

Refreshing the spring garden

If our early spring continues, then gardeners throughout Southern Nevada will need to do their seasonal preparations very soon. That is more than the excitement of reading seed catalogs and deciding what vegetables to choose for the garden. Where were the biggest problems during the last few seasons? If these involved irrigation, that would be a first priority for life in the Mojave Desert. Other issues also need to be addressed before gardening success in this new growing season.



Leaf-footed bug on Pomegranate

Were the leaf-footed bugs particularly bad on the pomegranates? If so, make sure to remove any of last year's mummies that might still be hanging from the tree. They should have been taken off at the end of the fall, but be sure to get rid of any that might have remained. Changing the mulch around the base of the tree will also be helpful.

Whatever buggy problems might have afflicted the vegetable garden, rotating crops is the first line of defense. If squash bugs were a problem on melons or pumpkins, do not plant members of that family nearby. These include watermelons and cantaloupe,

but also all the different squash and cucumbers, as well. Pumpkins and squash are their favorites. Not only do these bugs feed on the plants, but their saliva is toxic to them, adding insult to injury. They can multiply fantastically quickly; we at Cooperative Extension have resorted to removing them with a wet/dry vacuum when their population explodes.

If there were no invaders in the vegetable garden, congratulations on your good luck! Even if the garden avoided infestation, however, it is a good idea to plant members of different families each year. That way, there will be less of an invitation to pests. Tomatoes or peppers could be planted where cucumbers were, as could corn or okra. These are all "warm season" vegetables, which we grow for their fruits or seeds.

As vegetables or other plants grow in a raised bed or pot, they remove fertility. Even more than with leafy vegetables, the soil where fruiting vegetables grow needs extra nutrients, since they draw large amounts of minerals from the earth.

Over the course of the seasons, the soil (or other planting medium) in a large pot or in a raised bed will recede. This is due in part to soil being washed out, and the plants pulling enough



Squash Bug

nutrients that the volume will diminish. Surprisingly, a very rich planter mix will lose some of its nutrition and volume through the process of volatilization, where something is converted to a gas. Some parts of the most lush compost amendment will evaporate as carbon dioxide or a nitrogenous gas.

To deal with old problems, or enhance the growing conditions, it is possible to add fresh soil to the top few inches of the growing area, especially if there has not been a significant infestation of an insect pest. It is not necessary to completely change all the soil in the pot or raised bed. That would be both expensive and laborious.

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