

THE GARDENER'S YEAR

SUMMER

Because there are some things we all know, and so often forget to do anything about, it occurred to the editors that a kind of seasonal column of recollection, an informal proposed agenda, might be of some interest to gardener readers.

One thing to keep in mind in Summer is mulching. A dust mulch, from frequent cultivation, not only helps to hold moisture in this frequently dry part of the year, but it is the best way we know to discourage flea beetles, those little black pests that eat holes in the leaves. And it may even help to keep your week-end guests happy. We remember the lady guest who helped every day in a newly ploughed field in a very rocky part of the country, carrying off from the ground a certain quota of rocks that she had set as her daily stint. After a few days she complained to the housekeeper, in a horrified way that "My bedroom is full of fleas." By luck the gardeners heard of the trouble, and a little investigation showed that each afternoon, when she got tired of carrying rocks, the lady would sun herself on the bare, baked ground near the rock pile. The little flea beetles climbed aboard, and later disembarked in the lady's chamber.

And use as much ground cover as possible. You not only hold moisture, but preserve the soil. If you have something like mignonette lettuce started in flats (this is a variety that will do rather well all Summer long), fill in the gaps where, for instance, your rows of early peas have been pulled out and composted.

Where the length of season permits it, arrange for sowing your fall crop of peas and beans, to have them nicely started with the September rains.

We spoke before of composting. Keep a frequent check on your biodynamically treated piles of animal manures and of plant-refuse composts, this time of year. They *ought to* be kept weeded, though we know well how often, under pressure of other things, that is a job that is put off and off. Those weeds, sucking moisture, dry out your pile. They don't protect it. If you don't have enough natural or artificial shade for the piles, try planting squash or cucumbers next to (not on) the piles, and training the vines over them. And by all means open each pile up frequently and make sure it has the moisture of a *wrung-out sponge*, that it is definitely wet although you'd have trouble squeezing more water out of it. If it is drier than that, it will repay you for your effort to water the pile. Best and easiest is if the piles are within reach of a garden hose. Then just take a tool handle—or crowbar if necessary—and poke a hole into which the nozzle goes. Leave it there, and running, until you have water overflowing out of the pile. Poke a new hole a little further along, and repeat. Attention to the moisture content of your piles is an essential if you want to get value out of your B.D. preparations. After all, they are full of organic elements* that need proper environmental conditions in order to do their best work.

*See, "The Bio-Dynamic Method, What it is and What it is not," by Dr. E. Pfeiffer, in *Bio-Dynamics*, Vol. VI, No. 4, Summer 1948. That article, in any case, is something you owe it to yourself to read and study if you haven't already. It gives laboratory proof of why the preparations are of value.

If you haven't done it yet this season, you are earnestly advised to get yourself a large square of stiff white paper and a few work sheets, also an indelible pencil. Take the smaller sheets, a tape measure and a partner out to the garden. Get its dimensions accurately onto the paper, and then lay out the exact locations of the various rows or beds, including pre- and after-crops where these are used. Then next Winter, when you are planning your 1950 garden, you will *really* know where the sweet corn was, the members of the cabbage family, the peas and beans on the other side of the soil ledger, and every plant in between. Only in this way will you be able to plan a healthy, soil-conserving crop succession year after year. We have seen relatively good ground, under continuing bio-dynamic treatment, go downhill fast because the gardener who took it over needed a lot of corn for the table and planted it several years in succession in the same place. This is a waste of effort. Proper use of the B.D. Preparations is an essential aspect of the Bio-Dynamic Method, but attention to such things as crop succession planning is of equal importance.

Speaking of the preparations—have you really given the spray No. 501 a fair test in your garden? See the article mentioned in the footnote, for scientific reasons why it might be worthwhile, but actual use will convince you more quickly than any laboratory tests. The results show in the deeper green of the plants, their increased resistance to the effects of both very wet and very dry periods, and in the flavor of the produce. Since this issue of "Bio-Dynamics" is a little later than it should be, you may not be able to do anything about the matter this season—though we have found that even late spraying, provided the blossoming of the plants is over (before blossoming is preferable in most instances) still showed good results. But they won't be as striking as the results of spraying No. 501 according to directions. By the way, tomatoes can take it even in blossom, and we have had excellent results spraying it in the orchard after the fruits had developed and were just beginning to grow. One caution: it should not be used where preparation No. 500 has not been used on the ground (for root development) the same season. If you do, your plants are likely to get too viney and suffer in other ways from an unbalanced development.

Lawns, in the hot, dry time are another subject worth Summer mention. If you want to keep them nice and green, do mow them as little as possible during the dog days. Of course you will go over them before they get too tall for the mower, but wait as long as you can if you want to avoid that parched look. And when you cut, set the mower blades as high as they can go. We have had estate owners object that the beautiful English lawns are kept close-clipped, but then, because they were honest, and had jogged their own memories, they added before we could "But the English climate is much wetter than ours, isn't it?" That of course, is the point. And where the lawn is not so big that the extra work and handling makes the additional labor costs too high for many, we advise raking up and composting the lawn clippings rather than leaving them on the ground to increase the lawn's natural tendency to too much acidity. They must, of course, be composted

in a mixture with coarser, heavier material, or if alone, in very thin layers, lightly limed and covered with thin layers of soil (no subsoil in any composts). This means about an inch and a half at most, after treading down. Thicker layers will putrefy, and your nose will tell you why such composting isn't wise. If you find you have to sprinkle your lawn, do it early or late or on really cloudy days. It will burn otherwise. It seems silly to have to mention this practice, but it is surprising to see how many people spoil their lawns that way. And sprinkle for as long a time, each time, as your home water system, or your water meter bill, can stand the strain. Somewhere, not available at the moment, there are figures that show how much artificial sprinkling is necessary to equal the soil-penetrating effect of a relatively short period of good rain.

The above soliloquy on watering the lawn applies with full force to the garden proper. The best, we think, is to avoid watering altogether except in extreme conditions—or, of course, if you are blessed with a system of built-in perforated pipes or nozzles. Living in a region of woodland with swamps and ponds, and consequently of a rather satisfactory dewfall, we personally have found that even in quite dry times we have on the whole gotten along better in our garden than did our friends who tended to start watering if it hadn't rained for even a week. And there certainly is no denying that biologically lively soils, protected by mulching and a good ground cover of plants, have a wonderful resistance to drought. They just do stay wet, very close to the surface. And equally important: plants whose soil gets frequent surface sprinklings send their rootlets right up to where the new moisture is, and then if you stop sprinkling, look out!

On that cheerful note we will close for the moment, realizing fully that there is lots more that could be said regarding Summer in the Gardener's Year.

THE EDITORS.

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