



by Pam Bresler, HCMG

ALL THINGS EDIBLE May

It's official....we are now living in a desert! Not really, but a desert is defined as having 9.75" or less of rain per year and we've had only 3.4" of rain in six months. On an annual basis, we're gardening in desert conditions, and keeping water in the ground is nearly impossible without drip irrigation and plenty of mulch. We may soon have water restrictions, so bonus points if you have a rainwater collection system.

With this dry weather and above average temperatures, spider mites are a problem. Have you noticed our native cedar trees "bronzing?" Cedars are heavily infested with spider mites. This does not bode well for susceptible plants like tomatoes. A hard spray on the underside of the leaves, about every other day for two weeks, will usually solve the problem. To prevent the problem, spray tomatoes and other plants with a kelp-molasses mixture every two weeks. Use 2 Tab. kelp and 1 Tab. of molasses to a gallon of water. This spray makes the leaves "tougher" to resist insects and fungal spores. The kelp also encourages bloom set. In the autumn, using this spray several times can make plants more resistant to freezing.

Grasshoppers are out earlier than usual due to our extreme heat and drought. Spreading Nolo or Semaspore bait as soon as you see young grasshoppers may help reduce numbers. The microorganism in the baits, *Nosema locustae*, spreads a disease to grasshoppers. As diseased grasshoppers are cannibalized by healthy grasshoppers, the disease spreads throughout the grasshopper population.

This year I'm waging war on squash vine borers and squash bugs. I love yellow squash and seeing a plant loaded with small squash collapse overnight from borers is very disheartening. If you love summer squash, this is a battle worth fighting!

Dust the stems near the soil with Dipel (*Bacillus thuringiensis*, or Bt) to discourage squash vine borers. Row cover will also help exclude the adult moth of the borer, as well as the squash bugs. You might need to hand-pollinate, as bees are also excluded. The moth has a red abdomen with brown wings. An early sign of the borer is a pile of green frass on the stem. Also, check for brown eggs at the base of the stem. If the stem gets heavily damaged from borers, you can split the stem, remove the borer with a nail or ice pick, dust inside of the stem with Dipel and bury the damaged stem with a little soil on top. That may save the plant until harvest.

Some people make a Dipel solution and inject it with a syringe into the stem. If you suspect you have squash bugs, go out at dusk and aiming at the base of the stem where it enters the ground, pour a steady stream of water from a watering can, without the "rose" on the end. If squash bugs are present, they will come crawling out of the ground. The adults look like stink bugs and are brownish gray with a flat back. The small nymphs are light gray with black legs. The thumb-and-forefinger method works, or for the squeamish, a spray of spinosad or neem oil will dispatch them to insect heaven. Examine your plants for eggs, which are shiny, dark brown clusters on the leaves, which should be removed. The squash bug can attack other cucurbits such as melons, cucumbers and pumpkins.

Seeds to sow in May: snap beans, lima beans, chard, black-eyed peas, southern peas, beets, radish, pumpkin, turnips, summer squash

Transplants for May: cantaloupe, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, summer squash, herbs, eggplant, tomatillo, watermelons, sweet potato slips

Happy gardening and keep doing that rain dance!