



Summer, the mere word conjures up an idyllic time of warmth, heavy-scented flowers, song birds and bees a 'buzzing'. A time of languor and heavenly peace. Maybe for a few hours . . . , but for the gardener summer is a time of weeding, watering and the wonderful joy picking fresh vegetables from the patch. The yard is ablaze with color, together with the beautiful butterflies that grace the sky. They love a place to sip nectar, but also a place in which to rest and stretch their wings in the sun to regain their strength to continue their flight. Place some rocks in sunny locale for them to perch on; or provide a small, shallow water bath that contains a few stones. The butterflies can light on the stones, drink and bask. Simple measures can bring enormous delight, especially when these beauties like what they find and come back to visit often.

Vacations are a big part of summer. However, they also pose somewhat of a dilemma --- what to do with the garden while away? Some people are lucky and they have installed a drip irrigation system that operates with a timer or two. Some still have to rely on the hose or other manual method. It is a good idea to get a reliable neighbor or house/garden sitter to tend to the hose hauling while you are away. Even with a good irrigation set-up, we often still have some plants that need individual attention. My property fits neatly into the last category. Whenever I put in a new plant, I hook it up to the drip system, if it is feasible. Otherwise, it goes into the older category of 'hand watering'. That is when the problems grow. I have always been lucky with having a house sitter, but even with their diligence, some plants go wanting. Too bad! My goal is to go fully drip irrigation sometime! Nevertheless, until then it is a dicey situation. Sons are wonderful in a pinch . . . !

Fruit trees are bearing fully this time of year, especially the stone fruit. Apricots, plums, peaches and cherries are so juicy and delicious. Then there is the abundance of berries, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, loganberries, huckleberries, boysenberries, oh my YUM! You can just taste them now. It is the ideal time to consider putting some by for a mid-winter treat. Lots of people still can and preserve them in jellies, jams and butters. Freezing is also a good option, especially if you flash-freeze them, singly. Not one at a time, but separated on a tray and put into the freezer for several hours to freeze. Then they can be placed in your Freezer-ready Zip bags, labeled and put back into the freezer. This keeps them from gluing together and you can pop some out each morning for your cereal, or made into a pie at Thanksgiving. The options are endless and the effort minimal. Fresh Peach and Raspberry Pie at Thanksgiving is not your usual fare, but so utterly yummy!



Our yards can always use a bit of sprucing up when an annual has passed its peak. Some great ideas to go into your yard at this juncture of time include ageratum, balsam, begonia, coleus, cosmos, dianthus, gaillardia, gazania, gloriosa daisy, impatiens, lisianthus, marguerite, marigold, portulaca, salvia, sunflowers, vinca and zinnia. It is also a good idea now to divide established clumps of day lilies --- after they have finished their bloom. Replant them immediately in a sunny area. Space the roots about two feet apart and water them thoroughly while replanting. Another wonder this time of year is the gaillardia. If you need to fill a bare spot, especially during the heat of summer, try it. Their cheery orange/red tones are easy to grow and can be mass planted or grown in containers. They love full sun and do not need much water. Deadhead to keep new growth emerging.

Putting your vegetable harvest away for a later time is a bit trickier. The only sure fire method I have found is to just eat it as fast as you can! Or share your largesse with the neighborhood, family and friends. String beans, broccoli and squash just do not lend themselves to freezing very well and to can them cooks the dickens out of them --- if they are to remain safe from botulism. Peas flash freeze nicely, just as I mentioned about berries. Corn can also be cut from the cob and flash frozen. I have also frozen whole peppers and tomatoes. The result after thawing is not perfect visually, but the flavor is and they work great in the winter soup pot or stews and sauces. What could be easier than washing some freshly picked tomatoes, dry them and pop them into a freezer bag for use later? If you want to get creative, flash freeze slices of red and green Bell peppers, corn, and some cherry tomatoes (separately). When frozen mix them together in a freezer bag and you have an instant stir-fry. Just toss in something fresh and voila! Dinner is ready. Herbs, I find can just not be frozen 'as is'. Pesto can be made and frozen, just do not add the Olive Oil until after it thaws.



One of the joys of summer is using the backyard grill. Here vegetables excel as well as stone fruits. Dinner can be prepared in a snap with some easy meat entrée (or not) and something freshly picked from the garden. Brush with a dab of Olive Oil and place over indirect heat. You can cover them to speed up the process or not. A bunch of Rosemary sprigs placed over the coals imparts a heavenly aroma. All manner of fruits and vegetables can be grilled. Artichokes, asparagus, squash, peppers, green beans, tomatoes, halved peaches, bananas, mangoes. Your choices are only limited by imagination. Corn is wonderful grilled, with or without the husk on. Try making a little pesto butter to slather on after they are done or some fresh made fruit butter. Pineapple is a great salsa maker; try some on your next serving of grilled zucchini.

BonAppetit.com and CookingLight.com are great resources for easy to fix and healthful cooking.

