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Getting Started in Ornamental Gardening, Part II

By Sara Elizabeth | August 2015 - Vol. 1 No. 8

by Cathy Caldwell

Yes, there's more for the amateur ornamental gardener to know! If you somehow missed reading Part I or you wish to review the initial steps, go back to the July issue.

So you've selected a site, you've prepared the soil and you've carefully chosen some plants. But as I mentioned last month, you can't just plop them in the bed. And please don't do it at all until the weather starts to cool a bit, probably September. Aim to get your new plants established before freezing temperatures start. On average, the first frost in our area occurs between October 10 and October 29, depending upon your elevation. Va.Planting Guide

Finally, there you are with your new plants on a planting-friendly overcast day in early September. First, while the plants are still in their containers, arrange them on the surface of the bed. Perhaps you've drawn a plan or maybe you're playing it by ear. In any event, be sure you read the height and spread (width)

information on each label to make sure each plant has enough space for growth — and also so that taller plants are behind shorter ones.

You'll want shrubs as background for your flowering perennials (perennials are the plants that "come back" year after year, unlike annuals), Those beautiful flowers and foliage show up better against a leafy green background. You'll probably re-arrange and step back to inspect more than once.

For lots more about shrubs — how to use them in your designs and how to plant and care for them — take a gander at Shrubs: Functions, Planting and Maintenance, Va.Coop.Ext. If you're planting azaleas or rhododendrons, you'll want to follow the instructions that meet their very specific needs. Growing Azaleas and Rhododendrons, Va.Coop. Ext.

Once you've got your plants arranged to your eye's satisfaction, it's time to plant those babies! The steps are listed below.

1. Water each plant thoroughly before removing it from the container. If it's dry, set it in a bucket of water while you're digging the hole.

2. Dig a hole that is twice as wide as the root ball of your plant, but no deeper than the rootball. You want the roots to have plenty of room to expand outward. If the hole is narrow, the roots may remain small and start circling — not good at all! The bottom of the hole should be solid, not mushy.

3. Gently remove the plant from the container. Turn the container upside down and tap the bottom of the container. I've been known to tap quite vigorously. If the root ball doesn't slide out easily, don't yank on the plant; instead, cut away the container.

4. Tease out some of the roots so they'll spread out in the planting hole. Cut — yes, cut — any circling roots. This won't hurt the plant; in fact, it will help. But what if the roots are such a tangled mess that mere teasing out is impossible? You can't leave them as is or they'll just stay that way in the ground, resulting in "girdling" and killing the plant.

> **— If the root ball was difficult to remove and roots are packed tight together, you've probably got a "root-bound" (a/k/a "pot bound") plant.**

Root-bound, container-grown plant
Photo courtesy of John James, Va.Tech.Ext.Pub.No. 426-701

—If the plant is so root-bound that untangling the roots is impossible, you'll need to do some cutting to prepare the roots for successful growth. Since scientists are not in perfect agreement on the best way to do this root-cutting, I'll give you both methods.

—***Conventional Wisdom***: cut 3 or 4 slits through the roots on the sides of the root ball, from top to bottom.

Slicing into a Root Ball
Photo: Jodie Delohery, courtesy of Fine Gardening website

Root Ball with a Box Cut
Photo: Jeff Gillman, blogs.extension.org/gardenprofessors

—***New Advice:*** "Box Cut" the root ball, basically turning it into a square root ball. Use a sharp knife and cut off the bottom of the root ball. Then make 4 vertical slices around the edges. Voila! You've given your root ball a Box Cut. I say "you" because I have not yet tried this new method myself. If YOU try it, please let me know how it works out.

5. Set the plant in the planting hole so that the top of the root ball (the spot on the stem where the roots begin) is at or above grade level. If the hole is too deep, you'll have to take the plant out and add soil to raise it to the proper height. If the plant is too deep in the soil, it will be more susceptible to disease and rot. In fact, in our clay-ish soil, placing the root ball a little bit ABOVE grade level is a good idea, especially for shrubs.

6. Re-fill the hole with the soil you removed. This is called backfilling. If you've prepared your soil in advance, it won't be necessary — or even a good idea — to add any amendments to the soil now. Also, remove all tags and wires from the plant.

7. Water generously and tamp down the soil so it settles and air pockets are eliminated. Air pockets are bad; those roots need to be in contact with the soil and moisture. Check that your plant hasn't sunken below grade level. If you're planting a shrub, you'll water and tamp down when the hole is partly filled with soil; then you'll do it again when the hole is full. Find shrub-planting directions at Shrubs: Functions, Planting and Maintenance, Va.Coop.Ext.

