

JUNE GARDEN MELANGE

Giant Pumpkins

Little did I know! Pumpkin growing is a highly competitive sport. Last year, a record-breaking 1,810.5 pound pumpkin was grown in Canada. Although most such prize-winners are backyard-grown, you may not aspire to reach such incredible heights. Follow these tips and you may still astound your neighbors.

You'll need an 8-foot by 8-foot garden plot in full sun, 4-6 bushels of well rotted manure or compost, 1-quart 5-10-5 granular fertilizer, and 4 plump pumpkin seeds. First, till the plot deeply, mixing the manure and fertilizer in well. Bury the four seeds an inch deep in the center of your pumpkin patch around June 10th. Use a mulch of straw or black plastic to keep weeds down and maintain moisture. When seeds sprout, remove all but the most vigorous one. Make sure it is protected from the wind by creating a temporary fence as a wind screen if necessary.

The yellow male flowers will sprout about 5 weeks after seedlings first emerge. Female flowers, with a small globe on their underside, will appear two weeks later. Allow bees to pollinate or self-fertilize by cutting a newly opened male flower and bringing it to a female flower. Gently swab the female stigma (internal parts) with the pollen-laden stamen of the male flower.

As the plant grows, re-position vines so the stems are perpendicular to the vines, doing it gradually so as not to damage fragile stems. By July, choose the best pumpkin of the lot and remove most of the rest.

Prune vines back once they reach 10 to 12 feet beyond a fruit. Side shoots should be no longer than 8 feet. Provide lots of water--pumpkins (about 90% water) are very thirsty plants. When the fruits begin to grow, apply a water-soluble fertilizer at the rate of one to two pounds per week per plant from fruit-set to the end of the growing season. Make sure you protect your pride and joy from marauding animals and reckless neighbors.



Prune Spring-blooming Shrubs Now

I've always been reluctant to prune spring flowering shrubs. In my laissez-faire garden, it seems like tinkering with nature. But just as we do, shrubs need good grooming. Now is the time to do it--after the flowers are gone. If you wait too long, you will minimize next year's blooming.

Spring-blooming shrubs bloom on the previous season's wood. A short list would include deutzia, forsythia, kerria, kolwitzia, Philadelphus (mock orange), spiraea arguta (bridal wreath) and wiegela. For rhododendron, azaleas, mountain laurel and andromeda, clip back the terminals of vigorous new shoots as well as spent flowers to keep the plants compact and encourage new production of side shoots and buds.

Lilacs are a special case. New lilac bushes don't require maintenance pruning until they are about 6 - 8' tall. Then the pruning rule of thumb is to cut no more than 1/3 of a shrub's stems each year. That will keep the plant rejuvenated. Your goal is to have a lilac bush with somewhere between 8-12 stems of various ages, but all between 1-2" in diameter. You won't always need to remove 1/3 of the plant, so use some discretion.



Perennials That Prefer It Dry

Although this looks to be a very wet summer, it's a good idea to be aware of drought-tolerant perennials. They are perfectly happy in dry conditions, and ecologically sound when it comes to preserving water. Among the species recommended by the Cooperative Extension are **yarrow** (*achillea*), **pasque flower** (*anemone pulsatilla*), **golden marguerite** (*anthemis tinctoria*), **butterfly weed** (*asclepias tuberosa*), **threadleaf coreopsis** (*coreopsis verticillata*), **purple coneflower** (*echinacea purpurea*), **sea holly** (*eryngium*), **euphorbia**, **blanket flower** (*galliarda*), **baby's breath** (*gypsophila paniculata*), **gay feather** (*liatris spicata*), **perennial flax** (*Linum perenne*), **mauve catmint** (*nepeta mussinii*), **Missouri sundrops** (*oenothera missouriensis*), **Russian sage** (*perovskia atriplicifoliae*), **orange coneflower** (*rudbeckia fulgida*), **stone crops** (*sedum*), **lamb's ear** (*stachy byzantina*), and **Adam's needle** (*yucca*).



To Do In Mid-June

Remove old flowers, not foliage, from spring-flowering bulbs

Prune spring blooming shrubs

Remove old flowers from perennials that have finished blooming

Propagate shrubs from soft wood cuttings

Remove faded flowers of rhododendrons

Sow seeds of a few fast-growing annuals for late bloom

Sow cabbage and cauliflower seeds for a fall crop

Fertilize trees and shrubs in late June