

HOME

SUMMER EDITION

Tuesday & Sunday, July 6 & 11, 2004

SUPPLEMENT TO THE RECORD-EAGLE

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Grow green: Organic gardening easy

BY ERIN ANDERSON
Special to the Record-Eagle

For many people, the warm weather means a long-awaited opportunity to spend more time working in their gardens.

And there is certainly no shortage of available products designed to enhance the experience. From fertilizers and fungicides, to garden limes and insecticides, these products seem to line garden center shelves endlessly.

But what if you're concerned that what you're buying to improve your garden could actually be hurting you, your family, pets or even the planet? The trick is to find a way to cultivate and enjoy our little pockets of the earth by using methods that nurture and protect, rather than damage.

As it turns out, more earth-savvy options are easy to find. In fact, Tim Lampton, owner of McGough's in Traverse City, said that McGough's best-selling fertilizer is a 100 percent natural and 100 percent biodegradable compost called Nature Supreme. Made from poultry-waste compost, Nature Supreme even outsells the chemically engineered national brands.

"All of our customers just love it," he said. Barb Reneaud, Traverse

City master gardener and owner of Flower Power, has been using manure composts almost exclusively for years and she raves about both their pragmatic and planet-friendly effects.

"I have ponds right here in my yard, and I'm too close to the (Boardman) River to take a chance with chemicals getting into the water," she explained.

One of the products recommended at Williamsburg's Barker Creek Nursery & Landscaping, Inc. is an organic cow compost called Dairy Doo. It is organic because the cow manure it contains comes almost exclusively from Amish cows fed only organic feed and kept free of steroids and other injected or ingested chemicals. Currently, Dairy Doo can be found exclusively at two area garden retailers: Barker Creek and Brian Zimmerman Landscaping.

Of course, there is a reason most manure has to be composted before it can be used as fertilizer. All manure contains nitrogen, an essential chemical; however, too much nitrogen can be harmful to



plants. Fertilizers like pure horse manure, which are concentrated, rich compounds high in nitrogen, are referred to as "hot" and will "burn" plants if applied directly without being composted for several months.

So why use compost rather than manufactured fertilizers featuring man-made chemicals and processing? Terry Bertrand, co-owner of Barker Creek Nursery & Landscaping, Inc. said that compost increases organic matter in the soil, helps plants build a sound root structure, helps clay soils become more porous and better able to drain, improves sandy soils by increasing the amount of moisture they can hold, attracts and feeds earthworms (one of a gardener's best friends), helps control erosion and improves vitamin and mineral content.

Over at Traverse City's Garden Goods, there are several planet-friendly products that deliver the same quality results as their more toxic competitors. Plant-Tone is a certified organic blend of several different meals that combine to make an extremely rich general-purpose fertilizer. Plant-Tone contains all 15 of the nutrients plants need to grow, making it what aficionados call a "complete food." In fact, it's so nutritious, it goes beyond simply fertilizing and can even be used as a slow-acting conditioner to improve the overall quality of less robust soils, even as it fertilizes your plants.

Another option is from a Milwaukee-based company that had the forward-thinking idea of creating a product nearly every gardener needs from something the city already had in abundance: sewage. Milorganite is a slow-release, "non burning," low-analysis fertilizer made from Milwaukee's treated septic sewage. Milorganite works so well and makes such good use of an inevitable surplus of ingredients, plans are already in the works for sev-



Above and below: Barb Reneaud promotes natural gardening at her business, Flower Power, located on River Road just outside of Traverse City.



eral dozen more cities to do the same.

But no matter how enriched your soil, or enhanced your plant food, the success of your garden isn't guaranteed until you find a way to deal with the unavoidable pests that

plague even the most seasoned gardener.

Not surprisingly, nature was way ahead of us in dealing with this dilemma. Certain plants actually contain powerful insecticides of

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Making outdoor parties fun

BY TOM TRACEY
Special to the Record-Eagle

Summer is here and area homeowners are jumping at the chance to enjoy the warm weather with family, friends and neighbors. An outdoor party is in order. But how does one accomplish a successful party?

It's all in the details, according to professional party planner Patricia Martel of PAM Associates. "Some questions to ask before the party might be, 'How many attendees will there be? Where will the guests gather? How will you decorate? What will be on the menu?'" said Martel.

Leisurely exploring these answers during the planning phase is a far better choice than scrambling for solutions during the actual event.

For example, determining the number of attendees seems basic, but knowing ahead of time the number of guests will ensure your guests' comfort. Send out R.S.V.P. invitations early (be it e-mail, snail mail or telephone) and follow-up a week before if you haven't received a response. After all, the number of attendees affects such factors as seating, traffic flow and available food and beverages.

When determining an area where guests are to gather, have seats available to all who attend. The initial burst of energy will dwindle, and guests will eventually seek a chair to sit in. Borrow folding chairs from

friends and family, or rent some from a party rental store. Better yet, write on the party invitation, "Bring your own chair."

If outdoor parties are to be an integral part of your summer, why not invest in proper outdoor furniture? Sales representative Trina Garner of Summer Place Casuals in Honor said the store in Honor offers 300 matched sets of outdoor furniture. Although traditional neutral tones are a perennial favorite, a new trend is taking hold in outdoor furniture.

"Right now, (environmentally-friendly) furniture in Adirondack style is really hot," said Garner. "It's actually made from the same material as milk cartons, but it has a wood-like appearance and is available in colors. It's heavy enough that you can keep it outside year-round, and the ice and snow won't move it. Then, when spring comes along, you just hose it clean."

A sprawling chair in the sun is a nice way to relax, but since most outdoor parties take place when the sun is at its brightest, have shade available for guests who need it. A decorative patio umbrella or tent gazebo adds to the festive atmosphere, and is easy to set up and takedown.

Speaking of festive atmosphere, how will you decorate? Giving an outdoor party a theme adds to the fun. Whether you choose beach party, casino or

Mardi Gras, take elements from that theme and integrate them into things your guests can see, hear, taste, touch and smell.

For example, a golf theme could include pennant banners that mark seating areas, a miniature golf course, bowls of chocolate golf balls to munch and a golf bag containing a bucket of iced beverages.

Julie Gamelin of the Gags & Gifts store in Traverse City said customers can choose a theme — say, Tiki Party — and she can help tie it together.

"We can supply the little patio lights, pink flamingos and matching plastic table covers," said Gamelin.

Not sure what theme to use? Just pick a color.

"You can create a whole theme around color," said Martel.

Bright hues are in vogue this year.

"The hot color this summer seems to be pink," said Martel.

"Yellow and lime green are really popular colors for us this summer," said Gamelin.

And when the sun goes down, make sure your outdoor party carries on by having plenty of tiny lights. Lights serve to create a mood, as well as to safely illuminate the party area. Mood lighting can be provided in a variety of ways — scented candles, decorative paper lanterns and string lights (in most every shape

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