

Let's Attend to These Garden Tasks Before Summer

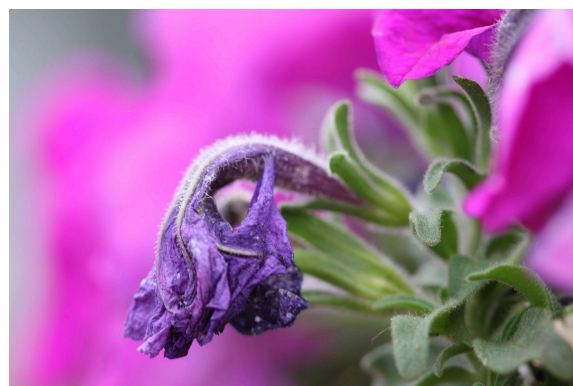
By Cindy Murray

We are well into spring, and Northern Arizona gardeners are bustling about preparing vegetable gardens, embedding ornamentals, planting shrubs, and anchoring in trees. Engaged in these activities ourselves, my husband and I must remind ourselves to attend to a few other necessary outdoor tasks.

In Northern Arizona, two cultivars capable of blooming from mid-spring to summer are violas and pansies. As long as I keep mine between 33 and 80 degrees and give them sunshine and moisture, they will embellish my walkway admirably. However, I have to remember to move them into a partially shaded area this time of year if I want them to thrive through at least part of the summer.



The petunias I bought around Mother's Day beg to be deadheaded (to have spent blossoms removed) now and periodically through summer. This entails pinching or clipping off withering flowers directly beneath the calyx, the leafy cup holding the petals. This will direct energy that would otherwise have been utilized in making seeds to make more gorgeous flowers.



My columbines are established in partial shade, so I don't move these heat-averse plants, but I do keep them deadheaded. I generally leave a few spent flower stalks for fall seed harvesting.

Now that our shrubs and flowers have fully leafed out, we must all remember monsoon rains are still weeks away from replenishing our soils. Let's not neglect watering our precious plants!

Presently, most grasshoppers have not reached maturity, but they soon will. Some of my perennials have countless tiny holes in their leaves due to miniscule, immature grasshoppers. Donning a pair of gloves and a mask, I periodically treat those areas by broadcasting handfuls of diatomaceous earth I purchased at Olsen's Grains. This method works well, but I suggest you consult an authority as to the safety of trying any new pest control method. And to prevent exposure to pollinators, I refrain from broadcasting diatomaceous earth on flower buds or blooms.

It's a foregone conclusion that our fruit trees will be assailed by thrips and aphids each spring. My husband and I haven't used pest control methods other than spraying the leaves with forceful jets of water, because ladybird beetles (ladybugs) and warblers of all sorts feast on those pests. If you have a heavy infestation, you may want to try Spinosad soap insecticide, but it is toxic to pollinators, so read the label carefully and don't apply to flowers or their buds.

The Flagstaff region experienced several damaging freezes this spring. (For example, the morning of April fourth the Flagstaff Airport recorded a low of 12°F.) Being forewarned outdoor temperatures would dip precipitously, we used sheets and frost cloths on several branches of each fruit tree every evening before a predicted freeze. Our apple trees

weren't yet blooming, but our peach and cherry trees were. The result: the cherry and peach blooms perished. Our apple trees bloomed later and now hold a good number of nascent fruits, mostly on those branches we protected. Now, I need to cull (thin) the apples, which are borne in bunches of five to about ten. I'll snip off all but one fruit in each cluster. The one fruit remaining will be large and unblemished. If this isn't done, there will not only be too many apples to handle, but they'll be puny. If your peach tree had the good fortune of escaping the freeze, cull the fruits so they're six to eight inches apart when most of the fruits are about the size of a dime to a quarter.

Let's destroy Russian thistle, Scotch thistle, cheatgrass, and bindweed now, before these weeds set seed. Pull or hoe Russian thistle and Scotch thistle directly below ground level. Cut off bindweed at soil level, as it's nearly impossible to reach all the roots. Hand pull, mow, or



weed-whack cheatgrass before it matures. For any of these weeds, you'll need to periodically check your landscape for signs of reinfestations. If you have large infestations, you may opt to use herbicides like glyphosate, but be certain to carefully follow directions.

Like me, I'm sure you'll find it's best to attend to these simple tasks now rather than having to deal with the ensuing consequences. After all, Summer is upon us!