

Getting caught up with your gardening chores

July holds lots of distractions for gardeners. It is the first full month of summer; the kids are out of school, there are Fourth of July celebrations, the Cherry Festival, Art & Craft shows and vacations.

We have worked so hard to get the garden planted, weeded and fertilized and are starting to reap the rewards. There are flowers blooming everywhere, green tomatoes on the vine and fresh herbs for cooking. It would be so easy to slip into auto pilot mode and think the garden can take care of itself for the rest of the summer.

Unfortunately, July is the month that many pests and diseases also start enjoying the fruits of our labor. If you haven't done so already, now would be a great time to develop a regular garden maintenance routine. The garden seems to grow almost before our eyes, and so do the weeds. If you allow weeds to get a start, they are tougher to control. Pull or hoe them as they appear; it's

amazing what a difference ten minutes a day spent weeding makes! I have been so overwhelmed by my lack of garden maintenance at home that it feels like I will never catch up!

But not gardening has never been an option for me, so I have decided to put on the proverbial blinders and concentrate on one garden area at a time. It may take me all summer, but by doing a little at a time, I am actually seeing progress. And that progress gives me the incentive and energy to continue with the next area.

July seems to be the month we notice pest damage the most. Aphids, Rose Chafers, Japanese Beetles and slugs can seriously damage plants in just a few days. Hand picking works well for many pests, but heavier infestations may require spraying. Insecticidal soap works well for most bugs.

Slugs can be controlled by several methods. Setting out shallow pans of beer at ground level works well, but you will need to dump them

out each morning and refill in the evening. Diatomaceous Earth and slug bait containing Iron Phosphate are pet and wildlife safe alternatives to poison bait.

Diseases like Black Spot and Powdery Mildew may show up now too. The best way to treat these is to prevent them in the first place. Good garden hygiene, cleaning up fallen leaves and clippings and watering early in the day so that the foliage has a chance to dry before evening, can help prevent the spread of disease in the garden. For those plants that always seem to have problems, using a garden fungicide on a regular basis before the problem shows up may be the easiest and least stressful solution.

This summer has been

very hot and dry and it doesn't look likely to change. Watering may be the single most important task in the garden. Many of us have irrigation systems and we tend to believe that should take care of all our plants' water needs. But most irrigation systems are designed to water the top few inches of soil and not deeper where the roots of perennials shrubs and trees are.

Remember that it's better to water deeply and less often than to water frequently and more shallow. Deep watering promotes deeper rooted, more drought tolerant plants. It's easy to check how much water is actually getting to your plants' roots; wait about 20-30 minutes after the irrigation has stopped and dig down about 4-6 inch-

es near your plants.

You may be surprised at what you find. One of my co-workers had a watering revelation the other day. Her husband had the sprinkler running for over an hour in a garden that was mulched with about 1-2 inches of bark. Later that afternoon, they were puzzled by the plants that were still wilting and dug through the mulch down a few inches and the bed was bone dry. The mulch had absorbed the water and it never got to the plants. While mulch does help to conserve moisture and keep soil temperatures more even, under extremely dry conditions, you may need to make sure the water is actually getting to where it is needed.

I know all of these sounds like more work than you

BY JILL RUBERT
LOCAL

bargained for a number that garden things and garden things, need care of. Garden have to be a commitment, but 20-30 minutes off in the local. If you have comments, Nursery owner Rubert at: hill-nursery.com

GARDEN TIP

Be a blade runner

A dull lawn mower blade will give a whitish cast to a lawn and not cut cleanly since it shreds the end of the leaf blade. To keep a lawn looking a cut above, sharpen the blade (right) about every 10 hours of use.

■ A sharp mower blade is even more important when the turf starts putting up seed heads.

■ The seed head stems are much tougher than the grass blades and, therefore, more likely to shred.

Shredded ends dry out, giving a lawn a whitish look.



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