

This Springing Spring

We seem to agree that when spring arrived officially last week, she was already middle aged, on the verge of sliding into summer. But don't you think, this primavera has been fast as well as early? On Monday only a scarce slim sighting of yellow on the Carolina jasmine, by Wednesday, a mass of gold. On the dogwood, it was hard to distinguish flower buds from emerging foliage and within hours small white saucers appearing.

And the roses so recently bare-branch pruned are fat with foliage. Even the Lady Banks rose, laced with the native coal honeysuckle in bloom is showing color in the buds. Spring is so lovely it should be very carefully spaced out, revealing its treasures in stately measure, not dumping them in a heap at our feet.

Roses, bless them, will last all summer. A good yellow rose is always welcome, a yellow with sturdy necks and healthy leaves. Among Conard-Pyle/Star Roses new offerings for 2012 are two yellow roses. "Eyeconic Lemonade" with its deep rose blotch at the base of the petals is said to do especially well in the western US which will center our attention on the second yellow, 'Sunshine Daydream'. This all-America Rose Selection winner is the first traditional garden rose to win AARS under no-spray trial conditions. Bred by Meiland, 'Sunshine Daydream' points to a greener and more organic way with roses. There is also a descendent of 'Knock Out' new to 2012, 'Thrive' a lovely red that does indeed thrive through our long hot summers.

Boxwood Blight:

Since the first discovery of this menace in North Carolina in October 2011, it has been found in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island and Virginia. According to an article in the March issue "Mid-Atlantic Grower" the pathogen, a fungus *Cylindrocladium buxicola*, has popped up in too many places for a quarantine to be effective. Universal concern among nurserymen has prompted them to initiate a drive for funds to be distributed to various research facilities with the directive that they cooperate in their work, dividing the work and sharing progress so they do not spin their wheels or reinvent them.

If one of your healthy box plants has turned brown and died without other cause, dig it out and bag it for dumping. Do not add it to the compost pile. Further suggestions: avoid plants raised with so many fungicides that this illness may be masked but will not have been eliminated. Buy plants of any variety from places practicing clean culture as diseases may be spread by infected containers and tools, even vehicles.

Honey Bees:

We have had this conversation before about honeybees and CCD – colony collapse disorder and the probable cause being a specific family of insecticides. A recent news release has indicated that the culprit may be the chemicals used to coat corn seeds. A study published in "Environmental Science & Technology (American Chemical Society Journal) reported an increase in bee deaths following corn planting.

In the process of planting corn, pneumatic drilling machines coat the seeds with neonicotinoid insecticides, a poison that kills insects by paralyzing nerves. It is the weapon of choice because it has lower toxicity for other animals. Honeybees are critical for pollinating food crops. Corn of course, is one of the crops that is wind-pollinated like many other grains, so does not need bees. However most fruit and vegetables are dependent upon bees or other insects for pollination. The problem has become more acute as the acreage planted in corn as biofuel has increased dramatically.

Most gardeners enjoy watching all the buzzing around their plants, scores of little black and yellow winged things going about their business. They come in so many shapes and sizes it is difficult to tell bees from the flies that look like them. Both bees and flies are important pollinators in our gardens and since bees come in fly-sizes it is helpful to know that flies have but one pair of wings, the bees have two pair.

Although our urge to avoid calories has made honey a no-no, it is good for us. Valued as a sweet it was doubly valued as a medicine and modern medical research is finding that our ancestors were right. It has unique health properties, containing phenolic compounds, plant antioxidants that come from plant nectar. Be careful that what you buy as honey is honey as it can be adulterated with corn syrup. Local is best!