Master Gardener Foundation
Grays Harbor & Pacific Counties, Washington

Pest Corner

August, 2005

Caring for Strawberries Now

August and September is a critical time for next year's strawberry crop. The spring fruit bud cell size is determined now. The more favorable the growing conditions are now, the bigger the cells will be, and the larger the berries will be in the spring. A University of Missouri study showed that it took only two late summer irrigations to increase spring yields by more than 5,000 quarts per acre! Just a week without water can stress the plants resulting in smaller spring berries.

August is also a good time to fertilize strawberries. For plants set out this past spring, apply 4 to 6 ounces of ammonium nitrate (33% actual nitrogen) or 12 to 18 ounces of 10-10-10 per 25 feet of row. Spread the fertilizer uniformly in a band 14 inches wide over the row when the foliage (not the ground) is dry. Brush fertilizer off the leaves to avoid leaf burn. For plants in the second year of growth, increase the application rate to 6 to 8 ounces of ammonium nitrate or 18 to 24 ounces of 10-10-10 per 25 feet of row.

Caring for Berry Crops after Harvest

Cranberries - like raspberries, loganberries, blackberries, and blackcaps - need three things done to them after they are harvested to keep them healthy and ready for next year's crop.

1. Remove all the canes that bore fruit this season. This pruning exposes to the light the new canes that will bear fruit next year and gives them a chance to develop.

2. Check for crown borers particularly in raspberries. Look for dead or dying canes that pull easily away from the root crown. If you find crown borers, dig out and burn the infested canes. There are no chemicals registered for home garden use to control raspberry crown borers.

3. Stop watering and do not fertilize! This slows growth and lets the canes harden up before the first frost.

Tomato Woes

Tomato Leaf Roll occurs when the leaflets of older leaves roll upward along the edges and curl around the midvein. The leaves have a normal green color and are firm and leathery to the touch. Eventually most of the leaves will be affected. It is fairly common, but does not damage the fruit and is not a cause for concern. Leaf-roll may be caused by excessive soil moisture. To alleviate the condition, plant tomatoes in well drained soil.

Tomato Blossom End Rot is a physiological disorder that causes the blossom-end of tomatoes to turn brown or black and appear sunken. The dry rot often affects the fruit in the first cluster while fruit that sets later is usually not affected. It is related to a calcium deficiency brought on by drought, fluctuating soil moisture, or excessive and rapid foliar growth from too much nitrogen. To resolve it, do not allow the soil to become excessively dry between irrigations. Mulch to conserve moisture so that uptake is not interrupted. Add lime to the garden this winter to alleviate blossom–end rot problems next year.

Tomato Late Blight Fungus causes tomato foliage to quickly dry up and the fruits to develop gray-green spots that turn brown. The fungal disease is equally devastating to both tomatoes and potatoes and was responsible for the great Irish potato famines from 1845 to 1847. Since 1990, there have been severe outbreaks of this disease in both the United States and Canada. There are no commercial tomato varieties that are resistant to it. The month of August is notorious for this disease to occur. Warm summer temperatures combined with dew, fog and rain are ideal conditions for its development. Fortunately, there are several things you can do to prevent a tomato crop from being infected.

1. Place a temporary roof over the plants to keep moisture off the foliage

2. Avoid wetting foliage when irrigating, especially in late afternoon and evening.

3. Stake and prune plants to provide good air circulation.

4. Use fungicide sprays before disease begins to prevent complete crop destruction. Fungicides registered for use include Bravo Weather Stik and Kop-R-Spray.

Pest Corner is the title of a series of gardening articles which appears in the Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties Master Gardener Newsletter.