Should you add one of those transplant starter solutions to the water? I generally do, but I've wondered if it really helps to prevent transplant shock as the labels promise. I did a bit of research and here's what I learned. Transplant starter solutions that contain rooting hormone and fertilizer may boost growth of roots and ease the transplant process. But don't pay for a solution that contains vitamins because vitamins don't do a thing for transplants. ColoState.edu/Garden Myths Virginia Tech scientists recommend using a starter solution of high phosphate fertilizer which is water-soluble. Va. Coop.Ext. Pub. 426-203 "Perennials: Culture, Maintenance and Propagation". So adding some transplant fertilizer won't hurt and may indeed help. Just be sure to follow the directions on the label.

8. Mulch around your new plants. A layer of mulch — ground hardwood, leaves, or bark — is essential for keeping the roots cool and moist.

9. Keep Watering! Regular watering is essential for your new plants. We're not talking about casual sprinkling! We're talking about a **long, slow drink** from a hose or a watering can. Keep it gentle so as not to disturb the growing roots. You need to commit to watering regularly — often enough to keep the roots moist for at least a few months and providing extra water for up to a year until the plant is well established.

10. Start Weeding! Those new roots will do better without competitors, and the weeds may start quickly

because the planting process brings weed seeds to the surface. Mulch will help, but keep an eye on your new plants and pull weeds as soon as they start.

Your new plants need your nurture and attention for the first year. Think of that time spent watering and weeding as an opportunity to admire your new plants. You may find that you enjoy this chance for close contact with plants. You may even find yourself talking to your new plants. I know I do. Is there any science to support this? Well, I doubt it. But that's never stopped me, and it probably won't stop you either. You're a gardener now.

This local garden features purple coneflower (Echinacea purpurea), an easy native perennial, and a shrub background. Photo: Gail South

Sources:

Taylor's Master Guide to Landscaping (R. Buchanan, Houghton Mifflin 2000)

The First-Time Gardener (P. Barron, Crown Publishing 1996)

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"Perennials: Culture, Maintenance and Propagation," Virginia Cooperative Extension Pub. No. 426-203, http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-203/426-203.html

"Plant It Right for Healthier, Long-Lived Plants," Penn State Extension (2015), ext.psu.edu/plants/gardening/news/2015/plant-it-right-for-healthier-long-lived-plants

"Planting and Transplanting Trees and Shrubs," University of Minnesota Extension, www.extension.umn.edu/garden/yard-garden/trees-shrubs/planting-and-transplanting-trees-and-shrubs/

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Growing Fresh Fall Greens

By Cleve Campbell | August 2015 - Vol. 1 No. 8

When blistering mid-summer heat drives us from the garden, it's time to sit in the shade with an icy drink and dream of cool weather crops that freshen up fall menus. Lettuce and spinach need the milder temperatures of September and October. With some protection, we might bring them to the table in December. Kale, collards and Chinese cabbage improve their flavor with frost and sometimes can be harvested throughout the winter. These crops thrive in cooler temperatures (60-70ºF.) and supply vitamins A and C to our diet; plus they will be ready to eat long after staples such as corn, beans and tomatoes have had their turn.

Fall offers a second chance to perfect those spring veggies that didn't do as well as expected. All these vegetables need well-drained, fertile soil with a pH of 6.0 – 7.0. Just as with early-season gardening, it takes a little planning with an eye toward fall frost dates where you live. **Here's a guide for extending home-grown nutritious greens beyond summer.**

Since the average frost date for Albemarle County is mid-October, we work back in the calendar to determine when to plant seeds or shop for bedding plants. Determine the planting date by adding the number of days for germination for your variety, the length of time until harvest, and a "fall factor" of two

weeks. The fall factor takes into account shorter sunlight and lower temperatures at this time of year. Total these days and count back from mid-October to determine a planting date for seeds. Since kale, collards and cabbage are more tolerant of frost and hot weather, exact calculations are not necessary. But, see note on lettuce and spinach below.

About Frost: Old farmers distinguish light frosts from heavy frosts by the damage done. Many fall vegetables will stand a light frost and even improve their flavor. Frost settles in low spots, so a garden with a slight slope can avoid some damage. When temperatures are dropping below 45º F. by 10 PM, when the night sky is clear with stars, and the air is dry, you can know that frost is likely.

Kale, Collards and Cabbage: Collard and kale seed can be planted outdoors by August. You can add the seeds to an existing row in your garden, but since hot summers can make our clay soil hard, you may prefer to make a bed with a little vermiculite and potting soil in the garden or in a container designed for planting seeds. One year we received a present of 25 or more Tuscan kale (also called lacinato or dinosaur kale); they started in a flower pot and all transplanted successfully.

