

In the Garden

By Rachel Anderson, Certified Professional Horticulturist

I recently received a gift in the form of Linda Chalker-Scott's latest book, *How Plants Work*. Yeah, I know most of us get the main concept there, but her new book is great because it goes into some very sciencey details as to the how's and why's of plants without being too dry and, well, sciencey. It's pretty cool stuff and it will certainly give you some insight when it comes to soil and watering. I mean really, how hard can watering be? Right? There are also plenty of gardening myth-busters in the book too, just in case the science part didn't give you enough of that "Eureka!" feeling.

In the ornamental garden:

- Keep up with the weeds! Eat them if you have to!
- Stake tall perennials like delphinium and foxglove.
- Now's the time to prune your rhododendrons and azaleas if you think they need it. Remember, if you prune them hard you may be sacrificing a season of flowers next year. Also, if you never got around to fertilizing them this spring, now is better than never.
- Keep up with the watering of new plantings. Even if we have rain, it's important to remember that there isn't a deep, well established root system for new plants to absorb water. They will quickly dry out if you forget about them, which will make them unhappy and you unhappy.
- Continue to put out slug bait; those rascals know when you're not paying attention!
- Dead head peonies, iris, and other spring bloomers.
- Remove the old foliage of tulips and daffodils. By now the bulbs have gotten as much sustenance via photosynthesis as they can. The leaves should pull easily with a gentle tug (no pruners required!). If not, and you find yourself pulling out the entire bulb, then it's not time yet!
- It's been an early season for roses, among other things, and you'll probably need to go through and dead head them already.
- Enjoy the beauty that you have created! June is a special time. The garden will change before you know it!

In the edible garden:

- Prune out the flower stalks on your rhubarb. No flowers if you want stalks to enjoy!
- Keep an eye out for ripe strawberries and get to them before the birds! There's nothing worse than going out to harvest your first berries that you've been monitoring the last week or so and then finding out the birds have gotten there first – or the slugs!
- Use slug bait!
- Thin the fruit on your fruit trees if you haven't done so already. Ideally the fruit shouldn't be larger than a walnut. Select the largest in a cluster and remove all the others. I know it's difficult to do. After all, that's food you're tossing! However, the

apple (or pear, or peach...) that remains will be larger and healthier and the branch from which it hangs will not be stressed by the extra weight. So, thin away!

- Hopefully it's warm enough outside to put out basil without fear of it melting into nothingness. Watch the night temperatures and use caution. This year is exceptional in many regards, so who knows? This may be the perfect year for basil in the PNW!
- Protect ripening berry crops (like blueberries and raspberries) with netting to keep the birds out. This works well to prevent deer browsing as well.
- Keep sowing beans, carrots, and beets for a continuous harvest. You can also continue to sow lettuce and spinach, ideally in an area that gets a bit of afternoon shade. The coolness will help to prevent premature bolting due to warm, dry conditions.
- Get those tomatoes in the ground if you haven't yet! When it comes to growing tomatoes in the Pacific Northwest, we need to take advantage of all the time we have available during the season. It helps if the tomato varieties chosen have a shorter maturity span – ideally in the 50-70 day range if you're growing them without the help of a green house.
- Snap off the flowers of hard neck garlic, known as scapes, before they get too tall and elongated. The scapes divert energy from going to the bulb and instead focus it on producing seeds. Don't toss them though! They're edible and very tasty-like garlic! Imagine! Add them to pesto, sauté them in olive oil and even make garlic scape pickles! Yummy!

One of my favorite parts of the book (so far- I'm not quite finished reading yet) is a side note about aphids. Apparently when a plant is under duress from an aphid onslaught and there isn't a gardener hovering to intercede, the plant will send out a chemical signal that says they're under attack. Predators hone in on it and come to the rescue! Not only that, but whatever scent the plant exudes will drift downwind to neighboring plants and their natural immune systems will be activated to help prevent attacks from similar pests! Amazing! This is something I have witnessed in my own garden, but I didn't have the science to back it up so I chalked it up as coincidence. Now I know! Plants are so fascinating and we gardeners are so lucky to have the opportunity to be up close and personal with them.