

# The Garden in July

By Rachel Anderson, Certified Professional Horticulturalist

I was on my way out to the chicken coop one morning, when I noticed that the new growth on my apple tree was curled and distorted in the way that only an aphid infestation can do. Usually aphids are on the bottom of my 'bad bugs' list, but when I stopped to take a closer look...YIKES! This was bad! There were aphids in every color of the rainbow it seemed, and loads of them. They were crawling all over each other and I saw that some had wings, which means that the population had become too large and it was time for some to move on to colonize somewhere else. I felt that I had to do something quick - anything! I contemplated all of my options as I was turning over leaf after leaf in alarm and growing disgust.

Then something caught my eye that I had never seen before. There were tiny golden orange ovals that looked like eggs neatly arranged in rows. These little ovals were all standing on end, maybe 30 of them, clustered on the underside of one of the leaves. I peered closely at the other leaves and saw that there were indeed more just like the others. I had a hunch as to what they were, and a little research confirmed my hopes - they were ladybug eggs! I knew then what I had to do about my aphid problem - nothing at all. Nature was going to take care of it for me! How perfect is that? A couple of days later I went out to inspect the eggs and aphids and, to my delight, there were tons of ladybug larvae all voraciously eating their aphid meals. It was a beautiful sight and a great reminder to me that a little tolerance goes a long way, and that close observation in the garden is an excellent way to learn.

## In the ornamental garden:

- I think that the most important thing you can do for your garden in July is keep everything watered, especially if you have any new plantings (and I hope you do). We have finally reached true summer in the Pacific Northwest, which means warm dry weather for a change. Time your irrigation so that it happens early in the morning so as to minimize moisture loss due to evaporation later in the day. If you're hand watering, early morning is a lovely time of day to be out in the garden and I always appreciate the quiet coolness before the day begins in earnest. If you're ever in doubt as to whether you need to water or not, wiggle your ungloved fingers 4-5 inches down in the soil. If it feels cool and moist, then you're probably ok, but if it's dry and crumbly all the way down then you need to water. Try to keep water off the leaves and flowers of tomatoes and roses to help prevent disease problems.
- Keep bird baths clean and filled with water. The birds need water just as much as your plants.
- Dead-head roses. That is, remove the spent flowers to encourage more to come. In fact, dead-head any repeat blooming perennials and annuals to keep the flowers coming.
- Summer prune early flowering shrubs like forsythia, lilacs, and mock orange.
- July is the perfect time to fertilize your roses after their initial flush of flowers. Side dress with a slow release organic fertilizer and a generous handful of alfalfa meal too. Alfalfa meal, by the way, is a great source of nitrogen and other vitamins and minerals that roses seem to love!

## In the edible garden:

- Begin thinking about fall crops. I know we just got into summer, but by planning ahead for fall you can ensure that you'll have something good to eat from the vegetable garden all winter long. We have a great class lined up at the nursery on this very subject if you're interested in extending your vegetable gardening season. It's on Sunday, July 14, from 1 - 2 pm and it's called 'Vegetables for Winter' with popular author and speaker, Bill Thorness.
- Remove any veggies that have bolted (that is, flowered). If you're tight on space then this is a chance to clear some room for something new.
- Keep the birds away from your berries with bird netting.
- Make sure that any seeds you have sown recently don't dry out. Keep the seedbed moist to ensure good germination. If your seeds have sprouted already, then you can prevent them from bolting too soon by ensuring soil fertility and adequate soil moisture.
- Keep picking! Many veggies will continue to produce if you continue to pick them. Peas, beans, zucchini, and cucumbers are all like that. If the fruit gets to be too large, then the plant feels that its job of procreation is complete and it begins to yellow and die. So keep picking! If you feel like you have more food coming from your garden than you know what to do with, consider sharing what you can't eat with friends and family or donating to a food bank or shelter. They are always very grateful to receive fresh, seasonal produce.
- Harvest garlic when the tops have yellowed. Let them cure for a week or so in the garage before rubbing away any soil and loose papery sheathing. I've learned that garlic keeps longer if it's kept attached to the tops, than if the tops are cut off. If you've got lots, then store it in a cool dark place.

Hopefully the warmth of summer and the beauty of your garden will lure you outside to your favorite chair with a good book and a tall glass of something tasty and cold. The hard work is done for now and it's time to relax and enjoy.



### **About the author:**

*Rachel has been gardening since childhood, thanks to her mom, and has been part of the team at Christianson's since 2002. She's a Certified Professional Horticulturist with a passion for roses and vegetable gardening. Rachel and her family enjoy gardening together and now share their urban garden with a menagerie of ducks, chickens, two cats, and a dog.*

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