Due to summer heat, **plant seeds in the garden twice as deep as you would in the spring**. A good, gentle watering or a rain helps with germination. Old farmers would lay a board over the row to conserve moisture, removing the board as soon as sprouts appear. Mulching alongside the plants will help reduce the need for watering until seedlings are well-rooted.

Young cabbages will need to be transplanted either from your garden or from the garden center. Thin kale and cabbages to 6-8 inches apart when they have at least two leaves; collards need at least a foot. These vegetables can withstand the heat of late summer.

Leaves of kale and collards can be picked as they reach 6-8 inches, starting from the bottom of the plant. Leaves will grow much larger without losing good flavor, and both generate new leaves over the season. Cabbage heads can be cut off and eaten when they are firm and the size of baseballs. Space cabbages farther apart for bigger heads; but reduce watering as the heads form and get larger in order to prevent splitting. Light frosts won’t hurt and actually add flavor.

Swiss Chard is another spring/fall crop that manages fall temperature fluctuations well, although it grows throughout the summer. Because the mid-vein of the leaf is tender, it can be used like celery either separately or together with the rest of the leaves. Rainbow chard dresses up the garden when most things

are fading from green to brown. Chard needs to be thinned twice, first when it's 6 inches high and again when 8-10 inches tall — until plants are 8 inches apart. Don't throw the little guys away, but take them to the table. Cut mature leaves of 10-12 inches just above the ground.

With all fall greens, it's smart to choose varieties with a shorter time to maturity so as to increase your chances of a good result. A light application of a balanced fertilizer helps. Remember that average temperatures are just averages. Occasionally, the killing frost for these hardier greens won't come until January. Stay hopeful.

September is about right for seeding **lettuce and spinach**. **Leaf lettuce** is the easiest and fastest to grow as well as tasting better than the familiar "iceberg" head lettuce. Leafy, Bibb and Romaine lettuce will all grow in central Virginia, but require slightly different spacing and culture.

A seed mixture of lettuce leaf varieties will offer a rainbow of colors, textures and flavors. Our challenge in central Virginia is that **late summer heat** can cause **lettuce and spinach to bolt and turn bitter**. Partial shade or sprinkling in the afternoon will cool plants. On the other hand, these vegetables thrive in our fall evenings. Follow Thomas Jefferson's advice and plant a thimbleful of lettuce every two weeks in well-drained, fertile soil. This insures a lengthy harvest since leaf lettuce does not keep well. When plants have four leaves, thin carefully since roots are fragile and near the surface. Leave space between them depending on the variety and instructions on the seed packet. Air circulation in the row and keeping soil moist but not soggy helps prevents disease.

Spinach needs much the same conditions and care as lettuce. As a bonus it's eaten either raw or cooked. Harvest by pinching stems when plants have six to eight leaves. Both lettuce and spinach are more vulnerable to frost than other greens described above, but may bounce back from temperatures no lower than 30ºF. Unlike other greens, spinach will not generate new leaves after harvesting.

Problems: Before cold weather drives bugs into hiding, scout leafy greens for nibbling insects. Worms or caterpillars can often be picked off. Row covers help. We want to be cautious about chemical sprays with greens. Insecticidal soap, neem oil and pyrethrins are less toxic. Good air circulation, consistent soil moisture, leaves that dry before nightfall and crop rotation keeps diseases at bay.

PESTICIDE WARNING:

Pesticides (which include herbicides, insecticides, rotenticides, etc.) are poisonous. Always read and carefully follow all precautions and safety recommendations given on the container label. Store all chemicals in the original labeled containers in a locked cabinet or shed, away from food or feeds, and out of the reach of children, unauthorized persons, pets, and livestock. Consult the pesticide label to determine active ingredients, signal words, and proper protective equipment.

Pesticides applied in your home and landscape can move and contaminate creeks, lakes, and rivers. Confine chemicals to the property being treated and never allow them to get into drains or creeks. Avoid drift onto neighboring properties and untargeted areas.

Resources:

"Collards in Va," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6v03TLEyayU

"Leafy Green Vegetables," http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-408/426-408_pdf.pdf

"Fall Vegetable Gardening," http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-334/426-334.html

“Edible Landscaping,” http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-411/426-411.html

“Growing Lettuce & Spinach” http://extension.psu.edu/cumberland/news/2012/growing- lettuce-spinach

Rodale’s Garden Answers, Fern Marshall Bradley, ed. (Rodale Press, Emmaus, Penn. 1995).

