

## Rain Rain Rain

Questions have been coming in from gardeners asking what they can do in their gardens when everything is so wet. Here are a few of the answers:

**Can I aerate my lawn?** Wait till the soil dries out for at least three days. Running equipment (mowers, aerators, etc) over saturated soil compacts it, negating the positive effect of aeration. If possible, avoid walking on saturated soils.

**Should I fertilize my lawn?** Do not fertilize if heavy rains are forecast. The soil under your lawn is saturated, and nitrogen is highly water soluble. More rain will dissolve the fertilizer and wash it away, contaminating the streams that lead to the bay as well as wasting your money and time. Wait until the rains have let up and the soil has dried out for a few days. This applies to most fertilizers for most plants. The exception will be plants in containers, and for those a slow-release form of nitrogen should be used. Rarely are other forms of fertilizer needed in local soils. If in doubt, have your soil tested.

**When can I mow my lawn? It is getting tall!** Try to never cut off more than 1/3 of the length of the lawn when mowing. If your lawn has gotten very tall, you will need to set your mower on its highest level and plan on mowing again as soon as possible- the next time it is dry enough to walk on the lawn. Lower the height sequentially over the next month. Cutting off more than 1/3 of the length stresses the lawn grass and makes it more susceptible to insect and disease problems.

**Can I plant vegetable seeds?** Seeds can be started indoors, preferably with grow lights and bottom heat. If you are starting seeds outdoors, the unending rain can create problems with damping-off fungi (*Pythium spp*) that destroy the seedlings. Heat loving summer crops cannot thrive unless soil temperatures rise. Most gardeners will need to wait to plant summer crops until the weather warms.

**Can I plant azalea and maples?** You can plant as long as you avoid compacting the soil. If you stand on a piece of plywood and move soil onto a tarp, you can minimize the damage.

**When should I start mulching?** Mulches keep water in the soil, which is a very good attribute in the warm summer months. Applying mulch now will keep water from evaporating, and will keep soils cooler for longer. Wait until the soil has been dry for several weeks prior to applying new mulch.

**Snails and slugs are all over the garden. What is the recommended control?** Snails and slugs can be controlled by

- hand-picking after dark (drown them in a bucket of soapy water);
- trapping by placing boards near the areas where you see damage occurring or slime trails. The snails and slugs will congregate under the boards in the day-time, and can be scraped into that bucket of soapy water;
- baiting with iron-phosphonate baits.

**How can I weed without standing on the soil?** It is hard to weed suspended in the air, but all of the winter weeds are going to seed as you read this, and removing them from your garden is a top priority. Stand on a piece of plywood or a side piece of scrap lumber to keep from compacting the soil. Pull weed carefully so that you minimize scattering any seeds that might have set. For deep rooted weeds like thistles and dandelions, use a long bladed weeding tool to reach the tap roots. If seeds have set on the weeds, bury deeply underground or compost if you have a hot compost pile. A scuffle-hoe can be used to remove small summer weeds that have germinated.

**What can I do to keep mosquitoes from my yard?** Be sure to empty all the places where water can collect: plant saucers, empty buckets, tubs, old tires etc. Mosquitoes will start breeding quickly when the weather warms up, and removing sources of standing water is very important. If you have a backyard pond, consider getting *Gambusia affinis* (Mosquito fish) from the mosquito vector district to eat the mosquito larvae.