HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEMS • HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS • HEALTHY COMMUNITIES • HEALTHY CALIFORNIANS

University of California
Agriculture and Natural Resources
Making a Difference for California

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Whether it's a vegetable garden, house plants or a landscape...

A Garden Runs Through It

July 2012

In This Issue:

This newsletter is produced by:

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OFFICE HOURS:

Tuesday,
9am—12pm
1pm –4pm
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Have a question?
Email us at
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Information Booth Locations:

Arbuckle Farmers Market
July 11
July 25
August 8
August 22

Colusa Farmers Market
July 9
July 23
August 6
August 20

Colusa County Farm Bureau

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

Dear Master Gardeners,

I have cracks in my tomatoes. What's going on?

Your Neighbor

Dear Neighbor,

Cracks in your tomatoes point to overwatering. Over two weeks ago we had very hot and very windy weather. At this time we watered a lot to keep up with the heat and wind. When the temperature dropped to normal, we kept watering and watering. Tomatoes like deep and regular watering. Adjust your watering to the weather. A farmer once told me that when the forecast called for very hot weather they irrigated ahead of the heat. The water ahead of the heat gives the plant a health vigor and a better chance of survival.

Other potential problems with your tomatoes:

- Sunburn—overexposure to sunlight
- Blossom End Rot—Water soaked spot on blossom end of fruit

  Maintain even soil moisture

  Avoid heavy applications of high-nitrogen fertilizer

  Soils that are deficient in Calcium may be amended with gypsum
- Catfacing—Malformation and cracking at the blossom end, may be caused by wide differences in day and night temperatures. Also may be caused by abnormally cool or hot conditions.

Happy Gardening,
Your Master Gardener

Book of the Month

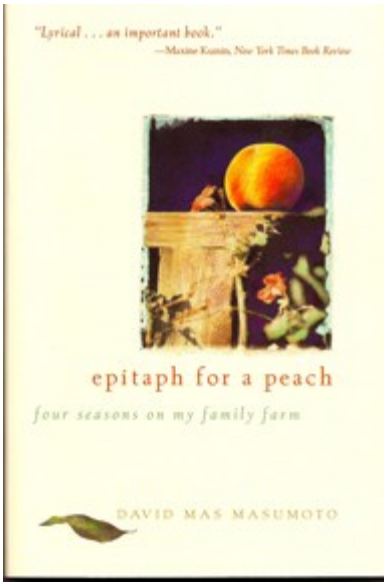
Epitaph for a Peach

David Mas Masumoto

"Sun Crest is one of the last remaining truly juicy peaches. When you wash that treasure under a stream of cooling water, your fingertips instinctively search for the gushy side of the fruit. Your mouth waters in anticipation. You lean over the sink to make sure you don't drip on yourself. Then you sink your teeth into the flesh and the juices trickle down your cheeks and dangle on your chin. This is a real bite, a primal act, a magical sensory celebration announcing that summer has arrived. " (from the prologue)

As pleasurable as a perfect peach, Epitaph for a Peach tells the passionate story of one farmer's attempt to rescue one of the last truly sweet and juicy fruits from becoming obsolete in a world that increasingly values commerciality over quality. The story of Mas Masumoto's Sun Crest peaches begins on the day he turns the bulldozers away from his orchards and vows to give himself four seasons to find a home for the fruits of his labor.

At once a deeply personal story, a sharp commentary about the state of American agriculture, a lighthearted rhapsody of nature, and an intimate glimpse into the Asian American experience, Epitaph for a Peach is about saving a peach, saving a farm, saving a family, saving a way of life--it is a story about finding "home."



Submitted by Cynthia White

Science word of the Month....

Decorticate—To remove the bark, husk or outer layer

Ornamental Plant of the Month

Submitted Cynthia White

This is an article from "Edible Sacramento" magazine and couldn't be better written in lay terms for us – enjoy! It's by Mike Madison and is News From Up the Creek

A political geographer might divide the Sacramento Valley into the north part and the south, with the wealth and the power in the south. As a gardener, the obvious division of the valley is east side from the west side, with the Sacramento River the dividing line.

Soils on the east side derive from erosion in the Sierra Nevada and tend to be neutral to acidic, whereas soils on the west side derive from the erosion in the coast range, producing west side solids that are alkaline, and irregularly troubled by high levels of magnesium or boron or selenium. The Sierra is high enough in elevation to carry a permanent snow pack, supplying the numerous rivers of soft water that flow into the east side of the valley year round. The Coast Range is lower, and does not carry a snow pack, and there are only three west side streams (Putah Creek, Cache Creek, and Stony Creek) that flow year round into the valley, and in severe conditions even these may go dry. Water in the west side is alkaline and hard; they say you can put pans of it in the sun to dry, and make bricks that way. The west side is the windy side of the valley; if the north wind is blowing at 20 knots in Fair Oaks, it will be 35 knots in Winters. Finally, the east side has gold in the hills, which together with the abundant water led to earlier settlement and a denser population. The west side is still much less populous. In general, the west side is the tough side.

