

The Garden Corner

By: Art Kammerlohr

Master Gardeners of Johnson County Missouri

This has been a glorious spring – lots of cool days and plenty of rain. All of our flower and vegetable beds are bursting with spectacular growth with the promise of showy flowers and garden produce to come. Not only are the plants we love doing great; so are the weeds and you can almost hear the bugs licking their lips preparing to dine at their leisure. Now is the time to get, and stay ahead of, these two annual misanthropes.

If you haven't gone and done a thorough purging of the weeds in your beds, what are you waiting for? Pulling weeds now will reduce the amount of seeds that will certainly return with a vengeance in a few weeks. After you have finished your weeding adventure, cover the area with two to three inches of mulch. Not only will the mulch keep the weeds from returning; but, it will help keep the soil at a more even temperature and conserve the moisture in the ground. I use chipped wood mulch during this time of year. Sometime around September or early October, the mulch is turned into the soil thus providing a means for adding organic material to the earthy environment. Remember! As the mulch decomposes, it is using the available nitrogen in the soil. If you want your plants to retain their fine green appearance, you will have to add nitrogen throughout the growing season. Some may consider this technique as a form of cheating; but, from the onset of the growing season, I water with a water soluble fertilizer until mid-July. Stopping in July gives the plants sufficient time to "harden off" in time for the freezing temperatures of late October.

Bugs! We've all heard the old saying: "There's only one kind of good bug – that's a dead bug!" If that is your philosophy, the shelves of local vendors are well stocked with all you need to wage war. But before you do, consider this. Those hole-riddled Black-eyed Susan are the host plant to the beautiful Buckeye butterfly. The Tiger Swallowtail feeds on Lantana. By spraying or powdering your plants, there is a very good chance you have destroyed future generations of several different types of butterflies. Instead of using poison, might I suggest a less lethal approach? There are insecticidal soaps which are inexpensive and easily prepared. Hand picking works wonders with the Tomato Hornworm. Water spray gets rid of aphids. And, planting companion plants will discourage armies of plant predators.

If you would like more information about the more environmentally friendly way to combat the pesky critters, write: 370 NW 121 Rd., Warrensburg, MO 64093 or email: maandpak@embarqmail.com and I'll get right back with you. The really hot days of summer aren't far off now. Please take plenty of breaks and drink lots of water so you will be around for next month's column.