August 2013 Hilltop Garden Tips

- Bagworms are 3 to 4 weeks later this year and they are feeding heavily right now, making up for lost time. Bagworms can kill a needle evergreen if it is heavily infested. Inspect host plants periodically - bagworms seem to like juniper, arborvitae, and pines, but they are will attack many broadleaf shrubs and trees such as rose, sycamore, maple, elm, and black locust. A hand-picking light infestation works well; applying the bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis* (*Bt*) will also take care of the problem.

- Fall webworms should be appearing in pecan/hickory/persimmon trees in mid- to late-August. Controlling the bottom 1/3 of the tree will be quite effective, even though we cannot reach the upper areas. *Bt* or Carbaryl will stop this nuisance caterpillar. Observe all label precautions on mixing and use. Do not use dust formulations due to the problem with application.

- Check your tomatoes for blossom end rot on the fruit as it begins to form. This is usually an indication of a calcium deficiency. Place a handful of gypsum in the soil beside the tomato at planting (or later) to prevent this. Foliar sprays such as blossom end rot spray will also help alleviate the problem. Nothing will "heal the fruit with rot on it, so remove and discard them.

- Plant pansy seed this month in flats for planting in the landscape in September.

- Plant the following fall vegetable plants this month: beets, bush beans, Chinese cabbage, cucumber, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, radish, rutabaga, spinach, summer squash and turnip. With the leafy greens, plant a few feet every 2 weeks and you will greens up to and beyond the first frost.

- Spray the following landscape shrubs for the following insect pests: arborvitae and juniper (spider mites), azalea and pyracantha (lace bug).

- In late August, prepare the lawn areas for seeding if you plan to have a tall fescue lawn.

- Bearded iris look sickly right now. Actually that is normal, as bearded iris go somewhat dormant after bloom. Now is the time to cut them back, divide and reset them. After digging them up, detach the younger rhizomes from the older, woody-looking mother rhizome and replant the young ones. Chunk the old mother rhizome into the compost heap. Choose a sunny, well-drained spot and don’t cover the young rhizomes completely when resetting.

- I have used the whack-back, rejuvenation technique on Shasta daisies, rudbeckias and other perennials flowers during mid to late summer. Sometimes, this encourages new bloom, sometimes not, depending on when I do the whacking-back. I would encourage you to experiment with this and make notes of what works for you. Always remember to keep these severely pruned plants adequately watered and give them a weekly dose of soluble fertilizer to spur that new growth. Late summer and fall blooming perennials like the asters, mums, salvias, etc. should NOT be cut back as you will be cutting off, or at the least, delaying the bloom period. Keeping that mulch thick (4 inches) on perennial flowers keeps you off the water hose duty by retaining the soil moisture. It also keeps you off the hoe duty by reducing the number of weeds.

- Soak shrubs periodically during dry spells with enough water to moisten the soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches.

- Pinch the growing tips of gourds once adequate fruit set is achieved. This directs energy into ripening fruits, rather than vine production.