

1999

Mother Knows Best

Dennis Hinkamp
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall

 Part of the [Horticulture Commons](#)

Warning: The information in this series may be obsolete. It is presented here for historical purposes only. For the most up to date information please visit [The Utah State University Cooperative Extension Office](#)

Recommended Citation

Hinkamp, Dennis, "Mother Knows Best" (1999). *All Archived Publications*. Paper 777.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall/777

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Archived USU Extension Publications at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Archived Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact dylan.burns@usu.edu.





GARDEN NOTES

MOTHER KNOWS BEST

By Dennis Hinkamp

January 1999

Winter-07

As the temperatures dip below zero and the seed catalogs start arriving in the mail, it's a good time to give homage to the mother of all gardening—nature.

One of the most important things I learned this year is to take a lesson from the “perfect gardener” and implement her ideas into my own garden, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. “There are lessons to be learned from Mother Nature to improve the aesthetics of our gardens and landscapes, along with reducing many problems,” he adds.

“Throughout the growing season we hold a Diagnostic Clinic in the Ogden area where gardeners bring in samples to get our help solving their gardening problems,” Goodspeed says. “We track the problems encountered to determine the major causes and evaluate any trends or outbreaks. The major difficulty this year, as in most years, is over watering and failure to amend the soil.”

About 30 to 40 percent of the problems in our landscapes are somehow related to watering, he concludes. This includes such things as iron chlorosis, powdery mildew and root rot. All of these diseases are aggravated by excess moisture. Other problems associated with too much water include weed problems in lawns, reduced growth in many shrubs and plants, nitrogen deficiencies and dieback of evergreens such as junipers, yews and pines.

“When watering plants, keep in mind the method Mother Nature uses in a native setting,” Goodspeed explains. This normally consists of large amounts of water at one time, then a few dry days or even weeks before watering again. Some plants, such as junipers and other trees, survive and look great just being watered once a month. Keep in mind whether the plants you care for are water loving or prefer a dry, hot environment .

Another major consideration is the soil type, he adds. Look at the soil where growth is abundant, such as on the East and West Coast. Because most of this land has been continuously cultivated for centuries, it has accumulated organic matter which develops a deep, rich soil for plant growth. Mother Nature returns some organic materials back to the soil every year. Adding organic matter is not a one-time thing. It must be repeated on a regular basis.

“Mimic this process in your own yard and garden,” Goodspeed says. “This is the perfect

time to start since Mother Nature has provided us with an abundance of leaves—even if some of them might be covered with snow and ice right now. Pick up a bag or two once the snow melts or go to the local landfill for extra mulch in the spring.”

“Mother Nature does not throw all her leaves into a big pit called a landfill,” he says. “In her infinite wisdom, she spreads them out to improve and enrich all the soils. In Utah we need to add all the organic matter we can. Keep the leaves and work them back into the soil.”

The last thing to learn from Mother Nature is the shape of trees and shrubs, Goodspeed says. Their natural shape and form seldom need changing. Mother Nature has never trimmed a round juniper to fit a square space. The true beauty of most landscape plants is in their natural shape.

“When Mother Nature plants trees and shrubs she provides them with room to stretch and grow,” Goodspeed says. “Normally they are not planted in rows or in a symmetrical design. Also, when pruning use care to maintain the plants original shape. How would you feel if someone cut off or changed some of your best features maybe removed an arm and added a nose the size of the Baja Peninsula? When planting, be sure to allow a plant enough room to grow to maturity.”

For more information, contact your local [USU County Extension office](#).

Utah State University Extension is an affirmative action/equal employment opportunity employer and educational organization. We offer our program to persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 9 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice-President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. (EP/01/1999/DF)