

The Garden in July

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In the words of Shel Silverstein:

It's hot!
I can't get cool,
I've drunk a quart of lemonade.
I think I'll take my shoes off
And sit around in the shade.

It's hot!
My back is sticky,
The sweat rolls down my chin.
I think I'll take my clothes off
And sit around in my skin.

It's hot!
I've tried with 'lectric fans,
And pools and ice cream cones.
I think I'll take my skin off
And sit around in my bones.

It's still hot!

I think of this silly poem every time the weather warms up and it's hard to get cool. You may think it has nothing to do with gardening, but is there ever a conversation with a gardener in which the weather doesn't come up?

In the ornamental garden:

- Since it's been a while since we had a good, hard, drenching rain, you'll probably be noticing signs of drought in the garden. To help your garden make it through this unusually dry summer, try watering early in the morning. This helps to minimize moisture loss due to evaporation, in addition to just being a lovely time to be in the garden. The addition of a compost mulch at least 3-5 inches thick, is good for helping to keep the soil moist and cool while also reducing weeds. Plus, it looks pretty too! Lastly, when making plant choices look for those plants that are drought tolerant. Remember, even though a plant label advertises drought tolerance, the plant will still need to be watered on a regular basis for the first season or so until it becomes established. Barberry is a good example of a tough plant that is a complete baby for the first season it's in the ground. If you're not paying attention the leaves will shrivel up and turn brown and it will sit there and pout until more favorable conditions come along. This is also a good reason to save any major planting until the fall, when rain is a more reliable source of water and new plants don't need constant vigilance.

- This is the time of year when leaf cutter bees are most active. You know they've visited your garden because you'll see perfect circles roughly the size of a dime (or smaller) cut out of the edges of some leaves. They overlap the leaf circles to make a smallish pellet, or cell, which is packed with pollen and nectar to feed the larva that will hatch from the egg they laid inside the pellet. Usually the pellets are buried in soft rotted wood or the thick pithy stems of some plants (sometimes roses). Leaf cutter bees are small, native, mostly solitary, non-stinging bees that are excellent garden pollinators. The damage they do to plants is minimal, so if you notice them, try to resist the urge to spray and instead celebrate their presence and the good work they do in your garden.

In the edible garden:

- Begin sowing your fall/winter veggie garden. Some of my favorite seed sources for fall and winter gardening are Territorial Seeds, Uprising Organics, and a recent find for me is Kitazawa Seed Company. Kitazawa is exclusively an Asian vegetable seed producer out of Oakland California and they have some pretty cool varieties of all kinds of things. Check them out!
- Keep new seed beds moist. Your carrots won't germinate if the soil is allowed to dry out.
- Remove any veggies that have bolted, or flowered. If you're tight on space this is a good way to create some extra room in the bed. If space allows, let the kale and other brassicas bloom because the yellow flowers are a great nectar source for garden pollinators.
- Stop watering garlic when you notice the tops beginning to turn yellow. Allow them to go dry and harvest when the tops fall over. Cure them with the tops on in a cool, well ventilated space that is out of direct sun.

I really hope the heat doesn't become too unbearable this month. Being a true Pacific North Westerner, I begin to feel overly hot when the temperatures reach a scorching 75 degrees. Anything warmer than that and I long wistfully for a shady spot with cool grass beneath my bare feet and an icy glass of lemonade in my hand. With the way this summer is going I fear that I will at some point be sitting around in my bones, unable to get cool and complaining miserably about the heat. May you all have a shady oasis to retreat to when the blazing Western Washington heat becomes too much!