The Garden Corner  
By: Art Kammerlohr  
Master Gardeners of Johnson County Missouri

It’s official! This past May is the wettest ever – by a bunch! With warm, wet weather comes the annual scourge: mildew or powdery mildew. The good news is this fungus is a living, breathing critter; and if you’re living, you can be destroyed. I know! Violence in a gardening article. Who would have thought it? A mixture of 40% milk and 60% water will kill it. That is, if you can live with yourself. Repeat the application every 10 to 14 days. Here are some other tips that can keep the unwelcomed guest from your garden.

There are plants that seem to attract this affliction: lilacs, phlox grapes, squash, cucumbers, monarda are especially susceptible. Your first line of defense would be to purchase resistant varieties/cultivars. This doesn’t always guarantee mildew free plants so remember the mixture above. That is just about the most natural treatment you will ever come across, and it works. Whenever possible, try to stay away from chemicals. 

Once you’ve got your plant growing well, make certain there is good air circulation. It is the dampness of our Missouri spring that allows this fungus to explode. Air circulation allows the leaves to dry much quicker. And while we’re on the subject of dampness, be mindful of how you’re watering. If you can afford them, soaker hoses are the best for delivering water to the root zone, conserving water, and not splashing water on leaves.

However, most of us water by hand. If you have a problem with mildew, do your watering in the morning so the leaves and the surrounding area have a chance to dry. One more sentinel in your defensive line could be the addition of mulch. A layer of mulch will keep the soil from splattering up on the leaves during watering or rain showers. That one action will keep the fungus from spreading.

And then a little later on when the days grow shorter and the first hint of a north wind blows, it will be time to clean up. With all the plants that had mildew, you will want to toss the stems, leaf litter, pruned material on a brush pile and burn it.

Anything else? Write: 370 NW 121 Rd., Warrensburg, MO 64093; or, email: maandpak@embarqmail.com and I’ll get back with you. Enjoy the summer!