

SPRING IN THE GARDEN By David Maher

Depending upon climatic zones and the vagaries of the weather, gardens in Australia will present contrasting images of development and colour in the months of spring. In my garden in October, for example, spring-flowering bulbs have peaked, azaleas and bearded irises are in full bloom and camellias have completed their flowering except for a few late flowers. The seasonal pattern may be far more advanced or retarded in your garden, depending upon where you live. This State's regions truly do have variant seasonal patterns. Clearly, this phenomenon underlines the horticultural interest and diversity of gardening across the States of Australia.

FERTILIZING

Azaleas, Camellias and Gardenias: About 3 to 4 weeks after the application of the chemical fertilizer or Osmocote Plus applied in late September, apply a foliar spray of Aquasol or a similar product. Early morning and late afternoon are the preferred times so that the foliage absorbs the maximum amount of fertilizer. Spray on both surfaces of the leaves in order to maximize the absorption by the plant. This treatment can be repeated every couple of months until the end of March.



Bougainvilleas: Apply Searle's Bougainvillea/Hibiscus fertilizer 6 weeks in order to keep these gross feeders flowering continuously. Sprinkle the fertilizer 15 cms from the trunk and water in thoroughly.

Bulbs that have finished flowering should receive a foliar spray of Searle's Flourish or Aquasol or a similar product to assist with their bulb formation for the following year. The embryonic flower for next year's flowering forms in some bulbs during the post-flowering period.

Gerberas: Blood and bone (5 parts) and potash (1part) or rose food or a complete fertilizer should be applied every 5 to 6 weeks in order to keep these heavy feeders flowering continuously. In between sprays, apply a foliar spray of potash or powdered or granular potash to maximize flowering.



Lavenders benefit from a light dressing of dolomite during October because they have a special preference for magnesium and calcium.

Liliums should now be growing strongly and will benefit from a fortnightly foliar spray of either Aquasol or Vitall or Searle's Flourish or Phostrogen. Again, the spray should be applied to both sides of the foliage. It is also timely to supplement this foliar spray with an application of potash worked into the top two centimetre of the soil at the rate of 15 to 20 grams per plant. (Golden Ray Lilium Nursery in the Dandenongs uses Vitall.)



Tomatoes can have a light dressing of potash every six weeks to promote flowering and the development of fruit. In observing the principles of crop rotation, I have planted my tomatoes where I grew beans last summer.

A CARDINAL RULE FOR FERTILIZING: Fertilizers are only effective if an adequate moisture level is maintained in the soil. Fertilizers need the assistance of soil moisture to break down and to convert their chemical elements into nutrients that can be absorbed by the plants' roots.

MAINTENANCE

Azaleas: Contrary to popular thinking, azaleas respond splendidly to trimming and pruning. After the completion of flowering trim behind the spent flower heads. In the case of misshapen plants and those with lanky branches, severe pruning may be needed to encourage branching and to produce a compact plant. Some azaleas will even respond to hard pruning into the mature wood. Gardeners who grow azaleas in alkaline soil conditions should apply sulphur powder to the soil area in order to provide a more acidic environment for these acid living plants. Be forewarned, however, the dosage should not be overdone – about 40 gams is sufficient for a mature bush and ten grams for a very small plant – nor is it necessary to apply every year otherwise an imbalance of the chemical elements could occur. Plants that have an iron deficiency, that is, green veins and yellow leaves can benefit from a dose of Iron Sulphate at the rate of 5 grams in 5litres of water.

Bearded Irises: After the completion of flowering cut off the spent spike and sprinkle some sulphur powder on the wounded areas as a precaution against a fungal infection in the rhizome/s. Bearded Irises can be divided after flowering. This allows for a long lead up time to the next year's flowering for newly-planted divisions and can offer the best prospect for flowers in their first year. If possible, always plant into a fresh planting mix and do remember to expose the top of the rhizome.

Citrus: After all the fruit has been harvested, it is an appropriate time to prune citrus trees. Cut out any weak branches and twigs that are cluttering their centres because citrus require excellent ventilation. This is also an appropriate time to skirt: prune trees. This process entails the removal of any branches close to or touching the soil. Mature trees can be pruned aggressively so that they are kept at a manageable height. Remember, too, to keep the ground most at all times to avoid fruit drop. Remove developing fruit from recently planted trees in order to assist the development of a strong root system and robust branches.

Roses: Black spot on roses is caused by spores in the soil and also by aerial spores. While a mulch of lucerne around the bushes is a wise precaution, it is not totally effective because of the likelihood of aerial infections. Spraying alternately with Triforine, Mancozeb Plus, Yates' Rose Shield and Yates' Baycor every three to four weeks is one of the best measures to limit the problem. Young leaves should be targeted as these absorb spray readily. Aphids should be sprayed with Confidor or Yates' new Natrasoap, non-toxic products. Aphids should be sprayed with either Natrasoap or Pyrethrum ideally as these are non-toxic.

Stone Fruit Trees: The thinning of fruit, that is, the removal of excess, crowded fruit is an essential task, if healthy, large fruit is to be harvested. Fruit should be spaced at a distance equal to the width of a wrist. The tinning process is best undertaken when the fruit is the size of a marble or a jaffa lolly. I thin the fruit on my apricot tree in early to mid-October depending on the season and the extent to which the tree has discarded fruit naturally.



MULCH your garden with a product appropriate to each plant, e.g. lucerne or sugar cane or pea straw or well-rotted manure for roses, shrubs and citrus; tea tree mulch or Johnson/s Organic Mulch & Soil Improver for plants which grow well in acid soil conditions, e.g. azaleas, ericas and camellias; and Zeolite chips for succulents and orchids.

PROPAGATION

Cymbidium Orchids: Crowded plants can be divided into divisions that desirably have three to four bulbs. This is a time consuming task that requires the use of tools and pots that have been disinfected thoroughly.

My (David Maher) Spring Garden



Happy gardening