



July Gardening Chores

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Despite the humid, cloudy weather, much of Connecticut remains abnormally dry. Do your best to keep plants as well watered as you can. Water early in the day when possible and avoid wetting the foliage. A mulch will reduce evaporation, keeping the moisture in while at the same time reducing weed germination.

What kind of mulch often depends on what plants it gets placed around. For the vegetable garden, one can use untreated grass clippings. Leaving clippings on the lawn is encouraged as that practice adds both nutrients and organic matter to the soil. However, it is fine to collect clippings that have not had weed killer applied and spread about 2 inches thick around tomatoes, squash and other vegetables. If untreated clippings are not available, one can purchase straw mulches. These might be sold for putting over grass seed, but they are generally fine for use in the vegetable garden.

Typically, shredded bark mulches are used in perennial and woody ornamental beds. Only 2 to 3 inches of mulch should be put down, less around smaller perennials. Excessive mulch heights will reduce the amount of air and water going in and out of the soil. For small perennials and herbs, I prefer to use cocoa hull or buckwheat hull mulches, but these have become more difficult to find in recent years and are more expensive as well.



Cocoa Hull Mulch. Photo by dmp.

Spend some time every day or at least a few times a week walking through your gardens and looking for insect and disease problems. Control is more effective if started early. Look for insects or signs of insect activity on vegetables.

Inspect broccoli, cabbage and other cole crops for imported cabbageworm and diamond back moth larvae. The small caterpillars blend in with the foliage so check both the tops and bottoms of leaves. Plants can be sprayed with BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*).

Oriental, Japanese and Asiatic garden beetles are all active now. Adults feed on a variety of garden plants including roses, coleus, dahlias, peppers, mums and many more. The Asiatic garden beetle feeds at night so sometimes it is difficult to figure out if your plant is being attacked by slugs, that also feed at night, or by this insect pest.

Other beetles to watch out for are the Mexican bean beetle, the Colorado potato beetle and the striped cucumber beetle. These are more particular in their feeding habits and one can easily guess on what plants to look for them.

Another insect pest to be on the lookout for is the squash vine borer. The adult is a clear winged moth with a black and orange body. Females lay eggs at the base of squash, pumpkins and gourd plants and the larvae hatch, bore into the stems, and typically cause the plant's demise. Inspect the lower stems for small brown eggs and crush if seen. Once the borers enter the stems, they are difficult to kill although some have luck carefully slitting the stem, offering the offender and covering the injured stem area with moist soil. Row covers can be used to protect early plantings. Also since there is only one generation of squash vine borers, late July plantings typically are not bothered by them.

There have been several calls about tomato leaves curling. Most likely the culprit is the weather with moisture and heat stress being common causes although a viral disease or mites can cause similar symptoms.

Annuals in the ground and in containers may look a little scraggly at this time. Remove spent flowers and trim back any leggy growth. Plants will benefit from a fertilizer application. Replace container plants that have past their prime for a fresh look.

Pinch or cut back later blooming mums, asters, helianthus and boltonias for bushier but lower plants with more blossoms. Bearded irises can be divided now. Deadhead roses as spent blossoms are more attractive to Japanese beetles. Fertilize roses one last time mid-July.

Spring blooming shrubs can be pruned now after the new growth expands. Consider a plant's natural shape before picking up those pruning shears or hedge trimmers.

While weeding seems like a never-ending task, your plants will be happier and healthier when not competing for light, water and nutrients and your gardens will look better too. Weeding is easier after a rain or irrigation. Try to pluck them when young so they don't get the upper hand.

July is a tough month in the gardens with high temperatures and humidity. Do your best to keep your plants up but take some time to enjoy them too. If you have questions about gardening chores or for other gardening questions, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.