

The Dog Days Are Here

Written by Alice Massey

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It is that time of year again, the dog days of summer, the time of year when the temperature's at it's peak. The ancients supposedly called them dog days because Sirius, also known as the Dog Star, was in close proximity to the sun this time of year, causing the intense late summer heat. I always equate August in the Lowcountry with February in Minnesota; you just can't get out and garden in either. Of course, that is not exactly true, we still have our lovely South Carolina mornings when we can walk around and take note of what is growing well. and where we might like to make some changes. The lyricist Gus Kahn surely knew what he was talking about when he wrote the words to that song about Carolina in the morning.

Let's grab that second cup of coffee and take a stroll through the garden and see what we can see. The perennials have been pummeled by the heat, the drought and the deluges, and are taking a much-needed rest. Some of them could use a good deadheading to remove spent flowers and foliage. If we clean them up now they will be in good shape to rebound as the weather cools. A light application of compost at this time will be just the right healthy snack for them. Some of the mulch we added this past spring will have broken down by now and could use some replenishing.

One group of plants that are coming into their best at this time are the tropicals; they love and thrive on our heat and humidity. The extended drought earlier this summer seemed to hold back their growth but they are coming on strong now. The Hedychium gingers are in full bloom and are perfuming the neighborhood; the variety Dr. Moy is just outstanding as is the old standby White Butterfly. The hibiscus, both the tropical and the hardy varieties are at their peak but I can see where the hummingbirds have torn the tender petals as they search for nectar. The mandevillas are blooming on many a mailbox and some of the prettiest I have seen this year are white ones in hanging baskets. They just seem to have a refreshing, icy cool look about them that is welcoming in August, and they are stunning in the evening. The elephant ears are finally putting on some size, and I saw a hand of bananas on a friend's tree the other day. Even if you have the non fruiting varieties of bananas, their flowers are still pretty awesome. Although they are not hardy here, the crotons, with their brilliantly-colored and oddly shaped leaves, really add some punch to the garden.

Can we find a spot for a fall veggie garden? It is time to start thinking about starting those seeds ,and the Master Gardeners will be holding a class on this at the Port Royal Farmer's Market on August 20th at 11:30. Rumor has it there might be some seeds to share at that time. Hope to

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see you there.

The coffee mug is empty and the cicadas are humming; they're telling me it is going to be another scorcher. It is time to head back inside to finish the garden planning in the luxury of air conditioning.