



## Pumpkin Brook Organic Gardening, Inc.

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Volume 3, June 2013

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### Greetings,

We've had quite a wet late Spring. Many of our articles this month have to do with the challenges this may have brought. If we can be of any help, please [let us know](#).

## The Wonderful World of Mountain Laurels

Mid June is the time of peak bloom for mountain laurels (*Kalmia latifolia*). When I was growing up in northeastern Connecticut, my family always took a Sunday drive with elderly relatives in tow to "see the mountain laurels." Here in Townsend, I am lucky enough to have these magnificent native shrubs naturalized right at the edge of my property near our plant holding area (see photos). This spring's bountiful rains, falling just as buds were swelling, have created a magnificent display.



A welcome sight in June



Native Mountain Laurel

Mountain laurels seem to prefer dappled light conditions at the woodland edge. Yet in a work road created down the street for forestry purposes, they are thriving in newly found sun. Often in this region, mountain laurels are growing with an associate species, the native witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*). Both shrubs gently spread to form colonies that are quite lovely to behold.

In our gardens, we often have to work to mimic the woodland soil conditions that these shrubs prefer. A mulch of shredded leaves or aged woodchips helps to create a soil teeming with microbial life. The mycorrhizal fungi of the woodland then get established, and the woodland plants such as *Kalmia* begin to take off in growth. There is often interesting color variation in the wild that growers such as my friends at Broken Arrow

## Slugs bothering you?

We use a product called Sluggo to control them, which is OMRI listed as safe for use in organic programs. This is a pelletized iron phosphate bait which lures slugs and snails to feed on it. They slowly die within six days. It is completely biodegradable in the soil and does not harm wildlife, pets or people. It may be used up to the day of harvest around edibles. We find it an effective control in our nursery and have used it in garden beds as well.

Nursery in Connecticut have capitalized on - pinks, reds, stripes and combinations thereof. This nursery has also introduced many dwarf, little leaf cultivars which are perfect for smaller spaces.

For pruning, we favor a light naturalistic touch aimed toward keeping an open form for good air circulation. Deadwood is removed from the interior. As they bloom, mountain laurels are also pushing out new green growth, so we will wait until this hardens off in July and August to prune.

Deer seem to often enter our gardens to eat mountain laurel foliage in the winter, so we advise protection for those living in deer country. Foliar spraying with a deer repellent plus heavy duty netting well secured is recommended. I have noticed that the dozen or so deer in a nearby deer yard don't seem to bother the naturalized plants, however! Deer damaged plants will releaf naturally this summer but won't be as lush and full as undamaged plants.

## Boxwood Blight

It seems that each season there is another exotic disease or pest on the scene. The latest is boxwood blight or *Cylindrocladium buxicola*. This fungal disease was first discovered in the UK in the mid 1990's, it has since spread to the US. In 2012 it was discovered in Massachusetts. There is no known cure for the disease once plants are infected. All *Buxus* species are at risk. However, *Buxus sempervirens*, including "English" and "American" boxwood are particularly susceptible. *Pachysandra terminalis* is also prone.



Boxwood Blight

Telltale symptoms include brown leaves that eventually turn straw colored and then fall off. Stems can develop dark black or brown lesions. Plants will attempt to regrow only to be re-infected. The root system eventually weakens as a result and severe dieback and plant death is the final result.

Infected plant material spread between nurseries is the main cause of disease spread. Fungal spores are spread primarily via

wind and rain but can also be spread via contaminated pruning shears or on the feet of birds. The fungus will survive for up to five years on fallen leaf debris.

As consumers and gardeners, it is important to understand what we can do to prevent the spread of this disease:

- Inspect new plants before buying.
- Avoid overhead watering.
- Don't work with wet boxwood.
- Disinfect pruning shears with a diluted bleach solution after use.
- Never compost infected material. Instead, remove the entire plant and put it in a plastic bag to dispose of it.
- Consider plants other than boxwood. Some good alternatives include: inkberries, Japanese hollies, and bayberries.

## Coping with Wet Weather

We're noticing that many heat-loving vegetables like tomatoes and annuals like dahlias are just sitting there due to the wet and cool weather. What to do?