To a gardener, these differences play out in well-known ways. In Sacramento you can easily grow camellias and azaleas and blueberries, which will not grow at all fourteen miles away in Davis. On the other hand, tomatoes are happier on the west side.

Despite difficulties with west-side soils and water, ag productivity of the west side is at least as great as that of the east side. Party, this represents adaptation on the part of the farmers. If you have a high boron soil you grow Pistachios, which love boron, and you don't try to grow blueberries. But in addition to a thoughtful choice of crops, west side gardeners and farmers can correct the ills of their growing conditions with a magic powder: GYPSUM.

Gypsum (calcium sulfate) is a naturally occurring rock that is mined and ground into powder for agricultural use. The brand commonly used – Diamond K (certified organic) is mined in Utah, but there are also gypsum mines in California and other parts of the west. You can buy gypsum by the truckload, or get it at the garden center in bags. It's not expensive; a 50# bag costs about eight dollars.

Each of the components of gypsum – calcium and sulfur-has a part to play. The sulfur makes the soil less alkaline, and in so doing makes various nutrients, such as iron and zinc, more accessible to the plants. The calcium corrects problems of calcium deficiency that shows up as chlorotic leaves as well blossom-end rot in tomatoes. The calcium story is somewhat more complex. In most places on the west side there is adequate calcium in the soil, but there is an excess of magnesium. Magnesium ions and calcium ions are similar in size and electrical charge, and the roots of plants absorb them in proportion to their relative abundance in the soil, with the result that excess magnesium is swamping out the calcium. An application of gypsum tilts the ratio in favor calcium, so the plant can get the calcium it needs. An additional advantage of gypsum is that it improves soil texture, making the soil more friable and easily worked. And finally, you are unlikely to cause harm by over-using gypsum, you can sump a fifty pound bag in a small area without creating a toxic result.

East side gardeners may be smug about their superior water and their freedom from the problems of alkalinity. But they might nonetheless envy the west siders, who have a magic powder they can invoke, a powder which is of little use on the east side. It's always good to have some magic up your sleeve to use when all else fails.

On my farm (west side) I scrupulously apply gypsum each year to citrus, persimmons, and tomatoes. The less sensitive crops get it once every few years. Gypsum is water soluble, and winter is a good time to apply it so that is can be washed in by rain. But a summer application works as well, and can be washed in by irrigation.

Edible Garden of the Month

John and Diane Vafis

What's bugging you?

Now that your garden is planted and mulched, it is time to monitor for pests attacking your plants. We need to learn to live with insects and other creatures in our gardens, but some insects are more welcome than others. Being able to identify your plants' opponents is important, but not a simple task. Remember that of the more than 2,000 different kinds of bugs in our backyards (not counting the soil organisms,) most are harmless, and many are outright helpful. Tachinid flies, ladybugs, parasitoid wasps, assassin bugs, honey bees, butterflies, lacewings, mantises, spiders and syrphid flies are just a few of the wonderful little bugs, along with creatures such as frogs, toads, birds and snakes, that can help our gardens flourish. Don't reach for the insecticide without first trying to identify the insect you want to kill. Visit the website http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/NE/index.html for a photo gallery of "natural enemies" that are beneficial in your garden.

When it comes to fighting disease pathogens, there are some things that you can do to prevent their success. Choose plants that are identified as disease resistant. For example, tomatoes are identified as VFN resistant, which means that the plant is resistant to some common fungi and nematodes. There are also steps that can be taken to create certain growing conditions. Two main influential environmental conditions we can usually control include soil quality and moisture levels. Regardless of whether your soil is acidic or alkaline, heavy clay or sandy loam, regularly adding organic matter will help keep it moisture retentive and well drained. Adequate moisture levels make soil nutrients more readily available to plants. Spacing plants correctly helps prevent fungus because it allows good air circulation.

Doing all you can to prevent problems is cheaper than trying to treat the problem with chemicals. It is important to monitor the garden looking for signs of trouble and responding accordingly as early as possible. Simply pruning can be a way to deal with pathogens and fungal infections. Cutting out and discarding the infected tissue can help prevent spores from forming that will infect in the future. Smaller insects can often be eradicated by blasting them with water at regular intervals until they are no longer detectable. The method usually works on infestations of aphids, scales in their larval form, whiteflies and spider mites. It's best done between early morning and noon, so that foliage can dry in the afternoon sun. If done later, plants might contract fungal diseases in exchange for relief from tiny insect tormenters.

We don't have space to go into all of the options for dealing with garden pests. You are encouraged to visit www.ipm.ucdavis.edu to learn about the least toxic approaches to dealing with various pests in the garden.

