

NORTH COAST YARD & GARDEN

HORTICULTURAL NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR THE OHIO GARDENER

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IN MY GARDEN

August marks the beginning of the traditional harvest season, as this was the month when grains were first collected. It is also the time when nature begins signaling that the year is in decline. The period of daylight is noticeably shorter, most plants have finished blooming, and singing insects outnumber singing birds.

August is the traditional month in my garden for tomatoes to begin ripening. I have tried all kinds of tricks to get earlier tomatoes, including purchasing extra large plants, warming the soil with plastic covers, setting up water-filled tents around the plants, and getting the earliest bearing varieties available. I have decided for now to accept that I will have to wait for August for tomatoes, and instead I will focus on other garden issues.

The Japanese beetle onslaught has diminished since the beginning of July, but there are still a lot of the critters out there. Hand-picking the beetles and dropping them in a jar of soapy water seems to be adequate now, although I am not ruling out another spraying or two of the grape vines. Japanese beetle problems should continue to decrease through this month, but it is possible that we will still have some chewing holes in leaves almost until frost.

A week of rainy weather has relieved some of the dryness in area gardens, but we are still considerably behind average in rainfall

for the year. Keep checking on newly planted trees, shrubs and perennials, and especially check the soil moisture a few inches below the surface.



One side effect of the drought is that many gardeners and homeowners are attributing other problems to drought damage. Lace bugs and spider mites have been feeding on plants, causing a characteristic brown stippled pattern that we call "bronzing". Unless the leaves are closely examined, the insects won't be visible and it is assumed that the plant just dried out. Lawns damaged by chinch bugs and bluegrass billbugs are also going untreated since the browning is ascribed to drought dormancy. Some folks may be surprised when their lawns do not recover in the fall.

As you visit your garden for squash, peaches, corn, peppers, cucumbers, and even tomatoes, take a close look at the other plants in the landscape. They may be trying to tell you something.

FEATURED INSECT

HUMMINGBIRD MOTH

One of the most interesting creatures in the garden at this time of year is the hummingbird moth. It is aptly named because they look very much like hummingbirds in size, shape, color, behavior and flight. Only when they hover to sip nectar from a flower can you tell that this is no bird. The most obvious characteristic and the one first noticed by most people discovering hummingbird moths is their large, prominent antennae, which, of course, hummingbirds lack. Once its insect identity is realized, some folks react with delight while some are completely terrified.

Hummingbird moths in the US include four species of clearwing moths, three of which are found in Ohio. Their appearance varies among individuals and locations, so distinguishing one from another can be difficult even for experts. The most likely to visit your garden is the common clearwing (*Hemaris thysbe*), which is also the largest hummingbird moth. Clearwing moths belong to the family of sphinx moths, but they are among the few that are active by day. Like other moths, they begin their lives as caterpillars.

Hummingbird moths can be found hovering at any of the plants attractive to butterflies or hummingbirds. Butterfly bush (*Buddleia*) is one of their favorites, but they will also visit honeysuckle, coralbells, lantana, trumpet vine, or caryopteris. The caterpillars are more particular about their food source, restricting their diet to leaves of honeysuckle, viburnum, hawthorn, snowberry, cherry and plum trees.

Hummingbird moths are fun to encourage in the garden because they are beautiful

and they are good pollinators. The caterpillars may do some superficial damage in the spring, but it is generally so slight that it goes unnoticed. They add another dimension to the variety of life and activity that energize the garden.



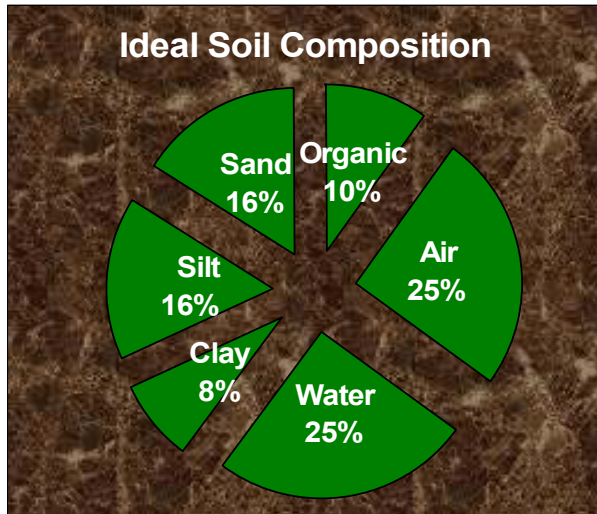
TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

SOIL MANAGEMENT

It doesn't take long for gardeners to discover that the quality of the soil is the most important factor for the success of their garden. Superb soil makes almost every gardening task easier and produces results that make the neighbors suspect some sort of witchcraft is afoot. Poor soils make even the easiest plants difficult to grow. The first step to successful gardening is to know your soil and to do everything you can to improve it.

Good soil is a mixture of air, water, mineral solids and organic solids. The basic composition of soil is its mineral content. This is classified by the size of the particles in the soil. Large particles over 0.05 mm in diameter are called sand. Intermediate particles are categorized as silt, and particles less than 0.002 mm are called clay. The ideal mineral ratio is about twenty percent clay, forty percent silt and forty percent sand. The rest of the solid soil is made up of organic material, consisting of

decomposed plant and animal matter. Ideally, air and water should make of about half the volume of soil. Collectively, this ideal mixture is referred to as loam.



