mildest to strongest control method). Diatomaceous earth (d.e.), Safer's Insecticidal Soap, Safer brand Yard and Garden spray (with pyrethrin), d.e. plus pyrethrin ("Diatect V" is an example of this product).

Minimize grasshopper damage. For the last few years, we have been plagued by grasshoppers - in biblical proportions. Those who live out in the country are more severely affected than the townsfolk. Spraying with chemicals or even organic pesticides such as pyrethrin or rotenone are not the answer for two main reasons. First, a wide area would have to be sprayed, and anything strong enough to kill grasshoppers would kill everything else as well, including beneficials, leaving a wasteland behind. This would also, in turn, drive away the natural predators of the grasshoppers, such as birds and frogs. Second, tomorrow there will be hundreds more healthy grasshoppers to replace the ones who might have gotten sprayed.

There are three routes of organic control that are recommended. First, as often as possible and over as wide an area as possible, spread Nolo Bait. Nolo Bait is a wheat flake that has been spiked with a grasshopper disease, *Nosema locustae*. It doesn't harm any other critters except for Mormon crickets and perhaps other everyday crickets. When properly applied, the grasshoppers eat the Nolo and get sick. Tomorrow's grasshoppers cannibalize the sick ones, spreading the disease through the population. Nolo Bait is probably most recommended for homeowners with some acreage, unless whole blocks or neighborhoods in the city could get together for a concerted anti-grasshopper effort. Because of the grasshoppers' sheer numbers and mobility, Nolo Bait is most effective when used over larger areas.

Second, for townsfolk, and as an added measure for country folk, there is a relatively new control called Kaolin clay. One to two cups of the powdered clay is mixed with a gallon of water with about a teaspoon of soap, such as a mild dishwashing soap or Dr. Bronner's soap (from health food stores). To make mixing easier, the Kaolin clay should be slowly added to a cup or two of water first to make a paste (with the soap), and then added to the rest of the gallon of water. This mixture should be sprayed onto all leaf surfaces. The object is to have a white film on the leaf that repels the grasshoppers. This may require more than one application, depending on the concentration of clay in the spray.

Another spray-on recipe was given to us by a customer of ours, and was also reported successful by Jay Mertz of Rabbit Hill Farm. Mix one cup of diatomaceous earth with one gallon of water along with two tablespoons of blackstrap molasses. Spray this onto the plants. Diatomaceous earth looks like talcum powder, but to the insects it is like broken glass.

The third route for control of grasshoppers is simply a physical barrier. For some people in summers past whose trees were stripped bare down to and including the bark, the last resort was simply using row cover to protect what was left. Row cover is a white, lightweight, spun fabric that is often used as frost protection for tender plants in the winter, but is also used as an insect barrier.

Fertilize the lawn a second time with an organic fertilizer. This mid-season fertilization is only necessary if the lawn has recently been converted to an organic maintenance program. Once organic nutrients have been built up in the soil for a year or so, you only need to fertilize in April and early October. Lady Bug brand 8-2-4 is an ideal lawn fertilizer.

Check all plants for signs of pest or disease problems. Identify the problem correctly before treating, and treat with the least toxic solution to that specific problem.

Remove poorly adapted plants which have consistent disease and/or pest problems.

Consider a fall facelift. Fall is THE best time to plant anything permanent here in Texas, such as trees, shrubs, and perennials. If you have ever thought about revamping your landscape, now is the time to start designing. Do it yourself, or consider bringing in a reputable landscape designer - who specializes in native plants and organic methods - to plan your ideal home environment.

(Thanks to Howard Garrett's Texas Organic Gardening Book, the Travis County Master Gardener Association's Garden Guide for Austin and Vicinity, and the staff of The Natural Gardener for some of this month's tips).