

JUNE GARDENING TIPS

By now I hope you are enjoying your blooming larkspur. I lost some of mine to the rabbits (outside the range of my dogs' electric fence!) and some turned yellow due to the excess rain. However, those that remain are blooming in all their glory. Don't forget to spread the seeds as the pods dry and you should have larkspur from here on out.

Deadheading is a crucial part of gardening. It helps perennials bloom longer, can prevent some from spreading, and produces healthier plants. Lilacs should be done as soon as they finish blooming. All roses should be deadheaded to keep them blooming all season. Fall blooming mums and asters need to be pinched back about 1-2" until July 1st, then leave them alone. For extensive deadheading tips, see www.GardenGateMagazine.com Check out the Online Extra for a printable, handy carry-along list.

Now is a good time to cut back your amsonias. Give them a good haircut after they finish blooming and you'll have lovely, bushy plants for the fall. I did it the first time with great fear, but believe me, it works.

Birdbaths are a love of mine, but I spent years fighting algae and just plain filthy water bowls. I couldn't afford what I liked and didn't like what I could afford, until I came up with an interesting solution a couple of years ago. I use glazed saucers (Garden Treasures) and set them on either an upturned, matching pot, or an interesting log of wood as a base. My favorite is a chunk of white birch from our old favorite tree. With the glazed surface you can keep it clean by blasting it with the hose set on "jet". Here's an interesting trick I read about but haven't tried - came from an English grandmother. Start with a clean birdbath, fill it with fresh water. Bind together 6-8 stems of lavender flowers along with a daylily leaf and lay the bundle in the water. One bundle of lavender will keep the water algae-free for two or three weeks. Replace more often during hot weather. The chemicals released by the lavender won't kill algae already growing, but will prevent new growth from starting. If you try it, and it works, let us know.

Another little gardening trick: use Clorox disinfectant wipes to sterilize your pruners between uses.

On a different note, for some light summer reading, try Susan Wittig Albert's mystery series featuring herbalist China Bayles. Her newest book, Wormwood, is especially interesting as our heroine visits a historical Shaker village. The Shakers were known for their great interest and knowledge of herbs - mainly for medicinal purposes. The book includes recipes and herbal formulas along with historical letters and journal excerpts. Ms Albert also writes a family friendly mystery series featuring Beatrix Potter.

Happy Gardening!