Keep excess water off these plants as they've had 6 inches of rain from the sky in the past week. Mulch tomatoes and other vegetables with sterilized straw (we highly recommend our bagged product) in order to prevent splash of soil onto leaves. Fungal diseases are spread this way! Avoid working in the gardens or picking produce and flowers if foliage is wet.

[Let us know](#) if you would like to purchase a bale of our sterilized straw for your garden.

There are diseases that look similar to boxwood blight, including Volutella blight (*Volutella buxi*) and root rot diseases that could be mis-diagnosed for boxwood blight. Volutella blight is another opportunistic fungal pathogen that is often seen on stems and foliage following spring frost damage. It similarly causes dieback of shoots but can be distinguished by the salmon pink spore masses found on stems. Also, Phytophthora root rot and English boxwood decline can cause a more generalized decline as a result of soil borne pathogens.

If you are unsure of what is wrong with your boxwood, let [Carmine](#) know so he can diagnose properly and recommend an appropriate strategy.

## Plant Alert: Botrytis on Peonies

The cool, wet conditions early this season were prime for botrytis infection. Especially susceptible are newly planted peonies. Suspect botrytis if you see peony stalks wilt and die and buds turning black. Onset is typically in early spring, but can be at any time when temperatures remain below 70 degrees. Botrytis is especially prevalent when the weather is wet and humid.



Damage caused by Botrytis

A spray of Liquid Copper can bring this problem under control.



Spotted Recently  
in One of your Gardens

When noticed, cut off diseased portions of the plant, dipping the pruners in a 10% solution of bleach between cuts to ensure the disease does not spread. Bag the cuttings and place in trash - do not compost.

When planting peonies, prevention is key. Make sure that your garden is kept clean of decayed peony foliage and that air circulates well around your plants. Don't handle, cut or plant them if foliage is wet. If you notice that something is wrong with your peonies, please let [Carmine](#) know.

## Pruning Time Is Just around the Corner

The end of June marks the beginning of our summer pruning season. All the early spring flowering trees and shrubs will need attention once they have finished pushing out new growth.

We typically begin this process with quince, boxwood and Japanese holly. Then we progress to azaleas and rhododendrons,

with yews, lilacs and the June blooming shrubs following in July and August. Our goal is to complete all pruning work by Labor Day, so please let [Priscilla](#) know if we can put your property on the schedule for this work at the appropriate time.



Summer Pruning Is  
an Important Part  
of Plant Health Care

For more information on why we prune, please read the [attached](#) article.

## Pest Alert: Rose Sawfly

Roses looking brown and chewed upon? We probably visited you earlier this month to spray Neem Oil for control of Rose Slug Sawfly. Now the damaged leaves are looking terrible. What to do? We suggest anointing the rose weekly with fish fertilizer. This will support new growth which will soon appear. You can then gradually remove the damaged leaves.



Rose Sawfly

Luckily, this pest has but one generation a year. In the fall, we suggest topdressing each plant with high fungal compost and amendments recommended by a nutrient density soil test.

Gradually the impact of this pest will abate.

## June Is the Time for....

- Finishing spring plantings in the vegetable garden, perennial and shrub border
- Planting annuals, typically to fill in spots where bulb foliage has faded
- Scouting for pests on fruit trees and ornamental trees and shrubs
- Pruning early spring blooming shrubs and trees (beginning late in month)
- Keeping up with weeding, checking beneath perennials and groundcovers
- Staking delphiniums, foxgloves and tall clumping perennials that may go down in heavy wind or rain
- Pinching back tall plants such as asters, mums and Joe Pye weed to keep stems from flopping later
- Deadheading spring bloomers that have finished such as peony, iris and Jacob's ladder
- Enjoying the changing colors of the garden and the first vegetable harvest
- Setting irrigation systems to a more frequent summer watering schedule, making sure that rain sensors are in place



Delphiniums

### Quick Links

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Here's hoping for a week's worth of sunny weather so that everything can dry off and put on its normal June growth.

**Sincerely,**  
Priscilla

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