

In the Garden with Shobha Vanchiswar



June 19, 2009

See inside for photos.

Weeds and pests love June, but the vegetables are thriving

More than any other month, weeds love June best. The conditions for their growth are near perfect. The temperature is neither too high nor too low, the soil is warm, there is invariably plenty of rain and the days are longer. So while we look towards the beautiful roses in June, it's the weeds that bear more attention. I know the recent rains have not helped at all. Finding oneself free to garden whenever there is a break in the weather has been a real trial. The proclivity with which the weeds invade all areas is quite impressive. And frustrating. I try to weed every other day. On the days in between, I focus on admiring whatever is in bloom and pretend neither weeds nor pests exist. It is the only way I can keep the weeds from consuming all my time.

I'm also paying more attention to the vegetable gardens in my own property as well as the plot in the community garden. It is hoped that lessons learned this year will stand in good stead for next year when I intend to get three full seasons of vegetables. The goal is to be as self sufficient as possible.

The white eggplant seedlings were planted out too early and so they have struggled. I knew it was not yet time but I decided to try early planting.

Luckily, I still had some seedlings growing in pots, so those have been added to the plot. Meanwhile, the escarole is looking fine. In the warm months when lettuces tend to faint, escarole steps in magnificently.

Pests in the garden

It seems the cabbage worms have discovered the Brussels sprouts. So they need to be scanned regularly and the worms and eggs must be removed by hand right away. Not pleasant, but necessary.

Raised beds are a bit better at keeping slugs at bay, but one still needs to be vigilant. Once slugs find a tasty meal, they can devour the young plants speedily. The latest slug deterrent I've come across is coffee grounds. Maybe I will try that. At the very least, the bed will smell good and might just be "the best part of waking up . . ."

The beans are properly staked and are growing well. There are two kinds of beans I'm trying out. Both are native to India. I haven't eaten them since I moved away over twenty-five years ago. Needless to say, I'm getting impatient.

The onion sets and leeks look good. As an experiment, I also planted some peeled garlic cloves that had begun to sprout in the refrigerator. This not how garlic is normally cultivated, so it'll be interesting to see how it does.

The cauliflower seedlings are as yet too small for planting out. They should be ready in a week or so. These are also an experiment in that they are of an unusual variety. An Italian variety that looks like it belongs in Jurassic Park. If they do well, I'll be sure to parade the photos.

The radish, lettuces and Swiss chards are being harvested daily. With vegetables so fresh, simple preparations are all that is needed to bring out their flavors. Last night, Swiss chard sautéed in olive oil with garlic, oregano and black pepper and then simmered in a bit of broth was added to multi-grain angel hair pasta. Topped with freshly grated Parmesan, it was delicious. My eleven year old ate it with gusto.

Now, tell me, how does your garden grow?

Reply to reader query about blossom end rot in tomatoes

At least three readers have asked about blossom end rot in tomatoes. Peppers, eggplants and certain melons are also susceptible to this condition. This is not a disease as most people think. It happens as a result of calcium deficiency. The problem can be remedied by digging crushed egg shells into the soil around the plant's roots and providing the right amount of moisture. Too much or too little water will affect the calcium supply to the fruits. This is one of the reasons I prefer to manually water the vegetables rather than rely on automated watering devices. It forces one to be attentive.