

August in the Garden



August is always a relaxing time in my garden. As a family, we often spent time away from Palo Alto during that last vacation time before school started. So I have trained the garden to be on its own in August. I trust the sprinklers to sprinkle, the Blow and Go Gardener to do some dead heading and lawn cutting, a neighbor to keep the supply of tomatoes thinned, and the roses to keep smiling. This year is different due to our Sheltering in Place Decree, but the heat is on the flowers to behave, and the heat is off me as an amateur gardener. The hard work of nurturing seedlings into fully producing vegetables is over by August. The tomatoes are contributing daily to breakfasts, lunches and dinners. Squashes are part of breakfast and dinner. Lettuce and cucumbers are prolific and look happy. **Our dinner table is blessed with a vase full of flowers.**

In the rest of the garden, my roses are getting ready to shine again, or they have sent up a few roses per bush per week as the first showy group faded from sight. In August, I follow a change in Ray Redell's Rose Feeding Schedule. At the beginning of August, I feed roses a granular, water soluble, balanced fertilizer, usually 10-10-10, using a garden sprayer connected to a hose. Then the third week I feed fish emulsion, one tablespoon per gallon, again using the garden sprayer, only around the drip line of each rose bush. Their buddies, the Clematis, are sending a second wave of flowers. They make a great combination, using climbing roses to reach for the sky. Close to the roses, in the sun, my dahlias are competing for attention. I planted some new dahlias in front to keep the roses happy, and I think it's also a great combination. I think they benefit from my exuberant rose feeding, because they look awesome for their first year in town.

The front walk and shaded parking strip both have dwarf Agapanthus that I usually thin and replant every four years, mainly because they act like wanna be full sized plants. They seem to be competing with the full sized parking strip agapanthus next door. The sunny parking strip has come alive as a nectar garden. It's about the fourth year of Salvia, Coreopsis, Echinacea, Buckwheat, and Lantana, all dwarf varieties, and Narrow leaf Milkweed that is taking over. I am hoping to see a few Monarch caterpillars, as I do every year.

The south front garden area had a bout of oak tree fungus 3 years ago. The Meyer lemon and all three Azaleas died. Now it is thriving again with new Meyer lemon bushes, reblooming Azaleas, two new roses and a front row seat for dwarf Salvia.

The backbone of my garden is the collection of camellias scattered throughout the property, mainly because their blooms are lovely, and then the rest of the year they are a

glossy dark leafed backdrop to the rest of the flowers.

Against the chimney in a pot in the back yard is a delightful pink Mandevilla vine. I really planted it to get to know it as a shade climber for other areas. Well six months ago, a friend who was downsizing dropped off a potted red Mandevilla. I think it was love at first sight! The red Mandevilla sitting in a pot near the chimney started racing up the bricks, keeping up with the cute pink version. So I carefully lifted Mr. Redhead out of its pot and put it in the same rectangular pot with Ms. Pinkie. They are now up as high as our second story window!



In the back yard in front of our guest cottage I planted another nectar garden several years ago to attract humming birds, butterflies, and bees. The area is now overgrown with overachieving Salvia, Alstroemeria, and Buddleia. They overtook the Narrow leaf Milkweed that I planted to attract Monarch butterflies, who only lay eggs on Milkweed. The most frequent customers to the area that I can observe are hummingbirds.

When I planted similar plants in the sunny part of the parking strip, I found dwarf versions of all those nectar flowers, so they act more civilized, and every October I find a Monarch egg or two that I then raise until they burst out as butterflies.

A landscape designer friend suggested a few years ago that I put in a strip of border flowers at the edge of the front lawn. I am still working on figuring out the right combinations of flowers for different seasons. Right now, the summer version consists of Sweet Alyssum (of course), Primroses, Gerbera, dwarf Marigold, Pansies, dwarf Echinacea. I really like the effect, but they seem to be more trouble than roses. However, it could be that the border flowers are closer to the ground, requiring more bending, kneeling, fluffing, dead heading and watering.



The only real pests in the garden are still at it. Crows used to sit on the roof, watching the back garden. When we went inside, they would swoop down, pick at apples, roses, and other precious commodities. Three weeks ago, I was at the Birders' Garden in San Carlos, and, on a lark, I bought a well stuffed crow. When I came home, I hung him upside down from a tree branch visible from the roof. When I left the garden to make dinner, one by one the crows did a drive-by, seeming to pay their last respects to a dead relative. I have not seen a crow since!

I had gone to the Birders' Garden looking for Capsaicin, which I heard was a deterrent to squirrels. I followed the instructions, first mixing cooking oil with the bird seed to help the powder stick to the seed, then mixing the Capsaicin with the seeds. I read that I must use gloves to keep the Capsaicin off my skin, and I also wore a mask. Capsaicin is an active component of chili peppers, creating the spicy hot ingredient. It is considered a chemical irritant for mammals, including humans, and produces a sensation of burning in any tissue with which it comes into contact. **A little-known fact is that birds have no taste buds!** No wonder they eat worms!

Squirrels have stayed away from my bird feeder for a week now. I haven't tried it on the tomato plants. **My squirrels don't eat green tomatoes.** I know they are waiting for them to ripen. Can it be washed off if I eventually spray capsaicin on my tomatoes? Stay tuned. I will let you know in September. If the squirrels all sat down and had a polite meal of tomatoes, I would grudgingly allow them to dine. However, they take little bites out of tomatoes and discard the rest. According to the National Pesticide Information Center, this irritant repels rather than harms. Good to know! I wouldn't want to harm those adorable little squirrels! (not) If you have read my column a few times, you probably know that I threw in the towel on my three lovely dwarf fruit trees due to squirrels. I averaged about one piece of fruit per tree for about six years despite all kinds of deterrents!

Well, happy harvesting! Enjoy whatever size yard or patio you have. Get a rectangular pot and enjoy some home-grown lettuce. My lettuce plants are in window boxes all year outside our kitchen and I rarely need to buy lettuce.

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