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Guide on what to do for your garden in June

By SONOMA COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS
FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT



Glenn Arsenault deadheads roses in his front yard garden in Sonoma. June is the right time to remove blooms to generate more. Christopher Chung/The Press Democrat

June is the ideal time to start thinking about how you will be flavoring the bounty of your summer harvest of fruits and vegetables. Perhaps you like mint in your lemonade, oregano in your pasta sauce, or sage in compound butters. Capture herb flavors at their peak before flowering begins and have your homegrown seasonings ready in your pantry for later use.

Harvesting, drying herbs

You can harvest and dry perennial herbs such as oregano, marjoram, mint, sage, lemon verbena, and bay throughout the growing season in Sonoma County.

The ideal period to harvest is when the aromatic compounds are at their peak. This is typically June and early July when plant growth is directed toward developing foliage

and before flowering commences. Regardless of the time of year, be sure to regularly trim and use your herbs. Consistent pruning keeps the leaves vibrant and delays flowering.

Early morning after dewfall and before midday heat is the best time to harvest. Snip individual leaves or entire branches and lightly rinse the foliage to remove dust and insects. Gently wrap plants in a tea towel and pat to dry.

Choose a warm, undisturbed space inside to dry your harvest. It should be out of direct sunlight and away from dust and wind. Lay individual leaves or whole branches on a basket or a screen to allow free air circulation above and below the plants. The round, stackable bamboo steamers found at Asian markets make a handy, space-saving air dryer. Cut a round piece of paper towel for the bottoms to keep foliage from falling through.

Another method is to bundle whole branches together with string or a rubber band and hang them upside down. If dust or insects are an issue, protect the bundle by slipping a paper bag with a hole in it over the herbs.

Depending on humidity levels and the specific plant, expect your herbs to dry within two to seven days. When they feel dry and crumbly to the touch, your herbs are ready to store. Transfer the dried plants to glass jars and close with a lid, label, and date. Store in a dark, cool cabinet or drawer, out of direct sun and away from heat because light and heat degrade the plants' essential oils. Store leaves whole. Wait until you're ready to use them to crush or powder them in order to keep their flavor longer.

Save or seek out used commercial brand herb or spice glass jars if you can. They are also available from online sources. The jars can be labeled with paint pens that write on glass. Carefully stored, dried herbs will retain their flavor for at least a year, perhaps two.

Food gardening

Tomatoes are having growth spurts now. To support their tender branches, stake them using staves and soft ties or use wire cages. Remove most of the shoots that grow in the intersections between the stem and the leaves to keep the plant more open, although this is a matter of choice. Don't handle plants in the morning when they are wet from dew to avoid spreading disease and bruising the plant. The stems will bend more easily in the afternoon. For more information on tomato staking techniques go to <https://ucanr.edu/site/uc-master-gardeners-santa-clara-county/tomato-staking-techniques>.

If you plan to grow tomatillos, be aware that they are only slightly self-fertile and you will need at least two plants for a good crop.

As you finish your transition from a spring to summer garden, choose early vegetable varieties with shorter days-to-maturity that have high yields, and/or are drought-

tolerant or drought-resistant for the most efficient use of water. Note that a heat-resistant label refers to air temperature and does not mean that the variety performs well with less water.

In the veggie garden, use yellow sticky tape to control whiteflies or apply insecticidal soap to the undersides of leaves. Larger pests such as hornworms and squash bugs can be handpicked and dropped into a container of soapy water.

When apple, pear, peach, and nectarine trees have formed small fruit, thin them to about four to six inches apart, about the space between your thumb and pinkie finger. Less fruit requires less water and fewer fruits on the tree will grow bigger.

Roses

Deadhead roses and other summer blooming plants for continued bloom. Cut blossoms for bouquets early in the morning. The blooms stay fresh longer if you quickly put them in a vase of warm water. Consider having an old can or jar with water handy as you cut your stems.

Continue to fertilize roses and other heavy feeders such as azaleas, rhododendrons and camellias.

Monitor your roses for pests commonly found in Wine Country including aphids, spider mites, Western flower thrips, Fuller rose beetles, Hoplia beetles, and more. While you are examining your plants, look for rising populations of natural enemies to these pests, such as lady beetles, soldier beetles, and spiders, that often rapidly control them and that you want to encourage. You can find information on rose pests and their common natural enemies here: tinyurl.com/4dyy9663

Check your roses for symptoms of disease. Common diseases in our area include powdery mildew, black spot, rust, and Rose Mosaic Disease (RMD). Also check for symptoms of environmental disorders, such as overwatering. You can find more information and images here: tinyurl.com/2wknby7v

Contributors to this week's column were Janet Baraco, Diane Judd and Debbie Westrick. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County sonomamg.ucanr.edu/ provides environmentally sustainable, science-based horticultural information to Sonoma County home gardeners. Send your gardening questions to scmgpd@gmail.com. You will receive answers to your questions either in this newspaper or from our Information Desk. You can contact the Information Desk directly at 707-565-2608 or mgsonoma@ucanr.edu.