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JOHN'S CORNER:

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS

by John Ferguson

Most gardeners know that plants always look better and grow faster after being watered by natural rainfall versus water from our municipal water supply. Rainwater is naturally soft and slightly acidic and it contains nutrients like dissolved nitrogen and trace elements from dust in the air.

Rainwater often contains beneficial microbes. It also does not contain chemicals that are bad for the health of our gardens; sodium (salt), fluoride, chlorine (think bleach), or chloramines (disinfectants). When we water with municipal water containing these toxic chemicals we kill the microbes in the soil that prevent disease and create soil structure. In other words, the more we water, the more problems one has in their yard and gardens. Capturing rainwater is great way to help ones garden.

The other option is to filter or treat the water to remove the toxic chemicals before watering one's plants. There are a couple ways to do this. The first option is to fill up a barrel with the city water and wait 24 hours to use. The chlorine will escape to the atmosphere overnight. After filling, add a few pounds of compost and stir into the water. The humus in the compost along with the microbes will neutralize the fluoride and chloramines and break it down so they can escape to the atmosphere.

Humates will also work but it does not contain the beneficial microbes and is a lot more expensive pound for pound to use. Both good compost and humates contain water-soluble nutrients that the plants will love. Secondly, several companies are making filters that one can attach to the outside faucet before attaching the garden hose. I will discuss these in future articles.

The journal HortScience (August 2016) has an interesting paper on pollinators, beneficial insects and plant types. This was done at the University of Georgia hence; the results should be very applicable to our area. Of the plants in the study, the 15 most often visited by pollinators were:

Agastache 'Black Adder'



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Gaura lindheimeri Engelm 'Passionate Blush'
Lonicera sempervirens L. 'Major Wheeler'
Agastache mexicana 'Knutz Acapulco'
Nepata x faassenii 'Walkers Low'
Foeniculum vulgare L.
Coreopsis auriculata 'Redshift'
Aster dumosus 'Woods Pink'
Rudbeckia triloba L.
Belamcanda chinensis
Salvia microphylla 'Hot Lips'
Solenostemon scrutellariodes 'Mariposa'
Salvia 'M. Martens' and Galeotti 'Mystic Spires'
Echinacea purpurea 'Magnus'
Rudbeckia hirta 'Indian Summer'

Of the plants in the study, the 15 most often visited by beneficial insects were:

Gaura lindheimeri Engelm 'Passionate Blush'
Achillea filipendulina 'Coronation Gold'
Buddleia davidii 'Sweet Profusion'
Coreopsis auriculata 'Redshift'
Curcuma petiolata 'Emperor'
Lonicera sempervirens L. 'Major Wheeler'
Rudbeckia triloba L.
Rudbeckia hirta 'Indian Summer'
Cassia x floribunda 'Irwin and Barnaby'
Achillea millefolium 'Sunny Seduction'
Coreopsis auriculata 'Snowberry'
Foeniculum vulgare
Coreopsis spicata
Coreopsis 'Cosmic Eye'
Stachys byzantina 'Koch'



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I was at the Plant Health Workshop and CEU Event put on by Texas A&M Agrilife Extension and OHBA (Organic Horticulture Benefits Alliance) at Centennial Gardens on Wednesday. Gaye Hammond (Past President of the Houston Rose Society) gave an excellent presentation on two new rose diseases causing problems in Texas. The first was on Crown Gall disease and the other was on Rose Rosette Disease. A few of the take a ways are:

- Rose Rosette disease has destroyed all the roses in the Ft. Worth Botanical Gardens and most of them in the Dallas Botanical gardens even after replanting several times.
- Rose Rosette affects almost all roses and not just the Knock Outs family of roses.
- Planting roses North of Interstate 20 is risky at this time due to the severity of the disease.
- A couple cases of Rose Rosette disease have been discovered in Houston.
- Best to purchase plants grown in Texas from reputable growers like Chamblee's or Antique Rose Emporium that hand inspect plants for the disease and grows them on their own roots.

Note: Many wholesale nurseries in Texas just purchase bare root roses from growers in other areas of the country then grow them out to sell in our local market. These out of state growers use automated equipment to grow their cuttings; hence, they do not inspect the roses for the disease before shipping them. This practice has helped spread the disease so quickly across many areas of the country.

There is a new documentary on the health problems caused by eating GMO crops that can be viewed free through September 30 on the Dr. Mercola website.

Transgenic Wars - How GMOs Impact Livestock and Human Health Around the Globe

<http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2016/09/24/transgenic-wars-gmo.aspx>