August Tips and Tasks in the Veggie Garden

By Cleve Campbell | August 2015 - Vol. 1 No. 8

My grandfather once remarked, “The dog days in central Virginia are so hot and miserable, even the dog quits fetching.” And dog days can also be an uncomfortable time for the vegetable gardener. The neat rows and beds in the vegetable garden often begin to look like a bedraggled mutt. Weeds are often flourishing, a harvest trip to the garden often resembles an Easter egg hunt, the lettuce and spinach bolted weeks ago, peas are long gone, the potato plants have died, and early blight is making it’s annual march up the tomato plants. Those neat rows and weedless vegetable garden patch have become a distant memory. August is a month of harvest, watering, and weeding. It’s also the month when we transition from warm weather crops to cool weather crops. It takes a lot of vision to think ahead to the cool crisp days of autumn and a fall garden during the hot and dry dog days of August.

The gardener who fails to plant a fall garden is often missing out on a remarkable growing season. Here in central Virginia, we can harvest fresh produce well into the fall and often into early winter. No matter how ragged the summer garden looks, a fall garden offers us not only second growing season, but a second chance to plant those early spring crops that failed in the summer heat. August in central Virginia is fall planting season, the time to plan and plant a fall garden. Timely planting is the key to a successful fall garden.

- When **choosing vegetables for the fall garden**, select those that are **semi-hardy**, as they will tolerate a light to moderate frost and look for those with **quick maturity** (fewest days to harvest). This information will be listed on the seed packet or in the seed catalog.
- **Vegetables that can be planted in August** include leafy greens such as lettuce, spinach, collards, kale and mustard. Radishes, turnips, beets and carrots can all be started from seeds. Chinese cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower and brussel sprouts can be transplanted in August and still have enough time to produce a good harvest. When selecting plants for transplanting at the local gardening center be sure you are selecting edible and not ornamental, varieties of cabbage and kale.
- Fall plants often have **fewer insect problems**, as they avoid the peak insect activity period of midsummer. However, some insects, such as cabbageworm and corn earworm, may be even worse late in the year than summer; vigilance is still required. Avoid some pests and diseases by planting crops of different families than were originally in that section of garden.
- When planting fall crops, **prepare the soil by restoring the nutrients removed by spring and summer crops**. A light layer of compost or aged manure, or a small application of an organic or complete fertilizer will provide the nutrients needed by your fall crops.
- Dry soil can making working the soil difficult and can also inhibit seed germination during the late summer. **Plant fall vegetables when the soil is moist** — after a rain or after you’ve watered the area thoroughly the day before planting. Plant the seeds slightly deeper than recommended for spring planting. Once planted, water them in thoroughly, and then use a mulch or a covering of compost to prevent the soil from crusting.
- **Watering properly** is the key to conserving water in the heat of the late summer. One inch per week applied all at one time will wet the soil 6 to 8 inches deep and insure good yield from your mature crops. Two inches of organic mulch such as leaves or straw, will cool the soil and reduce

surface evaporation of water. Water the garden early in the day so the foliage dries before nightfall. Wet foliage at night increases susceptibility to fungus diseases.

- When **mulching around young seedlings**, care should be taken not to cover the seedlings. Young seedlings need as much sunlight as possible, and the mulch should be covering the soil — not engulfing the young plants.
- **Pick summer squash and zucchini every day or two** to keep the plants producing. If you are going on vacation this month, harvest all your vegetables beforehand, and then arrange for someone to pick fast-maturing crops such as squash and okra while you're off loafing. Otherwise, your vegetables will become over-mature and stop producing,
- **Potatoes continue to grow as long as the tops are green**. Dig only as many as you need for immediate use. The tubers will keep better in the ground than in a warm dry area.
- **Consider planting a cover crop.** A cover crop such as annual rye decreases erosion of the soil during the winter, shades out weeds, adds organic material when it is incorporated into the soil in spring, improves the soil structure and adds valuable nutrients. Cover crops can be sown between rows of fall vegetables a month or less before expected harvest. The cover crops will get a head start and not interfere with vegetable plant growth. Buckwheat will be killed by frost but can be sown as a cover crop up to 6-8 weeks before a killing frost, usually about the 3rd or 4th week in October.
- Garden vegetables that become **over-ripe** are easy targets for some pests. Remove then as soon as possible to avoid detection by pests.
- **Having trouble locating your tools** in the garden amongst your plants? Paint the handles of your garden tools a bright color other than green or tie a piece of bright orange surveyor's tape around the handle.

