

Horticulture Hints

It is no bad thing to celebrate a simple life. J.R.R. Tolkien

June/July 2020

After a couple months off from writing (and all activities outside of gardening, it seems), it's time to get back to the grind. I don't mean that literally, of course. Writing Horticulture Hints isn't a grind, but it does require that I get my head back into the game. I'm nothing if not compartmentalized!

Following several weeks of hard work by a number of Club members, the Trailside Garden and Memorial Gardens both look gorgeous! Weeding has been done, a lot of erroneous plantings were taken out, and many, many bags of fresh mulch applied. Did I say 'many'? I meant 'MANY'. Carol and Kelley Wood deserve a huge thank you for hauling somewhere in the vicinity of 70 bags of the stuff. And, they took all the debris away again to compost. Then there are all the people that volunteered hours to do the work in the heat. But the gardens are a credit to our club. A huge thank you to all who helped!

After surgery at the end of February, my hand seems to be totally back to (better than) normal. I can do everything I was doing before surgery, but now I can do it without pain. How's that for a positive? Weeding never seemed so easy. We'll talk backs and hips at another point. Thank you for your good thoughts and sympathy.

Crocosmia Fire King (a relative of the iris) is showing its brilliant orange and yellow plumage right now. The little bulbs had been in the ground in the front of my house, but they never did much there. So I dug them up, put them in a pot in partial shade, and obviously found their sweet spot. They like less sun and richer soil, and a little more water than they were previously getting.

Native to grasslands of eastern Africa, the more normal bloom time in northern locations is August into fall, so imagine my surprise to see little flower stalks starting to show up at the end of June! The foliage resembles blades of grass, with the flower stalks resembling grassy seed heads - that is, until the bloom opens. The flower bears



Crocosmia Fire King

no resemblance to grass seed heads. A worthy little plant if you can get a hold of it. There are many sources online. You may possibly find them at big box stores.

My beautiful bulbine, the one in my boat planter that was so beautiful all winter and spring, finally burned out in the extreme heat. Despite plentiful watering, it seems the summer sun just did it in. Since it is still alive, albeit rather ugly, I may try lifting it out of the boat and putting in a pot in a shaded area to see if it might come back. I just can't bear to get rid of a plant that's still living. The

marigolds even petered out a bit with the heat and a day or two of missed watering. But the good news is: the volunteer red salvia is doing beautifully in the boat, even with missed above-mentioned waterings. The pollinators are very grateful. I'll be very grateful if we could get some rain soon. Watering is taking up all my garden time! Projects are losing out.

The tomatoes faded out as well, so they have been cut back, but okra is going gangbusters! One can never have too much. My one regret is that I can't share it with our son in Colorado, who loves okra as much as we do. And as an update to the goji berry story: the tiny little vines are producing enough tiny little berries that I can have a small handful with my yogurt every 3rd or 4th day. So far, this experiment is going beautifully!

Summer chores are in full swing these days. Lawn mowing this year is a little slower than normal because of the drought, but still needs to be done. This is the time of year for fertilizing nearly everything. Staghorn ferns are one of those things that often gets overlooked for this chore. Some people like to throw a banana peel on their staghorn, and as it decomposes it will provide the plant with some nutrients, notably potassium and a little phosphorus. But bananas don't provide any nitrogen. If you notice your staghorn exhibiting poor growth, or having pale or yellowing fronds, this may be your problem. For this nutrient, you will need a commercial fertilizer. You can mix a water soluble fertilizer at half the recommended rate and wet the growing medium. Or you can use a time-released fertilizer (all purpose). Just sprinkle on the growing medium. You can definitely continue to feed it banana peels if you wish, but if it starts showing signs of nitrogen deficiency, a balanced fertilizer is recommended.

Ants continue to be a nemesis, and populations are exploding this time of year. But I think I finally found an effective and easy method of control: borax and powdered sugar. Mix equal quantities of each and place in a small lid of some kind (I use lids from quart-sized yogurt containers) and place

near ant hills. The ants apparently can't tell the difference between the borax particles and the powdered sugar particles, and take both back to their nests. I have found that this decimates anthills in a very short period of time. Keep in mind two things - 1) regular sugar won't work, as the ants can tell the difference, and will separate out the sugar to take home; and 2) if the mixture gets wet at all, it will just turn into a sticky glob and needs to be discarded. Even heavy dew will ruin it. The good news is that it's cheap, quick, and easy to make and replace. Give it a try. Let me know what you think.

Black spot and fungus is rampant on roses this time of year, and can quickly decimate and kill a nice bush. Sometimes in the



Black spot on rose leaf

summer, foliage and flowers can become much paler. This is a normal change, and in the fall when the weather cools off, colors will return to normal. But the black spots and fungus are a whole different matter. Both surface and systemic products are made for this purpose. My experience has only been with surface fungicide sprays, but I've had good luck with them. Remember though, they are best used in the evening so the spray can dry overnight. If sprayed during sunny hours, the foliage may burn, and all your work was for nothing.

Hope you all survive the "Great Floral City Stink of 2020" (don't tell me you haven't noticed). If you don't know what it is, email me and I'll give you the lowdown. Enjoy our heat - that's why we live in Florida, right? Stay safe, and happy gardening.