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Maximizing Your Garden's Success for the Rest of 2015

During this midsummer nights' dream of gardening, let us pause and reflect on our successes of the first half and hopes for the second half of the season. Here are some tips for keeping your garden and landscape fine tuned and in good working order for the rest of the year.

Fertilize appropriately

As plants mature and go through their annual cycle, fertilizer needs will change. While early in the year plants need a little more nitrogen, later on they need a more balanced fertilizer that contains a relatively equal amount of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium (the three numbers on a fertilizer container). If you have not done so recently, apply such a fertilizer to your annual and perennial herbaceous (non-woody) plants now. Do not fertilize woody plants for the rest of the year.

Irrigate Efficiently

It is reasonable to say the only plants that need to be sprinkler irrigated is the lawn. Save water—and the weeds it awakens—by using drip irrigation and soaker hoses where possible. These watering systems are inexpensive and easy to install and save time and money. Know how much water your plants need and supply it at appropriate intervals. Most plants at this time of year need to be watered to a foot deep. The frequency of irrigation depends on the type of plant and whether mulching is practiced. A tomato plant in a sunny spot in an unmulched garden will need to be watered more frequently than a shrub in a shady mulched area of your landscape.

Mulch for multiple benefits

Applying mulch hinders evaporation of moisture from the soil. It can also prevent soil erosion and compaction. It blocks light to suppress weed growth, and can keep the soil cool in the heat of

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the day or hold warmth in on a cool night. Organic materials used as mulch encourage earthworms that aerate and improve soil drainage, and also make an inviting home for helpful microbes that stimulate plant growth.

Pollination problems

Sometimes garden plants will fail to set fruit, especially vine crops such as squash, pumpkin and cucumber, which have male and female flowers who need to find each other to form fruit. During especially hot summers such as we're experiencing, high temperatures can hinder pollination. In this case, sit tight and blame the weatherman until he can deliver some decent cooler weather and pollination will return to your garden.

Diseases, Insects and Senescence

Be vigilant for pest damage: nip it early while you can still treat pests easily. Many older leaves of vegetable plants will wither and become diseased; simply pinch them off and dispose of them. Use mulches or pruning to keep leaves from touching bare ground to prevent leaf diseases. You may find that certain crops have become pest ridden. You should remove them entirely before they cause problems in other parts of your garden. Remember, in gardening it is okay to have setbacks, they are just opportunities to learn.

Mike Bauer is the Horticulturist for Moose Valley Farms, a full-service garden center located in Naples at mile marker 495. Please feel free to call us at 267-5108 or stop in if you have any questions.