Recipe of the Month

Barbara Scheimer and Cynthia Peterson

MONTEREY JACK RATATOUILLE

1 (1 1/4 lb) eggplant
1/2 lb zucchini
1 green pepper
4 slices bacon
1/4 cup olive oil
1/4 tomato paste
1 1/2 tsp salt
1 cup sliced onion
1 tsp fine herbs or thyme
1 tsp minced garlic
3 Tbsp flour
1 (14 1/2 oz) can of diced tomatoes
12 oz sliced jack cheese

Peel and slice eggplant, slice zucchini, and cut green pepper into strips. Cut bacon into 1/4 slices and fry with onion, stirring often, until cooked. Mix in olive oil, tomato paste, salt, thyme, garlic, flour and undrained tomatoes. In 3-quart dish layer 1/2 tomato mixture, 1/2 sliced vegetables and 1/2 cheese. Repeat. Bake 400 degrees for 50 minutes

This recipe is from the Arbuckle United Methodist Church Cookbook

Weed of the Month Field Bindweed

For more information click here

Identification

Mature field bindweed plants have arrowhead-shaped leaves that can be 1/2 to 2 inches long, depending on environmental conditions. Mature leaves at the base of the stem are larger than the young leaves at the stem terminal. The flowers are trumpet shaped, white to pink, and 1 to 1 1/2 inches wide.

Field bindweed is a prostrate plant unless it climbs on an object for support. It often is found growing on upright plants, such as shrubs or grapevines, with its stems and leaves entwined throughout the plant and the flowers exposed to the light. Under warm, moist conditions, leaves are larger and vines more robust than under drought conditions.

Management

Control of field bindweed isn't easy, and it can't be accomplished with a single treatment or in a single season. Effective control requires prevention of seed production, reduction of stored carbohydrates by deep tillage of the root system, competition for light from other plants, and constant vigilance in removing top growth. Application of herbicides, which reduce bindweed growth and kill germinating seedlings, can also be part of an integrated pest management program.

Pest of the Month

Stink bugs

Stink bugs are shield-shaped bugs with a large scutellum or triangle on their backs. Most bugs are brown or green with red, pink, or yellow markings.

Damage

Stink bugs attack a variety of fruits and vegetables from stone fruits to pears to beans to tomatoes, often leaving blemishes, depressions, or brown drops of excrement. On green tomatoes, damage appears as dark pinpricks surrounded by a light discolored area that remains green or turns yellow when fruit ripen. Areas beneath spots on tomatoes or depressed areas on pears become white and pithy but remain firm as the fruit ripens. On peaches, fruit turns brown and corky.

Solutions

Handpick bugs or their eggs. Eliminate groundcovers or weedy areas in early spring before populations build up. Insecticides are generally not recommended in gardens for stink bugs. Parasites and general predators may contribute to control.

Click here for more information

June in the Garden:

- You can still plant seeds of annuals: zinnias, marigolds, sunflowers and alyssum will grow and bloom this year.
- Be sure everything is well mulched for the heat of summer. Water before 10 am to avoid fungal infections and to minimize water loss to evaporation.
- If you have blackberries in your garden, cut the canes that bore fruit to the ground. Tie up 3-5 of the new canes and fertilize to promote new growth.
- Cut canna stems to the ground as they finish flowering to encourage new stems to grow.
- Dig and divide bearded iris that have not been divided for 3 yrs. Cut the foliage on the divisions to 6-8 inches, replanting only new rhizomes and discarding the old rhizomes.
- You can dig and divide other bulbs after the foliage has died off.
- Deadhead blooming plants as they finish flowering to promote continuing bloom. Fertilize roses after each burst of blooms.
- Cut back lavender after flowering to promote a second bloom. You can prune by half to keep the plant in bounds.
- If you have fruit trees, be sure to pick up dropped fruit to prevent brown rot from developing and leaving spores for future infection.

Featured Publication

Songbird, Bat and Owl Boxes

Vineyard Management with an Eye toward Wildlife

Explore the benefits of the biodiversity and the beauty of songbirds, bats, and owls with this handy guide.

You'll learn about "win-win" ideas and methods for integrating nest boxes with vineyard management, biology and habitat requirements, details on construction and maintenance, literature sources, and online resources where you can get more information.

While written with grape growers and vineyard managers in mind, anyone interested in learning about nest boxes will find this guide useful -- from vineyards to the backyard.

Illustrated with 30 color photographs, 14 figures and tables. Includes patterns for building your own boxes and advice on where to place your boxes for best results.

Click here to purchase this item

This month's links:

- **Good Day Sacramento, part 1**
- **Good Day Sacramento, part 2**
- **Good Day Sacramento, part 3**

Additional Links

Integrated Pest Management	www.ipm.ucdavis.edu
UC Davis Arboretum	www.arboretum.ucdavis.edu
McConnell Arboretum and Botanical Gardens	turtlebay.org
Invasive Plants	www.cal-ipc.org
Plant Right	www.plantright.org
PG&E	www.pge.com
Save Our Water	www.water.ca.gov

The Colusa County Master Gardener Volunteer Program is a partnership among the University of California, USDA, Colusa County and the Colusa County Farm Bureau. Master Gardener volunteers extend horticultural information and offer educational programs and garden-related demonstrations in Colusa County.