

Wally's Weekly News 19<sup>th</sup> December 2009  
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### SEASONS GREETINGS

I would like to wish all our readers a very Merry Xmas and a Happy Gardening New Year.

It is a very great pleasure to bring you gardening information each week and to hear about your successes and problems.

Your emails and phone calls contribute a lot to these columns and sometimes when stuck for a topic, one of you will contact me with a query and the resulting answers make for the start of an article.

We are always coming across better ways of gardening, improving the health of the soil and plants, so it's never ending.

Maybe that's what life is all about, always learning and experiencing.

So all the best for Xmas and the New Year.

After 25 years of writing these weekly articles I have decided this season to have a couple of weeks off so I will resume the weekly articles early in the New Year.

### SOME TIPS FOR CURRENT PROBLEMS

I receive many emails and phone calls from gardeners that have problems in their gardens or with certain plants. These questions change with each of the seasons but re-appear about the same time each year. I have the view that if one gardener has a specific problem then likely there are 100 or even 1000 more gardeners with the same.

Currently here are some of the problems; Tomatoes not setting fruit? Air movement or vibrations are the setters. On a sunny day when flowers are open, tap the plant to cause a slight vibration, which will set those flowers.

Pumpkins, Cucumbers, Zucchini and melons not setting fruit? Bumble bees are the main pollinators of these and you need male and female flowers for it to happen.

The female flowers are found by the small, embryo fruit behind the actual flower.

The centre of the female flower contains the ovule. The male flowers contain the stamen and pollen. If there are no bees or bumble bees working the flowers then take a male flower (on a warm sunny day) remove the petals without touching the stamen that's covered in pollen. Then rub the pollen covered stamen over the ovule. Repeat on other female flowers till no pollen left then obtain another male flower to continue doing rest of the females. If no female flowers can be found, but there are lots of males, don't worry. The females will appear later when conditions are more favourable for that plant. If fruit form and go rotten while still immature it means that the pollination process did not happen for that fruit. Remove such rotting babies to prevent contamination of healthy tissue.

Tomatoes have a black patch at the base of the fruit? Called Blossom End Rot, it's a condition that occurs when there was insufficient moisture at the time the fruit was setting. (Pollinated) Very common in container grown tomato plants when the growing medium becomes too dry. A maturing/mature tomato plant needs about 2-3 litres of water a day. The water moves the calcium to the setting fruit. Not enough water to do this means not enough calcium, and the result is blossom end rot. Keep the plant's soil or growing medium moist. A large saucer under the pot filled with water may overcome the

problem. Don't refill the saucer till all the water has been used. Too much water at the time when the fruit have fully formed and ripening will cause splitting of the fruit. So don't over water. Ensure that your tomatoes have sufficient calcium available for their needs by sprinkling Dolomite around near the base of the plants. Ripe fruit with black bottoms are still ok to eat, just cut off the damaged part.

At the end of the season when you have a number of green tomatoes on the plant you can speed up ripening by root pruning. To do this take a spade and press it into the soil to a depth of about 6 to 8 inches, in a circle, out about a foot from the trunk of the plant.

If birds attack green or ripening fruit use **Bird Repeller Ribbon** to keep them away.

Talking about keeping things away from gardens that do damage and namely cats.

Sprinkle the product called **Cat Repellent**, it is a commercial strength Naphthalene (like moth balls) in a powder crystal form. Most cats avoid areas where the product is scattered. The Naphthalene evaporates as it is exposed to the environment and a second or third application maybe needed till the cats stay away for some time.

It will also deter other vermin such as cockroaches and moths indoors and outdoors.

Do not apply directly onto soil in food growing areas, place on lids instead.

Ants will be found in areas outside and on plants? If noticed on plants, there will likely be aphids or some other sap sucking insect on the plant, secreting honeydew, which the ants are collecting. By removing the sap suckers will stop the ant activity on the plant. **Spray with Neem Tree Oil and Key Pyrethrum.**

To kill nests of ants? A mix of boric acid, borax, sugar, honey and water is by far the best ant bait going. Borax and boric acid can be found under the name, '**Granny Min's Ant Bait.**' On the label is the instructions to make it up with sugar, honey and water. Place the made up bait in lids beside ant trails, keep topping up the lids till no more ants are seen. Use outdoors as the bait inside only encourages them to visit. Indoors the best way to keep them out is to use one of the pyrethrin Can Dispensers which are available under trade names such as 'Robocan' These cans automatically release a puff of the ingredients out every 7 minutes or so.

Hang one on the wall of the kitchen and it will take care of flies, ants, fleas, cockroaches, mosquitoes etc. I used one for about a week in my chicken house to kill mites and lice.

You could use one in a conservatory or glass house to rid plants of pests. As pyrethrin is quickly de-activated by UV only place in a glasshouse over night and remove the next morning. You can repeat for a few nights in a row to clean up pests. Indoors they can operate 24/7 but not where you have a fish tank as it will also kill your fish if they are exposed to the pyrethrin. Keep tank covered and air tight.

Use the **Neem Granules** around plants in glasshouses etc to assist in keeping them pest free. Ideal on tomatoes for whitefly control.

Citrus fruit lack in juice and flavour? All fruit including citrus need an ample supply of potassium and magnesium. This does not mean you apply these and that's it.

A monthly application is required and the two components can be found in perfect balance for plants in the product **Fruit and Flower Power**. A monthly amount of 25 grams per square metre is applied to the feeder root zone. With citrus this is from trunk to drip line. Can also be used to encourage flowering on any garden plants.