



by Pam Bresler, HCMG

ALL THINGS EDIBLE June

We are now officially in the driest seven-month period since records have been kept. The good news is that our drought-causing La Nina weather pattern should end in July. The bad news? July is historically one of our driest months, and unless we get a tropical system, we may be waiting until September for rain. To compound our gardening woes, this April was the hottest one on record. My favorite source for long-range weather info is the blog of our LCRA meteorologist, Bob Rose. http://www.lcra.org/water/conditions/weather/weather_column.html

This year we can blame many of our gardening failures on the extreme weather. My peach trees bloomed profusely, set a lot of fruit, and I was faithfully thinning them. Despite the occasional deep watering, my trees have aborted most of their peaches. With little soil moisture, it was a lost cause. Regardless of how much you irrigate, the result is inferior to nitrogen-rich, calcium-free rain.

Currently, the number one tomato problem is "Why won't my tomatoes set fruit? I have large, healthy plants." Large-fruited tomatoes have a hard time setting fruit if daytime temperatures are over 90°, or nighttime temperatures are over 70° or under 50°. April 1 was 91° degrees, yet April 4 was 34° degrees, which are difficult conditions for any tomato!

Early June is the time to start fall tomatoes from seeds. Fall tomatoes need to be planted by early July to mature before the first frost, as they ripen slowly in cooler fall temperatures and need a long growing season. I try to carry my indeterminate and small-fruited tomatoes, like "Sweet 100" and "Juliet" through the entire season, but replant your determinate tomatoes to assure a fall crop. I've also had success taking cuttings from healthy tomatoes to start fall tomatoes. Seeds of okra, eggplant and peppers can be planted in June. Transplants of okra, tomatoes and peppers can also go in this month.

If grasshoppers are still plaguing you, see last month's column on Nolo and Semaspore Bait. Another grasshopper tip comes from John Dromgoole's website: Mix one to two cups of the powdered Kaolin clay with a gallon of water and a teaspoon of mild dishwashing soap. To make mixing easier, the Kaolin clay should be slowly added to a cup or two of water first to make a paste with the soap. Add the rest of the gallon of water. Shake well and spray this mixture onto all leaf surfaces. The white film on the leaf repels the grasshoppers. Another spray-on recipe comes from Jay Mertz of Rabbit Hill Farm: Mix one cup of diatomaceous earth with one gallon of water along with two tablespoons of molasses. Spray this onto the plants. Diatomaceous earth looks like talcum powder, but to the insects it is like broken glass.

If pill bugs and snails are a problem, Sluggo Plus will control both of them. You can also use sunken traps with stale beer or a slice of apple. Putting a large pot over the trap creates shade which attracts more insects to the trap. Here's to a bountiful harvest....minus the bugs!