

GARDENING LETTERS

by Doug Green

The view from our garden has been pretty good this summer. This is probably the best vegetable garden we have had in quite a few years. It will however be remembered as the 'year of the rototiller'. Two engine jobs and finally a thrown rod has caused the tiller to be an ornament in the garage for much of the summer as we waited for a new engine to arrive. While I admire a hoe, it can only do so much when the gardens are on our scale. We did manage to keep the weeds under check in the vegetable garden, only the top perennial nursery really suffered. Our garden trials have been going on very well this year and I'll report on them in a future issue once the summer is over.

We did use a lot of bone and blood meal in our garden this year and I think that this is the primary cause for our plants' amazing growth. The sweet corn is well over my head and has filled out with huge ears, the tomatoes are bending the tomato cages over with the heavy yields, and generally speaking all the other crops are looking very good. This bone and blood meal is a long term, slow release type of fertilizer so it tends to be effective most of the summer and having tried it, I can heartily recommend it to you. We gave each plant a few tablespoons at the start of the season and a tablespoon at the end of

July. The corn got a bit sprinkled over the top of the emerging sprouts, (it doesn't burn) and really shot up.

We did have some trouble with potato bugs this year but found that several applications of Rotenone really knocked them back. They were all over everything, the tomatoes, the eggplant (which still hasn't recovered), the peppers, the cole crops and even the potatoes. Having tried hand picking and stomping, we felt that the Rotenone would do better as it would get them as they ate and could not hide from it.

Our experiments with the Tanglefoot were very promising. Tanglefoot is a sticky compound that you spread around the trunks of trees to stop crawling insects or caterpillars (gypsy moth, tent caterpillars, ants) from crawling up into the tree and doing damage. I applied the Tanglefoot to our trees in early May and it is still sticky in late

August. The only problem we had was with grass growing up next to the stump and making a bridge over the Tanglefoot.

I have also spread shadecloth around some of our trees and covered the cloth with grass clippings. This shadecloth or weed fabric prevents weeds from growing underneath the fabric but it allows water to pass through. I personally am coming to really like this stuff and will be using it a lot as we get our flower gardens on line in the next few years. It really does cut down on the weeding. Those of you who have had some landscaping done in the past few years may have some of this material. Laid down under a mulch, it cuts down on maintenance and weeding.

I will be taking my geraniums into the greenhouses pretty soon to get them ready for next spring's propagation. Let me suggest that if you want to hold a geranium over, the easiest way to do so is to dig it up and pot it into a 6" pot (or larger). Give it a trimming to reduce the broken leaves or straggly growth and put it into a cool but sunny windowsill. Next spring you can cut the leggy yellow growth and leaves off the plant to force it to get really bushy and then replant it into your garden. I know that some of you manage to leave them in the basement or in the garage, but I have never managed to do that.

Some of you may have kept a poinsettia over the summer in an attempt to get it to flower again. Don't forget that mid-September is the time to give them a heavy pruning to force the new growth for bud initiation. Lots of feeding and only natural sunlight will bring them into bloom about mid-November. Good luck. The All America trials just released their new winners and there is

another petunia among the winners as well as a few vegetables. I'll have more on this next spring. I can tell you that we grew some of last year's All America winners this year in our garden. So far, I am not very impressed with the Snapdragon 'Princess White with Purple Eye'; it does not bloom as much as the old 'Carpet' series and frankly, I think the colours are muddy and not very attractive. The bush basil, Purple Ruffles is an attractive plant and put in the right spot would be an attractive addition to the garden. It does have a basil taste and is useful in salads etc. A further report will be coming out when I write our trials report this fall.

Those of you who have been to our greenhouses and nursery will remember the large Manitoba Maple that covered the front of our house. I have to report on its passing. The ice storm last year knocked a lot of branches off it and weakened the trunk, so with trusy chain saw in hand, I cut it down this summer. Had a back-hoe come to dig out the stump leaving a very bare and exposed house. This was our year to raze the place and start at the bottom to landscape the house. As I write, I have almost finished the rock walls to make the two beds across the front of the house and using a skid steer loader, I piled up a huge mound of rocks to make a large rockery at the side of the house. Hopefully by the time the

snow comes, we will have a lot of the beds laid out, the front yard levelled and grassed and the place will begin to look less and less like a war zone and more and more like a nursery. Andrea and I are quite excited about our plans to make our display beds and show off our plants to you. Even if you are not in the market for plants drive by or drop in to look at our progress (not on Sundays please).

One major thing that we did this year, and in fact are still in the process of doing, is installed watering systems in the nursery and greenhouses. This watering misting system really puts the water out and makes life a lot easier. I installed a run of sprinklers in the garden as well and having seen the difference they make to the plants, I intend to continue to install water in the garden to really keep the plants growing. You may want to think about how much water is available to your plants, for really effective vegetable growing, the plants need about 1" of water/week. Anything less than this and yields begin to decrease. Even if you have a small garden, a rain barrel and a watering can, you will be way ahead of those who do not water. We found that our raised beds really needed the water in this dry year and I think without it we could have seen our yields really cut back.



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