During the hot dog days of August, one of the last things a vegetable gardener wants to think about is planting more crops. But look ahead to the fall garden, which offers its own satisfaction through its prolonged harvest of fresh vegetables, savings in food costs and knowing that you are making full use of your gardening space and season.

Thanks for joining us in The Garden Shed. We look forward to you stopping by next month for a visit.

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"Fall Vegetable Gardening," Virginia Cooperative Extension Publication 426-334, http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-334/426-334.html

Heliopsis

By Melanie | August 2015 - Vol. 1 No. 8

If you love big, bold sunflowers but avoid them in your garden because of their behemoth size, consider planting their smaller, more genteel cousin, *Heliopsis helianthoides*. Yes, that's a mouthful but the name is easy to pronounce (hee-lee-OP-sis hee-lee-an-THOY-deez). If the scientific name causes you to glaze over, just refer to it by its common name, which is false sunflower or oxeye sunflower. *Heliopsis* has golden yellow blossoms that add some much-needed punch and pizzazz to the arid August garden. This clump-forming perennial is an excellent choice for cutting gardens, cottage gardens and wild flower meadows. Native to the eastern half of the United States and Canada, *Heliopsis* is drought and heat tolerant once established and will thrive in clay soil. Although it doesn't mind dry soil, it does appreciate an occasional drink of water during the hottest days of summer to keep it at its healthiest and most productive. It prefers full sun, but will tolerate partial shade as long as it receives at least four to five hours of sun a day.

A number of *Heliopsis* cultivars are available commercially. 'Summer Sun' (also known as 'Sommersonne') is one of the easier cultivars to find at our local garden centers. It forms an upright clump three to four feet tall and two to three feet wide. If your garden is too small for a plant this size, try pruning or pinching the stems back in mid-spring. That will delay blooming for a couple of weeks, but it will result in a shorter, sturdier plant. 'Summer Sun' produces lots of showy single or semi-double daisy-like orange-yellow flowers from June

through September. For lots of visual excitement in the late summer border, pair it with purples and blues or a touch of red. Try purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), gayfeather (*Liatris spicata*), 'Lucifer' *Crocosmia*, 'Bishop of Llandaff' dahlia, or 'Victoria Blue' salvia. For a really stunning combination, pair it with one of the deeper purple-blue speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*) cultivars, such as 'Summer Border Blue' or 'Royal Candles.' *Heliopsis* also combines very well with ornamental grasses.

'Summer Nights' is another readily available cultivar. Similar in size to 'Summer Sun,' this cultivar is a little looser looking in habit. It has dark green, bronze-tinged foliage on narrow, dark red stems. Each stem is topped by clusters of golden yellow flowers, some of which display contrasting mahogany red centers. 'Ballerina' is a slightly more compact cultivar with a bushy, well-branched habit and semi-double yellow blossoms. It is 24 to 36 inches tall and 18 to 24 inches wide. 'Golden Plume' is a double-flowered variety with 2-1/2 inch wide blooms. Cultivars 'Loraine Sunshine' and 'Sunburst' have variegated cream and green foliage. However, like many variegated plants, the foliage tends to lose its variegated characteristics and may green out as the days grow hotter in this part of Virginia.

Heliopsis is basically a tough, easy-to-grow plant. Once it is established, it will thrive in rocky, sandy or clay soil as long as the soil is well drained. It can handle a range of soil pH, but prefers soil somewhere in the neutral range. Go easy on the organic matter and fertilizer. Overly rich soil can cause leggy stem growth, which could necessitate staking. Deadhead spent blooms to stimulate new buds. That will keep the floral display going into fall. Deadheading also helps prevent self-sowing. *Heliopsis* can be grown from seed, but a better bet is to divide clumps every three to four years in either spring or fall. This plant has no serious pest or disease problems although it can be susceptible to aphids. Just dispense with them with a sharp spray of water from your garden hose. Powdery mildew and rusts may also affect these plants but generally not to the extent that the problem requires control measures. *Heliopsis* is a butterfly magnet and bees love it as well. Best of all, deer don't normally bother it, nor do voles. What's not to like about this plant?

The Ornamental Garden in August

By Patsy Chadwick | August 2015 - Vol. 1 No. 8

August is the last of the summer months – a time when hot, humid weather can significantly stress or weaken plants throughout the ornamental garden. With the growth spurt of spring and early summer now only a distant memory, your landscape may appear to be slowing down and taking a breather. But that doesn't mean you can as well. In fact, it's now more important than ever to maintain vigilance over weeds, pests, diseases, and moisture levels.

