

Horticulture Hints

The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all. Mulan

September 2020

And so begins another year of Garden Club meetings and social events. Limited though they may be. September traditionally means weather a little bit cooler and a little bit more comfortable, but we'll have to wait and see about that.

The pipevine swallowtail butterfly caterpillars have been at it again, eating the Dutchman's pipe vine to within an inch of its life. It all started when I had to cut the vine back quite



a bit at the time that we got a new roof this summer. The vine had grown massively over the last few years, up and over the edge of the roof. After the haircut, several hoards of butterflies discovered it and used it for its intended purpose. But that is, indeed, why I planted it. The flowers are lovely and unique, but I'm also hoping that many caterpillars were able to make it to adulthood because of

it. (I must apologize for the stink vine in the picture, trailing all the way up, and even blooming - it has since been eradicated!)

Since we're in Florida (the heat and insect capital of the nation), I would like to say a word or two (maybe three) about dragonflies. Where I come from in the dry west, dragonflies are somewhat of a rarity. But here in this lovely state, the insect is fairly common. And, as I have come to find out, they are very useful in the garden. There are some one hundred (plus or minus) types of dragonflies, and their close relatives,



Dragonfly nymph

damselflies. They spend most of their lives underwater as nymphs (the immature, wingless form of insect). When time and temperature is right, the nymph crawls out of the water on a stem or stick, breaks out of its exoskeleton and becomes the winged adult. The adult form lives for a varied amount of time, but generally four months to a year. And during that time (and here's the good part), each dragonfly can eat hundreds of mosquitos a day. They also have been known to eat ants (go dragonflies!!), small flies and wasps.



Common Green Darner

On the same subject, there are some plants that will encourage dragonflies to stay in your yard. Among these are black-eyed susans (*Rudbeckia hitra*), swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnate*), and Joe Pye weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*). All of these will grow in our zone 9a location. In addition, putting rocks or sticks in your pond will be helpful when the nymphs get ready to crawl out of the water to become adults. Certain pond plants also are helpful to the laying of eggs, and sheltering of nymphs and the young adult: cattails (*Typha latifolia*), water horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), and water lilies. Water lilies are especially ideal because they allow the adult female a place to rest before and after laying her eggs.

The fall months might also be a good time to consider adding some bird habitat to your back yard. I know some people don't like to feed the wildlife (and, as a rule, you shouldn't), but everything that I read says that the only drawback to feeding birds is the possibility that you won't be able to feed them all the time. Say if you go on an extended vacation or some such thing. But I have always enjoyed watching the antics of birds in the yard, and have fed local varieties for years. And sometimes, yes, I inadvertently feed a few squirrels along the way. But in addition to feeders, there are a few things that may help to draw birds to your backyard. Shade is very helpful, but not necessary. A water source is very important. Gently moving water is preferred, but I find, not necessarily required for the birds to be interested. A wide shallow water source is best: bird baths or hollows or depressions in

rocks as examples. This allows for all types of bathers - both the dip and run type, and the "fluff and flutter" type. And the birds are able to perch on the edge and take a sip if desired. Leaving a brush pile somewhere not too far from the feeder provides a place for shelter and rest for some smaller birds. Leaving a dead tree as a snag provides a place for some larger birds to perch and scan the neighborhood. Vines on fence or pergola gives an outlook before attacking the feeder. And, not least important, is to stay away from insecticides.

Enjoy our impending cooler weather - it's bound to show up sooner or later! Safe and happy gardening!