

‘Good Growing with the Garden Gal’ Program #4 July 2017

WEEDS AND INSECTS MANAGEMENT/FOOD SAFETY/CUCUMBERS

TO DO THIS MONTH – WEEDS/INSECTS MANAGEMENT

MANAGING WEEDS

- Why? They compete for sunlight, water, and nutrients – often better than our crop plants!
- “A stitch in time saves nine” is really true when it comes to weeding. Weed at least once every ten days.
- Small weeds can very easily and quickly be sliced off by hoes with thin blades. They are often called co-linear hoes. When using them, it’s like “shaving” the soil, and the hoe is held in the same way that you would hold a broom.
- A thick layer of mulch such as grass clippings, straw, or spoiled hay not only decreases weeds, but it helps retain moisture and increase organic matter

MANAGING INSECTS

- The key is to know what insects to watch out for, and what the vulnerable point in their life cycle is.
- To identify, try using the “image” section of search engine, type in your crop name plus “insect pest” and look for your pest
- Once you know your pest you can come up with strategies that are both effective and limit exposure to toxins.
- For example – if you have squash bugs, the adults are very difficult to kill, but the eggs are not. The eggs can be easily seen on the underside of leaves and removed with duct tape
- Another strategy is to provide a barrier. For example is cucumber beetle – floating row covers can keep this pest away from your plants and prevent them from spreading bacterial wilt.
- Another strategy is to create an environment that attracts the insect’s predators. For example – heavy duty trellising can provide a perch for birds which can take care of your tomato hornworm problem for you.
- Another strategy is to make the environment inhospitable for pests. To control slugs in lettuce, don’t use mulch, and give plants wide spacings. Slugs like shade, and these conditions don’t attract them.

IN THE KNOW – FOOD SAFETY FOR GARDENERS

USING COMPOST AND MANURE

Compost

- When using compost with any animal products in it, it must be held at a minimum of 130 degrees for 15 days. This is done by building a pile with a 21:1 Carbon to Nitrogen ratio, and turning the pile whenever the temperature falls to near 130 degrees.
- This is often not do-able for the home gardener. Best to follow the safety standards for manure when using home-made compost
- If purchasing compost, talk to the person who made it and find out if these safety guidelines were followed.

Manure

- Incorporate manure into the soil two weeks before planting, and no sooner than four months before harvest

WASHING PRODUCE

- Wash water should be no more than 10 degrees colder than the produce! This is because at greater temperature differences, micro-organisms can enter the stem or blossom end of the produce.
- Use plain running water. Soap or specialty products aren't needed.

PESTICIDES (organic and chemical)

- Even organic pesticides need to be handled with care
- Pre-Harvest Interval – time for the pesticide to break down before a crop is harvested
- Re-Entry time – time before you can re-enter the area after spraying
- The label on the pesticide will tell you both of these time periods

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***CROP OF THE MONTH* - CUCUMBERS**

TYPES OF CUCUMBERS

Use

- Pickling (short and blocky, usually have spines, drier flesh)
- Slicing cucumbers (thin skin)
- Specialty (long Asians, lemon, gherkins, etc.)

Pollination

- Cucumbers, like all of the plants in the cucurbit family, naturally have both male and female flowers.
- All of our heirloom varieties are **monoecious**, meaning that they have both male and female flowers
- Breeding programs have developed **gynoecious** varieties, meaning that they have primarily female flowers. This matters because it can increase yields, because only female flowers produce fruit. Female flowers have a tiny start of a cucumber at the base of the flower.
- **Parthenocarpic** varieties are also relatively new. They don't require pollination, and they are seedless. Good for growing in a greenhouse.

HOW TO GROW CUCUMBERS

- Lots of organic matter
- Lots of water
- Protection from cucumber beetles
- Can trellis them for easy picking and to save space