

Wally's Weekly News 20th FEBRUARY 2010
Written by Wally Richards.

GARDENING IN FEBRUARY 2010

February is the last month of summer and the time when many pest insects have built up big populations, if you have not been on the ball with your controls. It is very easy to miss a build up and then a lot harder to gain control.

I got caught out recently with my zucchini plants, normally great producers; I started to wonder why they were not performing as usual. When I went to pick the sole fruit on one plant I noticed aphids had fallen on my hand. A quick look under the leaves revealed thousands of the pests sucking the goodness out of the plants and thus the reason for so few mature fruit.

The answer was to mix up **Neem Tree Oil** with **Key Pyrethrum** added into a trigger sprayer and then to fold back every leaf and spray the underside. Within a couple of days the vigor came back to the plants but another couple of sprays will be needed to keep the populations from building up again.

Mites, thrips, leaf hoppers, aphids, psyllids, whitefly and caterpillars can soon get out of control and reduce crop production which is something we do not need.

I sometimes get a call from gardeners that say even though they are spraying regularly with **Neem Oil and Pyrethrum** they cannot get on top of a pest insect population.

There is a simple reason for this as the pests are re-infesting from other plants near by and sometimes from a neighbouring property where the people are not spraying.

If this is the case then you need to check all your own plants in the area including weeds for the pests and spray those plants as well.

If coming from next door then you need to get permission from the neighbours to spray their gardens as well. If not you will have an on going fight till winter.

I struck an interesting problem this week from a gardener that told me that gum was oozing out of the trunk of a citrus tree. I had not come across this problem previously so did a bit of research and found that the condition is called Phytophthora gummosis.

An early symptom of Phytophthora gummosis is sap oozing from small cracks in the infected bark, giving the tree a bleeding appearance. The gumming may be washed off during heavy rain. The bark stays firm, dries, and eventually cracks and sloughs off.

Lesions spread around the circumference of the trunk, slowly girdling the tree. Decline may occur rapidly within a year, especially under conditions favorable for disease development, or may occur over several years.

Phytophthora fungi are present in almost all citrus orchards. Under moist conditions, the fungi produce large numbers of motile zoospores, which are splashed onto the tree trunks. The Phytophthora species causing gummosis develop rapidly under moist, cool conditions. Hot summer weather slows disease spread and helps drying and healing of the lesions.

Secondary infections often occur through lesions created by Phytophthora.

These infections kill and discolor the wood, in contrast to Phytophthora infections, which do not discolor wood.

The answer is to par away diseased bark (without ring barking the trunk) and then paint straight **Liquid Copper** over the clean areas.

Fruit on trees and plants such as tomatoes become very heavy as they reach maturity

placing a lot of stress on the branches and trunks.

On my beef steak tomatoes I have noted that the branches bearing the large fruit are bending under the weight and need further ties for support. If this is not done at some point the branches snap off causing losses. Ties onto bamboo stakes can also slip down the stake adding to the problem.

Very large fruit weighing up from 250 grams to near a kilo are a heavy item for a plant and maybe the support of old bras might be needed with the fruit cupped nicely into the cup of the bra, which is secured to a strong stake. On bushy plants a number of stakes maybe needed.

It is also a good idea to take the odd lateral off a tomato plant at this time and strike it as a cutting in a small pot. These can be progressively potted up into bigger containers and provide ripe tomatoes late in the season as winter comes on. Being planted into containers which can be moved later to sheltered spots to protect from winds and frosts. Several weeks ago when my tomatoes started ripening I had several attacks from birds pecking at the ripening fruit. A few lengths of **Bird Repeller Ribbon** fixed to the stakes soon put an end to the bird damage.

If you are growing pumpkins it pays to check the plants every day or so and pollinate the female flowers by taking a male flower with pollen on the stamen, off the vine, remove the petals (which are edible) and wipe some of the pollen onto each female flower's centre. (The female flowers are the ones with the baby fruit behind the petals) Do this and you will be sure of a good crop.

If you want larger pumpkins then set 2 or 3 fruit per plant and then pinch out the leader (growing tip) this is then likely to cause side branching and these should also be removed. If you don't want extra big pumpkins then don't worry about pinching out, just feed the plant well with either liquid manures or **Cucumber Booster**.

All flowering and fruiting plants should be given a dose of potash every few weeks to enhance the flowering and fruiting. This also applies to tomatoes for better flavour if you are not already using my **Secret Tomato Food** which has ample potash in it.

Garden areas where crops are now being harvested should be given a good dose of animal manure and winter crops of seedlings planted. If you do not want to plant up vegetables for winter then after manuring, plant green crops of any of the following, mustard, lupin, oats, wheat or peas.

I like peas as you can get a nice crop of peas as well as having the nitrogen rich foliage and roots for conditioning the soil for next season.

Another aspect is if you are repotting any plants into larger containers always plunge the plant into a tub of water prior to potting up. If you don't and the original mix is too dry then water may not penetrate into the old mix and the plant may suffer and in some cases die.

I learnt this lesson years ago in one of my nurseries where I lost lots of miniature roses as their pots were too dry and the damp mix I was using to repot did not allow the old mix to take up water.

Always learning. Seedlings in punnets and cell packs should also be plunged into a tub or bucket of water before planting out. It reduces root damage and gives them a better start after planting out.

Young weeds that have sprouted in gardens should be lightly hoed on a sunny day to be left on the soil to wither in the sun.

They are great food for the soil food web.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)