

Summer's end

Although summer might be coming to an end that does not mean the end of work for the intrepid Mojave gardener. It can be the time when work is just beginning, or to be more accurate, when the work picks up again after a brief summer lull. Until it cools down to those balmy autumn levels, many of us will simply look over the garden with a certain level of satisfaction. When temperatures are above 90°, only a few people are going to pull weeds with the same enthusiasm they had back in the spring.

Even observing our plants as they grow is more than a passive activity. A healthy garden does not require us to labor terribly energetically at all times. By August, any gardener has earned the right to enjoy what is literally “the fruits of one’s labor”.



Stepping back and paying attention allows us to see what has or has not been successful. This kind of scouting is the first, and most important, step in Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Before spraying or performing any activity that could change the ecosystem, it is a good idea to know what is going on. IPM is such a reasonable approach to landscaping maintenance that it is surprising it is not the norm.

No garden is the same from season to season. This is especially true in our part of the Southwest, where we have several growing periods. While the exact number of seasons depends on the gardener, many of us recognize

these: late winter/early spring (salads and greens), late spring (tomatoes), summer (sweet potatoes, okra, melons and squash), fall (tomatoes, revived from earlier), then back to salads and greens.

We gardeners control so much of our little farms, whether they are a single raised bed or many. Not only do we vary what vegetables we plant; it is also what we did with them and what happened with the irrigation.

Against all advice, we might have tried a beefsteak-sized heirloom tomato, only to be heartbroken when the little fruits became poached on the vine. We may find that one drip emitter was plugged with soil or salt, which resulted in a dead plant. Overnight, leaf footed bugs may have invaded the pomegranate tree and started to destroy the beautiful fruits hanging from it.

The gardener might have failed to thin seedlings as they emerged from the soil. Plants are tiny when they germinate, but they grow and grow. A pumpkin vine starts with two cotyledons per seed. It does not take long for that vine to overwhelm its neighbors. If we forget to thin carrots in

the spring, we get an unsightly clump of braided orange roots. If we forget to thin pumpkins or melons, we get a crop of giant leaves and stems that can irritate delicate skin.

When we stand back and look at the garden however, we see more than glitches. We see how well we have interacted with the soil and our piece of the natural world. This is the time for contented smiles.

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