

Horticulture Hints

There is no gardening without humility. Nature is constantly sending even its oldest scholars to the bottom of the class for some egregious blunder. — Alfred Austin

August 2022

If we're honest, it's been a brutal summer. And I haven't met anyone yet who would dispute that. Temperatures in the mid-nineties, and little rain. Oh, to spend the weeks at the beach. But I bet the Gulf is like bath water. Maybe it wouldn't be so fun after all. Stay indoors where it's air conditioned.

My experiments with vegetables have been pretty pitiful failures. The chayote is still growing about twenty feet up the nearby tree, but no fruit yet. The ridged gourds and New Guinea beans have succumbed to heat and fungus. I'll be interested to see if the chayote does something when the weather cools down. The nice thing about this one is that it's a perennial, so maybe next year. The only thing plowing onward is the okra. Oh, and eggplant. They need lots of water. Like twice a day, but fruit is ripening! My lovely peppers took a dive due to a combination of fungus and aphids. A little copper octanoate (copper soap) and a drastic trim should bring them back by mid-September. Then We'll have peppers again until frost. We've really enjoyed the Gypsy Hybrid variety that we grew this year. Sweet, yellow and crunchy, delicious both raw and cooked.



Transpiration

Transpiration. Isn't it a lovely word? It's also a lovely process, one carried out by green leafy plants. It's breathing, only they just breath out. The process happens all the time, the loss of water vapor through the stomata (pores) of the leaves. It's usually an invisible process. But to see it as the picture shows, it has to be a plant high in water content. This picture is a cucumber leaf. One also has to be fairly quick - the plants force out their excess moisture at night while the temperatures are cool. If you get out before the sun hits the leaves in the morning, you might be able to see this before the water has been evaporated by the sun. One of the many cool and beautiful things about plants. Another thing I think is really cool and beautiful about plants, is something I observed in vining plants. When they reach the end of whatever structure they're growing on, somehow they can sense that there is something nearby to wrap around. The growing tip can move six to eight inches in all directions, searching, and then figure out which is the best way to go. Sometimes the nearest prospect is several feet away. Yet they can find it. How do they do that without brains or eyes?

August is always a bittersweet month for me. Summer is close to and end (OK, not really, here in Florida...), but activities-wise, things always start up again in September. I really enjoy the freedom of summer. I really do enjoy the activities as well, but I guess it's an inertia thing. It just takes a lot of energy to get going again. But there's always lots to do in the yard. If you DO want to get outside while it's still pretty hot, you can prepare your garden for fall. Some more warm weather stuff, like tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucumbers, and corn can be started by seed right now. If you prefer to plant purchased

starts, you can do so, but try to supply a little shade, or shade cloth if you can. Make sure to keep the soil moist. You can continue to fertilize your lawn up til October 31, so do your best to keep it green and healthy before winter sets in. Let hedges grow out by six inches or so before you trim. Maintain mulch in your beds at minimum of three inches. More is better, but remember to keep the deep stuff slightly away from plant stems. You can also trim the seed heads from your crape myrtles to encourage more blooms. They are capable of a full bloom a second time in the season.



Colors of Summer, Passion Flower and Cigar Plant

Stay cool and happy gardening!