

Gardening Calendar for July

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Late July is the best time to plant fall tomatoes, that means we should harvest all the fruit and pull the spring planted tomatoes by early in the month. It is tough for some gardeners to yank the old plants before they have completely finished their production, even though there is more chance to produce spider mites and fungal diseases than tomatoes on the old plants.

Examine the old tomato plants for nematodes. If the garden area is infested, you can reduce the numbers by planting cereal rye for the winter. Cereal rye traps the nematodes in its roots and serves as a green manure. Cut off the top of the plants with your string mower and then till up the roots before it is time for the spring planting.

Cut the nematode infected root system off the tomato plant before you put the top in the compost pile. Put the infected roots in a garbage sack and dispose of them in the garbage. Don't dispose of them in the green recycling container because they might end up infecting another gardeners bed if they use partially composted material from the Solid Waste composting operation.

Another strategy to deal with nematodes is to use nematode resistant tomato varieties such as Tycoon, Valley Cat, Celebrity or BHN 968. Other good selections for fall planting include Surefire, 444, HM 8849, HM 1823, and Roma Surprise.

Pepper and okra production should continue strong in the garden. If fire ants move in to harvest aphids and okra buds, apply one of the insecticides with Spinosad labeled for fire ant control in the vegetable garden.

Zinnias can still be planted as transplants or seeds in the cut flower garden. You can also let the early planted plants go to seed. Dead head most spent blooms to maximize flower production but the seed eating birds will appreciate allowing some to drop their seed. My favorite varieties for cut flowers and nectar production are reseeded Dreamhill plants, California Giants and Cactus.

Other outstanding nectar producers are mist flower, Porter weed, tropical milkweed, lantanas, salvias, duranta, Mexican flame vine and mint marigold. All of them can still be planted in time for the fall flush of butterflies including the Monarchs.

The hummingbirds will visit your nectar producing plants and you can bring them into your patio for closer observation by including some sugar water feeders on the patio. Make the mix 4 parts water and one-part sugar by volume. For hummingbirds and other birds provide a birdbath rinsed and refilled every day.

The increase in butterflies that occurs in July coincides with the conclusion of purple martin nesting activities and their assembly to head south to the Amazon for the winter. As soon as it is clear that they are on the move, lower your martin houses to end the use of the houses by English sparrows.

The key to summer lawn performance is the availability of water. For a weekly watering recommendation based on evapotranspiration data, sign up for the SAWS newsletter. The SAWS irrigation recommendations are frugal but enough to keep the grass in good shape. Visit the SAWS website to receive the weekly email.