Unfortunately most gardeners deal with soil that is far from ideal. Sandy soil (more than 35% sand) drains very well, but does not hold water or nutrients for very long. Sandy soils have a higher percentage of air, causing them to warm and cool quickly with air temperature. Roots penetrate sandy soil easily, and get plenty of air, but may be unable to reach enough water and nutrients.

Clay soil (more than 30% clay) holds water and nutrients very well, but drains poorly. There is little air in clay soil, making it difficult for water to move in or out of the soil. It is slow to warm in spring and slow to cool in autumn. Clay soil tends to be sticky and heavy in the spring, but dry, crusty and hard once it dries in the summer. Roots have difficulty growing in clay, and do not penetrate far from the surface before there is insufficient air to keep the roots alive. Water and nutrients in clay soil may be too deep for roots to reach them, or bound so tightly to the clay that the plant is not able to use them.

Northeast Ohio soils are between 25% and 55% clay, with clay content lowest near a line running from Youngstown to Columbus. The zone along Lake Erie and the Cuyahoga and Grand Rivers is highest in clay.

The best way to improve clay or sandy soil is by adding additional organic material in the form of humus, or composted once-living materials. Organic matter helps sandy soils hold moisture and nutrients, and creates air space for better drainage in clay soils. The humus supports microbes and invertebrates in the soil, which convert the organic matter into nutrients that can be absorbed by plants. When soil has sufficient moisture and air space, it can support beneficial organisms that compete with disease-causing organisms and cycle oxygen and nutrients near plant roots.

This material is used up in the process of continued decomposition and feeding plants and soil life, and must be continually replaced. Good quality soil will benefit from one inch of compost applied over the top each year. Dig or till larger amounts of material into empty beds of poor soil before planting, and another inch of humus over the top each year thereafter. When starting a new bed, aim for a ratio of one part organic material to two parts native soil.

Materials tilled into the soil need not be finished compost. A wide variety of substances can be used to compost in place in the bed's soil. Chopped leaves are excellent as a soil amendment, as is sedge peat ("Michigan" peat), manure or straw. Acidify soils by tilling in sphagnum peat moss, or to a lesser extent, pine bark, pine needles or oak leaves. Some gardeners grow a cover crop of rye, alfalfa, vetch or clover just to till into the soil in early spring. Avoid lots of fresh, unrotted plant material as this material will actually draw nutrients

away from plants as microbes colonize and digest it. Plants in the vicinity will grow poorly if at all until the fresh material has been thoroughly decomposed and the microbes die and return the nutrients in their bodies to the soil.

Good soil is the foundation of every garden, and it requires regular care. Keep the soil alive with regular doses of organic mulches and compost, and it will help you make gardening look easy.

TURF TALK

It will soon be time to renovate lawns damaged by summer drought and insects. This is a good time to inventory your lawn for any other problems you would like to correct. The first thing to look for is undesirable perennial grasses, including creeping bentgrass, wild tall fescue, and nutsedge. These grasses should be killed with glyphosate (Roundup) now so that the area can be reseeded next month. Eliminate broadleaf weeds with a liquid lawn weed killer. There are some excellent products out containing quinclorac that will kill crabgrass as well as broadleaf weeds.

If you haven't applied preventative grub control this summer, you need to get it on the lawn by the middle of this month. These products use imidacloprid, which is a very low toxicity insecticide. If you wait too long, grubs will be too large for imidacloprid, and you will have to use a rescue treatment containing Dylox, a much

stronger chemical. The abundance of Japanese beetles this summer suggests that lawn grubs will be bad this fall.

GARDEN CALENDAR

- Plant seeds outdoors for a late crop of chervil, cilantro, collards, cucumber, parsley and okra.
- Transplant flowering cabbage, flowering kale, broccoli, cabbage and collards outdoors.
- Harvest sweet corn when the silks turn brown and are not too dry.
- Save seeds from heirloom vegetables.
- Donate extra vegetables to a local food bank.
- Prune summer-flowering shrubs after they finish blooming.
- Remove seed pods from rose of sharon to prevent seedlings.
- Give roses their last dose of fertilizer by mid-month.
- Trim hedges as needed.
- Continue deadheading flowers to encourage repeat blooms and prevent seed production.
- Daylilies may be moved and divided once they finish blooming.
- Plant mums for fall color.
- Switch to a different type of deer or rabbit repellent when you run out. This prevents the critters from getting used to one kind.
- Spend some time relaxing and enjoying your garden - its not all work!



ROGER S. BOLGER HAS OVER TEN YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL HORTICULTURAL EXPERIENCE AND HAS GARDENED ALL HIS LIFE IN NORTHEAST OHIO. HE HAS GIVEN DOZENS OF GARDENING TALKS AND SPECIALIZES IN WOODY PLANTS, PERENNIALS, TURF, ENTOMOLOGY, INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT, ORGANIC GARDENING, PONDS AND BACKYARD WILDLIFE.

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