

Garden Tales

Atlantic County Master Gardener Program Newsletter

Volume 2, Issue 2



Debugging Your House Plants by Phil Cross

Ever wonder where those gnats and flies you see in the house during the winter come from? Well, most likely you needn't look any farther than your house plants.

Whether you keep your plants indoors all year-round or place them outdoors for the Summer such pests will lay eggs in the potting soil to launch their protege later on.

You can eliminate this indoor pest problem in both cases by doing the following out of doors on a dry overcast day when temperatures are between fifty and eighty degrees F.: (avoid treating plants in direct sun)

1. Treat the above ground growth from all angles by applying a medium forceful or fine spray (depending on the durability of the plant) to foliage and stems using a dilution of insecticidal soap. Thorough coverage is a must. This will not only cleanse and brighten the leaves but also help to annihilate chewing and sucking insects. A solution of biodegradable dish washing liquid can also be used but will not be effective against many insects – in which case, a follow-on insecticide spray must be applied as well. Check gardening sources to assure that the plant will not be adversely affected by soaps. If so, use plain water.

2. Clean the bottom of the pots or containers and any saucer-like attachments.

3. Treat the soil by thoroughly soaking it, using a watering can, with a soil insect killing insecticide solution.

4. Place the plants where they can dry off and drain within a few hours before bringing them indoors.

Plants that may be sensitive to soaps:

- Ferns, Bleeding Heart
- Gardenia, Jade
- Lantana Sweet Peas
- Crown of Thorns
- Nasturtium
- Eater Lily, Violets
- Hawthorn, Cherry
- Japanese Maple
- Chestnut, Mountain Ash
- Others as listed on the label



Some varieties of geranium, impatiens and poinsettias have shown injury with soaps. Consider testing a small sample before making a full-scale application.

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TO SEEP OR BREW COMPOST TEA by Phil Cross



Most gardeners use the traditional seep method of making compost tea. This is the age old way whereby a cloth bag, usually burlap, is filled with compost and then immersed in a barrel of water for a day or so while periodically agitating it to cause the water to take on a brown tone much like the color of tea. The solution is then sprinkled around plants, especially seedlings, as a mild starter fertilizer.

Of late, however, many gardeners are also making compost tea using the brewing method to gain benefits far beyond it being merely a mild fertilizer. Those benefits stem from the high concentration of beneficial bacteria contained in brewed tea such that when the tea is sprinkled on plant leaves the beneficial bacteria it contains inhibit invasions from detrimental bacteria and fungus. And, when watered into the soil to penetrate to root depth, the bacteria not only thwart soil resident detrimental bacteria and fungus, but also produce enzymes that provide nutrients to the roots in a form that can be readily taken up. Here's how the brewing method works; or more accurately, how the brewing method grows and multiplies beneficial bacteria for use in the garden as a disease control and nutrient facilitator:

First, fresh compost, high in active bacteria, is loosely immersed in a barrel of chlorine-free water since chlorine will kill bacteria at the get-go. (If tap water is used it should be allowed to stand in an open top barrel or tub for a few days to dissipate the chlorine through evaporation. Better yet, is to use water from a pond, stream, well, or rain water collected as roof runoff.)

Second, food and nitrogen additives for the bacteria are stirred in at the rate of a tablespoon per gallon of

water. Examples of food sources are kelp, alfalfa or fish meal, or organic molasses. An example of a nitrogen source is blood meal.

Third, bubblers of the type used in fish tanks, are placed at the bottom of the barrel, connected to the air pump, turned on, and left operating for a period of three to four days, with occasional mild stirring of the mix, and adding another dose of food and nitrogen sources midway through that period..

Fourth, at the end of the third or fourth day, the bubblers are turned off and removed from the barrel. The mix is allowed to settle for twenty minutes then strained into easily handled containers – using a strainer that is not so fine that it prohibits minute compost particles from passing through. The reason being that many bacteria are attached to the particles.

Fifth, the resulting strained solution is then diluted at the ratio of 1:10 (one part solution to ten parts chlorine-free water) to produce the tea that can be sprinkled on plants. It is very important at this point to be aware that this step must take place within twenty four hours from the completion of the brewing process, since leaving the bacteria in the unoxygenated water for a longer period will cause them to die off.

So the next time you think about making compost tea don't just seep it – also consider the brewing method as a disease preventative and nutrient stimulant as well.

Congratulations to our Spring 2005 Graduates

Congratulations to our Spring 2005 Graduates of the Cape-Atlantic Master Gardening Program. The following students have now graduated from the initial training course and are well on their way to becoming Certified Master Gardeners.

Heather Boone
Michelle Brunetti (Post)
Ann Cinquina
Philip Cross
Stacey Davis
Camille Griffin
Thornton Hole
Anthony Jones
Evonne Kaminski

Jean MacNamara
Mary McDermott
MaryAnne Mooney
Gloria Perakovich
Judith Ryan-Heitz
Charles Senack



GREAT JOB EVERYONE!!!!



Demonstration Gardens: We have finished 5 of the 6 vegetable beds, and have the block to finish the last vegetable and the blueberry plot. Three of the beds have been planted and we have eight types of lettuce, three types of kale, swiss chard, beets, radishes, parsley, cilantro and carrots growing.

Estell Manor Garden: This will be an ongoing project that Master Gardeners can visit in their available time to get some hours on the books. We are also trying to plan a once a month group work time.

Library Programs: Those MG's interested in doing a small presentation or demonstration at the Atlantic City Library please let Mona know. Presentation or demonstration must be 45 minutes to an hour in length.

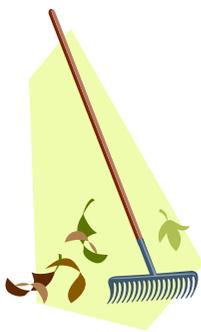
Atlantic City Courtyard Project: Stage one, the cleanup, was finished on Sept. 7th thanks to Anthony, Gloria, Rosemarie and Michelle. The next stage will be planting and designing the layout of the courtyard. Mona will keep you informed of progress and further dates.

Northfield Community School (NCS): We are beginning to start a new program with the NCS. They need our help to get their greenhouse running and ideas for projects to do throughout the year. Stay tuned for more details.

Help-line: The help-line is running smoothly, and this month it looks like every day has at least one name on the books. Thanks for all of your time.



Seasonal Activities - By Mona Bawgus



Another gardening season has come to an end. Here is a list of some Autumn chores that will make next year's gardening a little easier.

- ☉ Most important is the removal of dead plant material. This will help minimize the spread of disease and insects.
- ☉ Take some time to write down successes and failures. Start a garden journal if you haven't already.
- ☉ Begin planting spring flowering bulbs. Try something unusual. I planted the Allium "Globemaster" last year which grows to almost 3 feet with 8 inch wide round purple globes made up of 1,100 florets. They were a lot of fun and added a whimsical aspect to the garden.
- ☉ Continue to water your perennials, trees and shrubs before the ground freezes. While the plants appear dormant, the roots are still actively growing and functioning. Evergreens need more watering than other plants.
- ☉ Lastly, now is the ideal time for a soil test. Any amendments will have time to incorporate for next Spring's planting.

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