

## The Garden in July

By Rachel Anderson

Well gardening friends, I have good news and I have bad news. Let's dispense with the bad news first. I am leaving Christianson's Nursery after 13 years. I like gardening so much that I've decided to do it for a living! Just to give you an idea of how far I have come in the horticultural world, when I first started working at Christianson's, the first time I saw Cotoneaster, I called it 'Cotton Easter'. John was ruthless in his teasing, and I was so embarrassed! But hey! We all have to start somewhere, and little did I know that that was just the beginning of a close--- and long standing--- working relationship with John, and I can't think of a better teacher, nor a better learning environment. My co-workers at Christianson's have become good friends and like a second family to me; I will miss not seeing them every day, but I know where to find them! Shall I get on with the good news? I will continue to write for Garden Notes each month, just as I have been for the past year and a half or so. So, there! Gone, but not entirely!

In the ornamental garden:

- I think 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 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. Also, pay attention to how the plant looks; usually they will let you know if they're thirsty. 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. By removing the spent flowers, you are encouraging more. In fact, dead-head any repeat blooming perennials and annuals to keep the flowers coming. Pay attention to areas that seem a little crowded to you, and make a note to move plants around when it's safe, usually October or November.
- 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 handful of alfalfa meal. Alfalfa meal (not to be confused with alfalfa pellets or rabbit food, which contains salts that are harmful to your plants) is a great source of nitrogen and other vitamins and minerals that roses seem to love!
- Maybe, just maybe the weeds have slowed down a bit for the time being?

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 you'll have something good to eat from the garden all winter long. A couple of books on the subject of winter gardening I have found useful are 'Cool Season Gardener' by Bill Thorness and 'Winter Gardening' by Binda Colebrook.
- Remove any veggies that have bolted, or flowered. If you're tight on space then this is a chance to clear some room for something new. If space allows, let your brassicas go to flower-they are a great nectar source for all kinds of good insects!
- Make sure to keep any recently sown seed beds nice and moist. If the soil is too dry or lacks sufficient fertility, your seedlings (especially for spinach and lettuce) will bolt upon germinating. It's really disappointing and maybe it would be better to wait until cooler weather to sow these veggies. Or, try buying already started plants.
- 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 you garden that you know what to do with, then share it with friends, family, and neighbors! Everyone will be so happy!
- Harvest garlic when the tops have yellowed. Let them cure for a couple of weeks in the garage before rubbing away any soil and loose papery sheathing. I've learned that garlic keeps a lot longer if the tops are left on. If you've got lots, then store it in a cool dark place. Depending on the variety, it should keep through the winter.

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.