

## In the Garden in May

By Rachel Anderson, CPH

When I was growing up, my Mom was always spending her free time in the garden. How she managed to have free time as a single working mother of two I'll never understand. But, she did. Now I understand that spending time in the garden was the best way for her to relax and have a few moments to herself. Occasionally, I would "help" her by pulling weeds, (which sometimes were not actually weeds) or by gathering earthworms and lining them up into families (the longest was the dad, of course! Poor worms!). How I thought this could be helpful, I'll never know. I think she was just glad I was occupied and out of her hair for a little while.

In addition to her flower beds she also had a pretty good sized vegetable garden. Every year when she sowed her first seeds of lettuce and spinach, she would always sow them in the shapes of my brother's and my first initials. We would go out every couple of days and check to see if they were coming up. Soon enough there would appear a giant green and leafy 'J' for my brother and 'R' for me. Now, my brother and I didn't particularly enjoy eating lettuce or spinach or any other type of leafy green, but for some reason the fact that our salad came from the first letters of our names made eating vegetables seem a little bit tastier and a lot more fun, which was maybe my mom's plan all along. Moms are pretty sharp that way.

In the ornamental garden:

- It's finally warm enough to safely plant hanging baskets and containers outside and we have 2 whole greenhouses filled with colorful annuals for you to choose from!
- Keep on pulling weeds! If you haven't yet had a chance to spread a mulch for weed control and water conservation, you can still do so. I always think it's more difficult to spread mulch when everything is up, especially if your garden is as full as mine. It's easier to do when the ground is a clean slate, but later is better than never.
- Dead head your tulips that have finished blooming. Just like daffodils, you don't want the plant to waste energy creating a seed. Instead, you want all that good energy to go towards feeding the bulb. Just let the foliage wither and brown right where it is and later you'll easily be able to remove it.
- Dead head hellebores. Some varieties may still look pretty, but some of the earlier bloomers are beginning to look old and tattered. In my experience, aphids really like to congregate on the petals of old hellebore flowers, which is another good reason to get rid of them. Plus, deadheading shows off the glossy new foliage as well.
- Put out slug bait. Slugs and snails are out in force this time of year with all those newly emerging plants to tempt them. I really like to use *Sluggo* because it's safe to use around pets, it's organic, and it lasts a long time. Oh, and it works!
- On the subject of pests in the garden, it looks as though this is going to be another bad year for tent caterpillars. Over the winter I learned that tent caterpillars migrate south about 7 miles each year, so if you live a bit farther north and you had them bad last year, you may not have them as bad this year if at all, as they make their way south. I also learned what their egg cases look like, so I was able to remove them when I was pruning. I know I missed a few though, because I found myself removing tents full of creepy caterpillars from my plum tree the other morning.

- Fertilize roses if you haven't already. By now you should be noticing tiny flower buds! It's so exciting! I can't wait for the first roses of the season! May is also a good time to fertilize rhododendrons.

In the edible garden:

- You've probably noticed that any brassicas (i.e. broccoli and kale) that have overwintered in your garden are beginning to bolt or flower. If you have the space to allow them to bloom, then let them go. The bright yellow flowers are attractive to many pollinating insects that have emerged from a long winter and are looking for something to eat. Hummingbirds are also attracted to them. They're pretty, and you can eat them - they're a colorful, spicy addition to salads.
- It's a good time to sow outdoors, especially veggies like peas, lettuce, kale, beets, chard, radishes, and arugula. Towards the end of the month, if the weather is warm, it should be safe to sow beans and corn outside.
- Sow calendula, nasturtium, and sunflowers outside.
- By the end of May, thin the fruit on your fruit trees. It's better to thin them when the fruit is still tiny. Choose the largest one per cluster and remove all else. This ensures good uniform size, helps to encourage air circulation around the fruit and thus helps to prevent scab and other issues. It also lessens the weight load for the branches to support.
- Set out starts of tomatoes, peppers, squash, eggplant, and basil with caution. Keep an eye on the weather, in particular the night time temperatures. Most summer veggies prefer temperatures at least in the 50's during the night in order to thrive. It doesn't take much to cause basil to wither and flowers to abort on tomatoes. If you're so fortunate as to have a greenhouse, then you're already on your merry way to homegrown tomatoes, but the rest of us could benefit from the use of cloches at night to protect our babies. A cloche could be as simple as a gallon milk jug with the bottom cut out or as fancy as a tall, graceful glass bell cloche. Some people like to wrap their tomato cages with plastic or bubble wrap to protect their seedlings.

Happy Mother's Day and also Happy May Day! May your month be filled with flowers!