

Hope Springs Eternal

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Gardeners are a hearty lot. We have to be. Nothing is ever finished in a garden; change is constant, inevitable and often frustrating. One never has control over the plants, or enemies of the plants, yet we persevere, stumbling along and smiling when that perfect rose opens or tomato ripens. It is the process that holds us and keeps us out there doing foolish things like trying to grow plants not zoned for this area and always finding a spot for just one more. Well, that's my problem anyhow.

If it is not growing -□□ or the failure to grow -□□ we are dealing with, it is the critters. At this time of year the new crop of fawns are exploring our gardens and tasting everything. If you live in a deer free area, count your blessings. Recently a squirrel developed a taste for the buds on my tropical Hibiscus; we found petals and chewed buds all over the deck. I must admit the squirrel had good taste; it was a beautiful plant. However, my most formidable foes this year have been marsh rabbits. They have done far more damage than a herd of deer in my garden. Remember the carrots disappearing in the old Bugs Bunny movies? Whole plants have completely disappeared. Are you plagued with rabbits too? I've not had this issue before and wonder about the increased numbers of rabbits this year.

After a fairly dry spring I've been getting plenty of rain at my house lately. My irrigation system is set to "OFF" for the time being. With all this rain washing nutrients away and warm weather encouraging growth, our plants are getting pretty hungry. This is the right time to trim plants, especially your perennials, and give them a good feed. They will reward you with a new flush of growth within a few weeks. I'll be using a good organic fertilizer and following the directions on the container. If you are using a chemical fertilizer I would use it quarter strength on a weekly basis, remember weakly weekly. This is especially important for container plants.Ã Â

Have you noticed the Crape Myrtles around town? They seem to be unusually full of flowers this

year. My Crinum lilies are slow to bloom this year but I've seen many showing off in other gardens, especially an old favorite the deep rose 'Ellen Bosenquet'. My Amaryllis did not bloom well this year; all I have are many green, strap-like, leaves. I am attributing it to the fact that the bulbs have gotten buried too deep. Amaryllis like to have the tops of the bulbs exposed and mine have been covered over with leaf litter. It means I have to dig them all and raise the bulbs up. I'll add some balanced fertilizer to the hole when I do that; no need to buy a special bulb formulation as most have too high an amount of phosphorus. Unless your soil test says otherwise, the soils in Beaufort County are already rich in this element.

Don't forget to keep deadheading your flowering plants. This prevents the plant from directing its energy to seed formation rather than more flowers. Your elephant ears, the Colocasias and the Alocasias, are hungry, thirsty plants. Give them plenty of a good organic compost and water.

Do you see any pests on your plants? Often the first and best defense is a good hard spray of water from your hose. Large pests like tomato hornworms need to be picked off by hand and disposed of. If you see a row of tiny white projectiles on the back of the hornworm they are beneficial larvae that are already destroying it for you. Speaking of tomatoes, earlier this year I received a free package of tomato seed. The reviews on this particular variety were not great but ever hopeful I thought I would try them anyway. The plants grew beautifully; I don't think I have ever seen a fuller or prettier tomato plant. They promptly set fruit and there was nary a pest of any kind. At this point I should have been forewarned, things were definitely going too well. When the fruit ripened I anxiously tasted one and, well, I was underwhelmed to say the least; no taste and the texture of mashed potatoes. After several more taste testings, the plants were composted. They didn't even have enough flavor to use the fruit for sauce. I pulled the plants up and composted them. Moral of the story is you get what you pay for - or perhaps I should have listened to the negative reviews. Just another example of a gardener always hoping. We are a strange, always looking for the sunny side, group.

It's too hot to do much outside so I'll just sit here, drinking my tea and reading garden blogs about the latest horticultural finds. Always dreaming about what new plant will tempt me. It's a sickness. Garden nerds just can't help themselves. Have you seen the new 'Scarlet Torch' Bottlebrush? Sigh . . .