

## Let's Talk Gardening

July 16, 2004

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The Country Gardener

### Fall Tomatoes—Not Far Off

As you probably can tell, I was off last week...spent the night and next day in the ER getting my heart fixed up a little. Clay, the new editor, covered for me. Thanks, Clay.

I don't know about your spring tomato crop this year, but mine wasn't all that great...way too much moisture for too long. If the tops of your tomatoes were cracked or split, the excess moisture was the culprit. Not much you can do about that. Raised beds help, but they can only do so much.

Speaking of moisture, I sure hope you have your sprinkler system turned off. You really don't need it now because of all the moisture in the soil. It's down there—trust me. If you'll turn your sprinkler system off, you'll actually be encouraging your grass and other plants to put their roots down deeper—thus, able to live longer when the water dries up (if/when it does.)

It's time to start thinking about your fall veggie garden and the fall flowers you might want. In the veggie garden, pull out the old tomato plants any day now. They might produce a fall crop, but they're pretty well spent by now and should be put to rest in the compost pile. New plants will be more vigorous and will produce many more "love apples" for you (they used to be called that back many, many years ago.) Dr. Jerry Parsons says that he thinks that the variety "Heatwave" will be on the market again this fall. It will set fruit in the hot summer/fall season. Personally, I like Merceds, too. With the right fertilizer regimen, they produce very large tomatoes that are oh, so tasty. Add 2-3 inches of compost to each veggie bed and put in one cup of 19-5-9 slow-release lawn fertilizer (or two cups of 9-1-1 organic fertilizer) per 50 square feet. Get your transplants at the nursery and pot them up now to be ready to put in the ground about July 25. Even at that date, you're gonna lose a lot of them to the first frost in November. But that's why they invented fried green tomatoes. Right?????

It's also time to plant eggplant and peppers for the fall garden. The rest of the veggies can wait for a while. I'll let you know when it's time to plant the others...or you can write me at [gardener@gvtc.com](mailto:gardener@gvtc.com) and I'll send you the whole list of when to plant what.

Dr. Calvin Finch, in his column last Saturday, reminded us that late July is also the time to prune back the roses and fertilize them to get them ready for their fall blush of flowers. You can cut them back to about 36 inches above the ground if you want to keep them neat and tidy. Cut out any old canes that are either dead or dying and cut out any inward-facing branches. This will help open up the plant to sunlight inside the foliage and will help make the flowers more beautiful. If you have hybrid tea roses, be sure to keep up your spraying program every week with either a fungicide or pesticide...organic or chemical.

It's also time to cut back the blackberry bushes. Be sure to wear long sleeves and gloves 'cause those dang thorns will reach out and grab ya if you don't. Remove the older canes that had berries on them this year to make room for the new shoots which should be coming up any time. The new ones will have the bright green leaves whereas the older canes will have dead or dying, withered leaves. We had a bumper crop of blackberries this year. In fact, I'm still picking a few every couple of days. Looking forward to a banner year next year.

By the way, my Satsuma orange tree and the Rio Red grapefruit tree are LOADED this year. Branches are drooping under the weight. In fact, I think I'm gonna have to thin the fruit out a little before the branches break. Hate to do that, but it's gotta be done.

Dr. Finch also pointed out that late July is the time to plant marigolds—called marimums in some nurseries. When you buy them, don't buy ones that are blooming...you want the short, bushy ones that haven't bloomed yet. They'll get their roots down before they bloom in the fall.

Send your comments and/or questions to [gardener@gvtc.com](mailto:gardener@gvtc.com).