As you tend your garden, **observe what worked this growing season** and what didn't. Make a list of changes or improvements that need to be tackled. This sometimes means making hard choices about the plants in your landscape. For many of us, our ornamental gardens are perpetual works in progress. Maybe that prized peony that looked so stunning in May now looks crowded by its companion plantings and afflicted by mildew. Or perhaps that cute little Russian sage turned out to be a thug and spread with wild abandon throughout your garden. Whatever the problem, now is a good time to assess your options and decide what course of action to take for next year's garden.

Speaking of next year's garden, **use a garden journal** to document your gardening successes and failures. If you aren't in the habit of keeping a journal, August is a good time to start one while all the details are still fresh in your mind. That will be a big help to you as you decide what improvements you want to make. For example, are there bare spots that need to be filled in? Do some of your plants need to be divided? Did some of your plants succumb to disease? Was drainage a problem? With a working list of problem areas, you'll have a head start on creating an even better garden next year.

As for specific gardening tasks to perform now during these hot, dry August days, it's particularly important to **control weeds.** Otherwise, your ornamentals will have to compete with them for water and nutrients. In your battle to conquer weeds, don't make the mistake of deeply cultivating your flower beds. Loosening the soil under hot, dry conditions can damage surface roots as well as reduce soil water that might otherwise have been available to your plants. As a result, your plants may end up looking much worse after cultivation than before.

In the absence of rain, **monitor moisture levels** and provide water as necessary. Deep but irregular watering is the best strategy at this time of year. Don't forget your containerized plantings. They can sometimes require water daily or even twice daily.

Don't prune shrubs or trees this late in the growing season. Any pruning you do now will stimulate new growth which will not be able to harden off before winter sets in.

Tidy up your garden by cleaning up dead or dying daylily foliage. And while you're at it, cut back any remaining daylily flower stalks. If your daylilies need to be divided, now is a good time to do it.

Divide and transplant bearded irises, but do it on a day when the temperatures are below 90ºF. Irises grow from rhizomes, which are elongated stems that grow horizontally below ground and have roots attached to them. Snap off or use a sharp knife to cut off the vigorous ends of the rhizomes. Make sure that there are roots attached to each portion. Before re-planting, inspect each portion and discard any that indicate the presence of iris borers or soft rot. Cut the foliage on healthy rhizomes to about eight inches. They prefer dry feet, so replant them 18 inches apart in well-drained soil just at or slightly below the soil line. Don't pile mulch over the roots. Mulch can retain more moisture than the rhizomes can handle.

If you're into **dried flower arrangements**, you'll have better success drying flowers with bright yellow, orange, pink or blue petals. Those colors preserve best. Red and purple become darker and less attractive when dried. White flowers can quickly turn a buff or tan color. If you're using straw flowers, cut them when the blooms are only half open. Tie them together in small bundles and hang them upside down in a well-ventilated place to dry before using them in arrangements.

If your **annuals** have finished blooming or if they look overgrown and leggy, remove them from the garden and replace with mulch to keep weeds under control. Or, if you're really intent on keeping those petunias going a little while longer, try shearing them back, fertilizing and watering them to see if you can coax another round of blossoms from them.

Unless you want to leave **seed heads** in place for the birds, deadhead purple coneflower and rudbeckia. Also, deadhead garden phlox before it sets seeds. Phlox seedlings do not come true to parent color and may overtake your garden. If you like surprises in your garden, then leave the seedlings in place to see what comes up. If that approach doesn't appeal to you, just pull them up.

Order spring-flowering bulbs now while selections are good. If you're buying bulbs from nurseries, choose the largest bulbs available. Be wary of so-called "bargain" bulbs. If the bulbs are small or of inferior quality, they may not be much of a bargain.

Make a list of **plants that can be moved or divided this fall**. As a general rule of thumb, spring or summer-blooming plants may be divided in the fall. Fall-blooming plants should be divided in the spring. Keep in mind that some plants, such as peonies, bleeding heart, *Baptisia*, and Oriental poppies grow better if left undisturbed.

Many **self-sown seedlings** of hollyhock, larkspur, columbine, sweet William, etc., are appearing now. If the parent plant is a hybrid, the seedling may not come true to type. Remove any unwanted seedlings now.

Sow seeds in late summer for **cool-weather annuals** such as calendulas, Iceland poppies, primrose, pansies, violas, snapdragons, stock or forget-me-nots.

