

July Languor

Written by Alice Massey

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Iced tea, lazy afternoons in the hammock under the palmettos, and just letting the bees and butterflies have the garden to themselves. That's what comes to mind this month. Everything moves in slow motion, slightly hazy and mirage like. Lowcountry heat will do that; it is nature's way of calming us so we can slow down and appreciate our surroundings.

The lightest of clothes, sunscreen, a wide brimmed hat and plenty of water are in order. The few necessary chores for this month can easily be accomplished without too much exertion.

If you have planted vegetables, continue to keep them picked. Allowing them to go to seed slows the production of additional produce. Keeping the herbs snipped regularly helps to maintain a shapely plant and containers of fresh herbs in your kitchen look and smell terrific.

A slow stroll through the garden with your morning coffee allows you to see and snip off any flowers past their prime. This encourages more blooms. Deadheading lilies, and bulbs like crinum and amaryllis, encourages the plants to send energy to the bulb rather than wasting energy making seeds.

To avoid burning tender roots while it is so hot, hold off fertilizing with the exception of the heavy feeders like bananas. Broadcast a complete fertilizer which contains slow release nitrogen under the canopy and water well.

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The faded flower stalks of cannas and gingers can be removed to encourage new growth.

The Monarch butterfly larvae have munched on some of the citrus leaves and those of the Giant Swallowtail have completely decimated the Butterfly weed, *Asclepias*. It looks a bit of a mess now but I'll gladly share in anticipation of the butterflies to come and the plants will quickly recover. Parsley is another favorite of the Swallowtails; it is best to have extra plants available just for them.

Remember those Sun Patiens I mentioned last time? With only about 3 hours of sun daily they wilt badly unless I keep them very well watered. Planting such thirsty plants is not something I'll do again. Vinca, with all the new colors available, would have been a better choice for this location. It tolerates drought well.

There was a freak storm over the Fourth of July weekend which opened my eyes to the power of nature. We have a very heavy 24" ceramic pot planted with a Japanese Maple tree on our deck. As we looked out the window at the approaching storm the wind picked up this container, which weighs several hundred pounds, and tossed it off the deck. Scary.

According to Wiki, July has two official flowers: Larkspur, and my personal favorite, the Water Lily. A new one in my water garden is *Nymphaea* 'Wanvisa.' The peachy pink translucent petals are flecked with a lighter cream color. Grooming water plants is not unlike weeding but ever so much cooler during this part of the summer.

The afternoon breeze is picking up and the hammock is waiting. This is the best time of day in Beaufort.