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## August Gardening Guide

By Cynthia Brian



Passion Flower. Look closely at the intricacies of this beautiful specimen. Photos Cynthia Brian

in my landscape, the only times I have been stung is when I've tried to rescue a bee from a swimming pool, fountain or other water feature. (Of course, if you are allergic to bees, it's always good to have an updated pen of epinephrine on hand.)

Yellow jackets are meat eaters. Although these black and yellow carnivorous creatures are also pollinators, they are mostly attracted to meat, fish, sugary substances, garbage, and, alas, our barbecues and picnics. Unlike bees that sting once and die, yellow jackets have the ability to sting repeatedly. If you have bees landing on your plates as you are enjoying a meal outdoors, you have an invasion of yellow jackets, not bees. Bees flock to flowers, yellow jackets to flesh. Find the nest and call Vector Control, (925) 685-9301, a countywide free service paid through our taxes to eradicate these pests. Yellow jackets are not music to our ears.

For the rest of the butterflies, moths, bees and musicians, cue the conductors and buzz on! Go into the garden to enjoy the show.

### Refresher Steps for Sustained Buzzing

- Build a house: allow for a small pile of leaves or branches to provide shelter.
- Provide a fresh water source: birdbaths, fountains, ponds, even a small mud puddle for the butterflies.

"I am weary of swords and courts and kings. Let us go into the garden and watch the minister's bees."

- Mary Johnston

There is a symphony playing daily in my garden. While my husband turns on the stereo to listen to his favorite tunes, I merely open my door or window to hear the melodic concert of nature. My favorite musicians include the thousands of bees buzzing, hummingbirds bustling, birds singing, frogs croaking, water trickling, owls hooting and crickets chirping. Sometimes the hawks or turkey vultures swoop low with the sound of their flapping wings creating a "whoosh, whoosh" like a strong base. The orchestra changes by the minute as the pollinators search for nectar that produces one out of every three bites we consume.

This week as I was sitting on my porch putting on my boots, a hummingbird came to inspect the red mandevilla blooms next to me, then, rapidly moved to hover three inches from my nose for about 10 seconds. It was a magical moment photographed in my mind.

With much of summer spent outdoors, I've had individuals tell me that they don't like to be in their gardens because of their fear of bee stings. Honeybees, bumble bees and other native bees are passive as they busily forage. They are not interested in humans and will only sting to defend themselves. With the thousands of bees serenading

- Don't use pesticides, insecticides or other chemicals that will kill the pollinators.
- Offer a continual source of nectar and pollen by planting fennel, parsley, dill, lavender, tubular, colorful flowers, milkweed and shrubs.
- Attract a diversity of buzzers to your garden with drifts of the same plant so that they can see and smell the buffet.
- Don't be afraid of the native bees, honeybees or our other flying winged friends. They are not interested in harming you unless they are defending themselves. Let them do their business.

Trending in my garden:

- Santa Rosa plums, cherry plums, Asian pears, apples, blackberries and tangerines are finding their way to tarts, barbecues, sauces, salads and drinks.
- Zucchini is growing as fast as the pods in "Invaders of the Body Snatchers."
- Wisteria boasts a second flush of purple.
- Roses and stargazer lilies perfume the air and beautify my garden.
- Herbs (parsley, basil, cilantro, fennel, sage, thyme, oregano, rosemary and tarragon) are flourishing.
- Hydrangeas are finally blooming. I love putting a hydrangea in a Deckorations container from [www.Jberrynursery.com](http://www.Jberrynursery.com), then planting in a shaded area when the blooms fade.
- Passion lower vines are growing on my fence featuring intricate show-stopping blooms.

Monthly Tips:

KEEP fruited plants evenly moist to avoid blossom end rot.

PRE-ORDER new garlic varieties for a September delivery. Four new ones that are offered by Sow True Seed ([www.sowtrueseed.com](http://www.sowtrueseed.com)) include Early Red Italian, Red Russian, Georgian Fire and Majestic. Everything tastes better with garlic.

DRY herbs and flowers during the summer to use for infusions into homemade cosmetics, shampoo, steams and masks.

EAT the tendrils of peas. Stir-fry or eat raw. Many unexpected veggie greens are edible, including turnip, radish and beets. Never eat the leaves of rhubarb as they are poisonous.

PINCH back annuals for a fuller display all summer.

EMPTY any vessel holding water, even as small as a bottle cap to prevent mosquito larvae from breeding. Change birdbaths daily or add Dunks to non-moving water.

DEEP soak trees like magnolia or redwoods, especially when you see them dropping abundant leaves.

CHECK outdoor pots and containers daily for moisture level. Pots dry out very quickly in this hot weather.

SNIP the tops of your herbs as they flower to use in your salads and sauces.

SKEWER vegetables and fruits from your garden to barbecue on your grill. Toss the items in a bowl with olive oil, lemon, and herbs, refrigerate overnight, skewer, grill and enjoy. I use peppers, melons, plums, apples, radishes, zucchini, tomatoes and mushrooms.

ADD pea gravel to paths for easy walking and to prevent mud runoffs in the winter.

CONTACT Vector Control if you have a mosquito, skunk or yellow jacket problem. The phone number is (925) 685-9301.

HANG yellow jacket traps ONLY on days that you are having a picnic or outdoor event. If you have traps always engaged, you will attract more yellow jackets.

Happy Gardening! Happy Growing!



Blackberries are big and juicy this year. Eat raw or make a simple blackberry tart.



A drip system irrigates the bucolic garden leading to the peaceful pond. Photos Cynthia Brian



Yarrow flowers



Favorite summer skewers of vegetables and fruit include melon, peppers, zucchini, radishes, mushrooms and whatever other fruit is in season.





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