

July 31, 2001

Summer Garden Color

Summer garden color spots often begin to appear a bit straggly and seedy this time of the year. Many garden annuals and perennials can be coaxed into putting on another display with some timely grooming and maintenance. A few hours spent in the garden now will reward you with a fresh appearance and more flowers next month.

Deadhead (clip out or pinch off) spent flowers to keep plants looking neat and encourage re-blooming. Many annuals and perennials such as alyssum, dianthus, coreopsis, and petunia will take heavy shearing and still give a repeat performance.

Roses also benefit from deadheading as old flowers fade. Prune out suckers, as well as dead, diseased, or unwanted branches.

Flowers grown in hanging baskets and containers need extra attention to thrive during the hotter weather. Check soil moisture often and feed them regularly to keep flowers and foliage coming. Keep them out of the wind to avoid drying out too quickly.

Weed, clean up garden debris, and renew mulching material, if needed. This is a good opportunity to hunt out the hiding places of snails and slugs. Bait or remove them by hand and discard.

Apply moderate amounts of fertilizer to established annuals, perennials, roses and container plants, then water thoroughly.

Check irrigation systems and make repairs. Drip emitters require periodic flushing to function properly.

Be alert for signs of powdery mildew, rust, and other seasonal diseases on susceptible plants such as roses, zinnias, and dahlias. Remove and dispose of infected plant tissue and debris. Avoid overhead watering and improve air circulation, if possible.

To keep bearded iris blooming profusely each year, they need to be divided every three to four years. Dig up large, overcrowded clumps of rhizomes (underground stems). Remove any dead flower stalks and cut back foliage to about four to six inches long. Cut away the healthier, young rhizomes and throw away the older center portion of the plant. Discard any plant material that shows signs of leaf or root diseases. Save the new rhizomes to replant or to share with friends. Other perennials, such as delphinium and Shasta daisy, can also be dug up and divided.

Garden annuals can be planted in coastal areas, but inland gardeners should wait until the summer heat subsides. If you have tired of deadheading your annuals, try some of the new petunia varieties, like the Wave series, Fantasy varieties, or Calibrachoas (Million Bells). They will look great and keep blooming like mad regardless.

If you are the grow-it-yourself type, start seeds for cool-weather annuals and perennials, such as calendulas, pansies, violas, snapdragons, Iceland poppies, foxglove, and delphinium. Sow them into a flat of a fast-draining potting soil, keep in a protected area, mist and keep them moist until they sprout. In six to eight weeks, when weather is milder, they will be ready to plant out in the garden.

University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Volunteers can provide additional gardening information upon request. Call the San Luis Obispo office at 781-5939 on Mondays and Thursdays from 1 to 5 PM. You may also call the Paso Robles office at 237-3100 on Wednesdays from 8 AM to 12 PM. The Paso Robles Library Master Gardener community outreach program is available to gardeners on Mondays from 10 AM to noon. The Master Gardener e-mail address is mastergardener@co.slo.ca.us.

Submitted by Mary Bernard, Master Gardener