Monitor all ornamental plants for adequate moisture levels during the hot summer months. While this is important for all new plantings, it is particularly relevant for **newly planted trees or shrubs.** Those first

few growing seasons are critical for the overall health and development of vigorous root systems. If you need advice on strategies for watering the landscape, check out the Virginia Cooperative Extension's Publication 426-713, "Creating a Water-Wise Landscape," http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-713/426-713.html.

Remain vigilant throughout the growing season for **fungal diseases on roses**, particularly black spot. Just as its name suggests, this fungus appears as round black spots on the upper sides of rose foliage. The spots are often surrounded by yellow halos. As the disease progresses, the leaves turn yellow and fall from the plant. If you leave the leaves where they fall on the soil or mulch, the fungal spores will overwinter and infect next year's roses. To contain the disease, remove all fallen rose foliage and dispose of it in the trash. Do not put it in your compost pile.

Moles and Voles

By Melanie | August 2015 - Vol. 1 No. 8

Shawn Weeks, Wildlife Management Specialist, believes that moles and voles are indeed a lawn and garden pest. However, he also says that wild animals are part of what makes nature so magical. While it's important to coexist with animals in relative peace, they can cause many problems when they live in our lawns and gardens with their tunnels.

It seems every time I plant something new, within a day I see a raised tunnel heading straight to it; but many times there is no damage. In fact, a part of my yard near our pasture has grass that is not well manicured. When I feel lumps in it that I cannot see, that lump is actually a tunnel, and I do nothing. My garden, however, seems to constantly have these "runs" — especially in mulched areas. Most of the time they cause no damage, but in some mulched beds, the tunnels actually raise up the soil under a plant as the pest passes through, making an unsightly bed. That is this year. However, in the past I have seen several young edamame plants literally disappear below the soil surface. It reminded me of a cartoon where the gardener tries to hold onto the vegetable and the pest tries to pull it under.

Other than having similar names, voles and moles have little in common. They are two entirely different pests, yet they're often confused. Moles are better known, but it may actually be a vole causing damage especially in gardens and flower beds.

Identify the culprit

Moles are 5 to 7 inches in length, gray to dark brown in color, and are mammals. They are NOT rodents. They have a long, naked snout, no external ears (who wants dirt in your ears?) and can tunnel 1 foot per minute. Their eyes are buried in their fur. They are rarely seen because they live and feed underground, preferring moist, loose soil. Since they don't eat plants, their landscape carnage is really the incidental damage of shallow tunnels and runways dug in lawns searching for food. However, tunnels may cause damage to plants when their runways create paths around roots. Another objection from gardeners and those mowing the lawn is dirt that is mounded up in a rounded volcanic shape — better known as a molehill.

vole

Voles are rodents — looking much like mice with shorter tails. Voles are usually 5 to 7 inches long and may be black, gray or brown. They have eyes and ears that can be easily seen. Voles can either burrow, or more likely, use old mole tunnels. Between burrow openings, they produce characteristic surface runways about the size of a broomstick that you can see. They stay in nests above ground, coming out to eat day and night at short intervals.

Different diets

The mole's diet is almost exclusively earthworms and grubs, with a few insects for appetizers.

Voles, on the other hand, are plant-eaters or herbivores. They feed primarily on grasses, flowers, vegetables, bulbs and seeds. In the winter when food is scarce, they may eat bark off of trees and shrubs.

Reproduction

Moles are anti-social mammals, seeking each other out only at mating time. This means that usually you should only have 1 or 2 moles in your yard. There are generally 4 to 7 per litter. Their life span is 2 to 3 years.

Voles are prolific reproducers that can quickly colonize your yard. Their life span is only about 16 months or less, so they have to make up for it by having 3 to 6 young at a time with only a 21-day gestation period! Because they reproduce quickly, eat so many things, and are good at hiding, they can do a lot of damage before the gardener figures out the problem.

Ignore or combat the problem?

First, let me say that moles can be beneficial because they consume large numbers of grubs. Their tunneling can also aerate the lawn and mix deeper soil with surface organic material. Other than that….they are a nuisance!

I honestly can't think of any benefits to having voles in your garden and lawn. The control methods for both moles and voles is quite similar, but there is no one-and-done solution. In fact, we have few reliable approaches that will provide long lasting relief. I would encourage the use of only scientific research — not the many gadgets and homemade recipes that you may find.

So the important thing is to asses the level of damage and the level of need for control. Is having a few holes in your yard or perhaps some limited plant damage sufficient grounds for action?

Only Live Traps

Trapping, although successful in catching moles, should be viewed as a temporary fix. If the area continues to have the food supply they are looking for, more than likely others will come in to replace the one you removed.

