

# The Garden In August

By Rachel Anderson, Certified Professional Horticulturist

One of the most fun and entertaining parts of gardening for me, is having the opportunity to slow down from the busy pace of everyday life, taking the time to be observant and allowing my curiosity to ask questions and follow up to find the answers. For instance, the other day I was taking laundry off the clothes line and I set my basket down on the patio, when I noticed hundreds of tiny ants swarming the concrete where I swear 5 minutes ago there weren't any ants at all. I had an initial "EEK!" moment and quickly lifted my basket off the ground. But, I was curious more than grossed out. Where did they come from? Why were they there? And why were some of them larger and winged and the majority of them tiny and winged, or tiny and not winged? I did some research and learned that they were winged ants (not termites as I had feared), which are the fertile reproducing ants of a colony and without them there wouldn't even be an ant colony (which I'm sure is very important). They must have all literally just hatched out minutes ago and were on the move. The large ones were adults and the tiny ones with wings were baby winged ants which would grow up to reproduce. The wingless babies were just ants... or something like that. Anyway, I know that standing around watching ants isn't most people's idea of a good time, but I really appreciated the learning experience and the lesson of tolerance in the face of a real gross-out moment. Turns out ants are actually pretty cool. Who knew?

In the ornamental garden:

- If you don't have an automatic irrigation system set up in your garden, then by now you're probably pretty tired of hand watering. However, just because August brings a few cooler days and more foggy mornings, it's not time to give up on the watering quite yet. Keep going! And if it was difficult for you to keep up with it this season, maybe consider having an irrigation system installed next year.
- For me, August in the garden always conjures up the image of crispy dry lawns and tired bloomed out perennials that have begun to flop over in their rush towards a more restful time. After all, they've been working hard and going strong for months now! They deserve a nap! However, there are some amazing perennials that are just now coming in to their season, ready and willing to take over for their earlier blooming cousins. Look for Rudbeckia, Echinacea, Asters, Goldenrod, and Miscanthus. These late summer stars are at their best in August and September.
- Divide bearded Iris if your clumps are getting too large or didn't bloom very well last spring. Remember to replant the rhizomes shallowly or they will not flower.
- This bit of advice is going to sound crazy to those of you who still have both feet firmly planted in summer, but towards the end of this month the nursery will have begun to get in their bulbs for fall planting. That means bearded Iris, Crocus, Narcissus, Allium...so it's time to start thinking about next

spring! What?! Crazy! But smart gardeners know that timing is everything and planning ahead makes good garden sense.

- Remember tent caterpillars? Remember how frustrating and devastating they were? I had nearly forgotten about them until one day when I was taking a slow stroll around my garden and I noticed a fresh tent caterpillar egg case on a low branch of one of my apple trees. It was still soft to the touch, but I had a hard time peeling it off the branch and when I turned it over, there was row upon row of tiny eggs ready and waiting for another season of garden destruction. Be on the lookout for these egg cases throughout the rest of the season. They are silvery gray and resemble a small blob of foam adhered to a woody branch, especially but not exclusively on fruit trees. Pick them off and destroy them because they will inevitably hatch into tent caterpillars.

In the edible garden:

- If you're interested in keeping a winter garden, there's still time to sow seeds for many veggie crops. Try spinach, radicchio, cabbage, kale, and radishes. Sow peas, lettuce, and radishes for fall harvest. The sooner the better for peas.
- A late summer batch of Cabbage butterfly larvae is emerging about now, so be on the lookout and hand pick them when you see them. If you have a large area and a heavy infestation, Bt can be used as a last resort. The Cabbage butterfly is a pretty, creamy white moth with 1 to 4 black spots on its wings. It has an erratic flight pattern. The larvae are green (or sometimes purple if they're feeding on purple cabbage) and favor brassicas like kale, cabbage, broccoli, brussels sprouts....The larvae can quickly turn a lovely patch of cabbage into a holey mess, stunting growth and disfiguring your crop.
- Empty veggie beds are great candidates for cover crops. Sow buckwheat, bee bread (*Phacelia tanacetifolia*), or calendula and let it go. These plants grow quickly and smother weeds. They provide a nectar source for many beneficial insects and when finally turned under, will feed the soil for next year's crops.

During these dog days of summer I hope that you all have the chance to slow down a bit and make some fascinating garden observations of your own. There's always so much more going on than most people have time to pay attention to, whether in the garden or otherwise. As gardeners, we are lucky to have the perfect setting right in our backyards!