July is a bonus month for those who planted warm-season vegetables and flowers last spring. Sitting back and enjoying your personal vegetable harvest and taking in the floral display are one of the joys of a warm summer day. The aroma of your garden from early in the day, through the heat of the afternoon, to the long twilight can bring the best summer has to offer. Just close your eyes and savor the moment. One of the rituals in many households is to dry the pungent herbs at the height of their aromatic apogee. Lavender is a favorite and easy to save. Just cut the stems and hold them upside-down. Tie a piece of twine around the stems and suspend it from a hook in a cool dry spot. Lavender is wonderful to brighten up the linen closet or a 'closed-up' room. Try www.herbs.org located in Boulder, CO., for research and medicinal usage.

Fyi: Did you know that one ounce of an Avocado had 55 calories and 5g of fat (1g of it is saturated). An ounce of avocado has about 200 mgm's of potassium. The oil content is second only to that of olives. The oil is about 60% monounsaturated (most heart-healthy kind). Topped only by olive oil at about 70%. So, go out there and ENJOY your avocado. Courtesy of 'Round the Mountain Garden Club. Did you know that you can twist the top green off a pineapple and root it by placing it in water? It makes a wonderful indoor plant if placed in southern exposure. In time, it will produce pineapple that is edible and delicious. Try getting the Mango seed to sprout. Clean the seed very thoroughly and let dry for a few days. Then, slip it into water and watch it sprout. (courtesy *North Lake Garden Club*).

Cultural Tips for Succulents in the Bay Area

Succulent plants are very adaptable and survive in varying arid habitats. Most of them do very well in cultivation in our Mediterranean climate. Because of our mild weather, we can grow most succulents outside even during winter. There are exceptions to this and this winter might turn out to be one of them. All succulents appreciate good light, some do well in direct sun, but those in pots prefer not to have their roots too hot! If you are moving a plant, increase the light level gradually to prevent sunburn when changing locations.

Good drainage is the key to a succulent potting mix. Adding pumice, fine lava rock, coarse sand or perlite to a regular potting mix works well for most plants. I personally, use 1/3 potting soil, 1/3 perlite, 1/3 fine bark for my succulents and epiphytic cacti and add 1/2 this mix with 1/2 pumice for my terrestrial cactus.

The frequency of watering depends upon the environment in which the plants live. Watering becomes necessary when the soil is dry for most plants. Some succulents prefer not to be watered at all during parts of the year, such as some cacti resting in winter and some succulents resting in the summer. A big advantage to raising succulents is that they can survive without water while you're on vacation.

Fertilizer can be applied using the recommended dosage with a balanced one (10-10-10 or 20-20-20) once a month or 1/4 strength diluted with every watering. Most succulents will be happy without fertilizer but will grow more slowly.

Some succulents are resistant to the common pests of most plants but mealybugs, rot, and scale are the ones to contend with. Since I check my plants on a regular basis, I can usually catch any problems before they spread. I usually use alcohol on a Q-tip for mealy and scale or if I have an infestation, then I **use a small amt of horticultural oil, a small amt of liquid dishwashing liquid with water and spray the plants every two weeks.** Snails and slugs are always a problem that can be controlled with products such as non-toxic "Sluggo".

Plants listed below that are recommended and most popular with collectors in the Bay area: Aloe is a genus of leaf succulents, and includes the popular Aloe vera. Haworthia is small enough that you can grow many in a small space. Cacti are very popular and do very well in our climate especially with great drainage, remember to include pumice or fine lava rock in your mix. Tall species of cereus and opuntia (pricklypear) make striking landscape plants. Mesembs include the ever-popular living stones, Lithops and Conophytum, and the various kinds of ice plant. Agave, a group of rosette-forming leaf succulents, includes the century plant and yucca. The genus Euphorbia includes such plants as poinsettia and the weedy spurges, but is notable for its succulent members such as the baseball plant (Euphorbia obesa) and many cactus-like house plants. Other succulents recommended for the Bay area include Aeonium, Cereus, Cotyledon, Drosanthemum, Dyckia, Echeveria, Echinocereus, Ferocactus, Gasteria, Glottiphyllum, Graptopetalum, Puya, Sedum, Senecio, Sempervivum, and Trichocereus.

Many succulents are useful for landscaping in the bay area, the ones below are easy to propagate and are fairly resistant to frost damage. Aeonium arboreum 'Schwartzkopf' a very nice purple, almost black, Aeonium arboreum 'atropurpureum' a green-purple, Aloe saponaria, great orange bloom, Aloe mitriformis, Agave parryii, Agave americana, Crassula arborescens, Crassula argentea, Crassula multicava, will prosper in dense shade, Echeveria agavoides, edged in red, Echeveria pumila 'glauca', Echeveria elegans, Graptopetalum paraguayense, Kalanchoe pumila, abundant pink bloom, Kalanchoe blossfeldiana, Sedum rubrotinctum, useful as a ground cover, Senecio serpens.
Courtesy of Mary Crowell, *Mary, Mary, How Does Your Garden Grow?* Thank you Mary, as always, jbb