To live-trap moles, use a can about 10 inches in length and 6 inches wide and place it vertically beneath the tunnel. The top of the can is level with the bottom of the tunnel. As the mole comes along the runway it drops in unable to get out and can then be relocated.

Due to the large population of voles, traps are NOT very effective and are probably only a temporary control.

Repellents & Barriers

The most common **repellent for moles** contains castor oil and is registered for use in Virginia. It comes in the form of pellets or can be mixed and sprayed on the lawn, lasting as long as 6-8 weeks.

A barrier can be used around planting beds to deter the voles and moles by mixing something sharp into the soil. This could be sand, gravel or a products that are similar to cat litter. These materials, once they are mixed into the soil, make it more difficult for the pests to navigate.

Another barrier is the use of sheet metal or hardware cloth placed around the affected area. To install this barrier, dig a trench 12-15 inches deep and 10 inches wide. Place 8-10 inches of the barrier in the trench and then fold the remainder upright to create an “L”. It should extend about 5 inches above the ground for complete protection. Backfill the trench with soil.

Limit food supply

Since grubs are the main source of food for moles, treating for grubs is an option. See last month’s article on grub treatment. However, the Virginia Tech Extension Office believes it really should be viewed as a grub treatment rather than mole control . Of course, moles love earthworms — as do gardeners — so we do not want to do anything to deter earthworms.

Cultural

Voles make their hidden nests in vegetation and brush, so avoid having brush piles and the like near the areas you want to protect. Lastly, mulch is also a great place for voles to hide, especially if applied too thickly. Use a minimum of mulch around areas you need to protect.

No fumigants or toxicants

As with all wildlife, non-lethal control measures should be exhausted before lethal measures are used. Poisons are not recommended and may not only kill these pests but could even harm other animals if theycatch and eat the mole or vole after it has ingested the poison but before it is dead. Fumigants and toxicants are restricted in Virginia to certified pesticide applicators.

In Virginia it is illegal to:

- set a trap where it would be likely to injure persons, dogs, stock or fowl 29.1-521
- not visit all traps once each day and remove all animals caught 29.1-521
- transport, release, or relocate a mole anywhere other than the property it was caught on

4VAC15-30-50

- poison any animal (including moles) other than rats and mice on your property 4VAC15-40-50.

PESTICIDE WARNING:

Pesticides (which include herbicides, insecticides, rotenticides, etc.) are poisonous. Always read and carefully follow all precautions and safety recommendations given on the container label. Store all chemicals in the original labeled containers in a locked cabinet or shed, away from food or feeds, and out of the reach of children, unauthorized persons, pets, and livestock. Consult the pesticide label to determine active ingredients, signal words, and proper protective equipment.

Pesticides applied in your home and landscape can move and contaminate creeks, lakes, and rivers. Confine chemicals to the property being treated and never allow them to get into drains or creeks. Avoid drift onto neighboring properties and untargeted areas.

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Recipes for your Garden Greens

By Cleve Campbell | August 2015 - Vol. 1 No. 8

These are two easy recipes that make the most of kale's goodness. The more formal Kale Salad serves company while the cooked greens tempt your creativity with the family.

KALE CAESAR PASTA SALAD

Cook 1 lb. **bowtie pasta** as label directs. In large bowl, whisk 6 tablespoons **light mayonnaise**; 1/3 cup grated P**armesan cheese**; 3 tablespoons **lemon juice**; 1 tablespoon extra virgin **olive oil**; 1 clove **garlic**, crushed with press; and ½ teaspoon each of **salt and pepper**. Add 1 large bunch **kale**, stemmed and chopped, tossing to combine. While cooked pasta is still hot, add to kale mixture. Let cool slightly. Stir in 8 medium **radishes**, cut into quarters. **Serves 6**; about 390 cal., 14 g protein, 62 g carbs, 10 g fat (with 2 g saturated), 4 g fiber, 435 mg sodium.

–From May 2015 *Good Housekeeping.*

NANA’S WAY WITH GREENS

In a 10-inch skillet on medium heat, add 2 tablespoons olive oil; 2 cloves chopped garlic and/or onion; and 1 teaspoon cumin. Sauté for 1-2 minutes.

Add 1 large bunch of kale or Swiss chard, washed and chopped. Leave stems on chard and young kale, but remove from mature kale.

Cook until greens wilt (cover if needed to tenderize older greens), about 10 minutes. Water or chicken broth may be added if more moisture is needed. Toward the end, you may toss in balsamic vinaigrette, or carrots, or red pepper flakes, or salsa or tomato for variety. Salt and pepper to taste and serve.