

Minnesota Now (MPR) | Summer gardening tips with Meg Cowden 01G6R9438BX4319S4NV1D097W8

INTERVIEWER: Have you been enjoying the fruits and veggies from this summer's harvest? Author and gardener extraordinaire, Meg Cowden, is back to talk about what's happening in the garden right now. She's got a few gardening tips for us too. She is the author of the book, *PlantGrowHarvestRepeat*, founder of the website Seed to Fork and the gardening advice group Modern Garden Guild. Meg, how are you?

MEG COWDEN: Hi Kathy, I am good. Yes, enjoying summer, it's wonderful, isn't it?

INTERVIEWER: I love summer. I'm a big summer fan. We are about to head into July. I can't believe that the month of June is almost gone here. Are you planting anything right now?

MEG COWDEN: I am. Last night, I dropped in my third succession of sweet corn. The whole reasoning behind that is, well, first of all, I had open space. But the other thing is that I should have corn in season, starting sometime in late July, pushing us all the way into September.

This is all what my book's about, Kathy, succession planting is continuing to sow seeds. I've sowed more broccoli recently, and kale for the fall, and cabbages. I'm always sowing beets and carrots and green beans. And I'll even sow more summer squash soon, to offset pest pressure. Because my summer squash can fall prey to pest pressure. And so I just rip the plants out that are diseased and start over.

INTERVIEWER: By the way, how are you doing with pests?

MEG COWDEN: So this is the beautiful thing about the garden, is that it is the one place in our lives where it is completely normal to do the same thing year over year, and not only expect, but hope for different results. And pest pressure is a great example of that. The pests are different every single year. So right now, I'm seeing a couple of normal pests, like my cabbage white butterflies.

Those cute little white butterflies that you see flying around, they feast on our cole crops, so our broccoli and our cabbage, but also on roadside mustards. They're ubiquitous. I have a butterfly net in the garden. And I'm killing them any chance I get. And I squash their larva. Colorado potato beetles got out of hand last year in our garden. So we knew they'd be bad. I do a daily swipe for those and drop those into soapy water.

But I haven't seen any cucumber beetles yet, which I think is kind of strange. Because last year, they were out before June. So, pest populations, when you grow year over year, you see differences. But one pest I absolutely cannot stand, that never goes away in my garden, is the three-lined potato beetle that devours my tomatillos and my caped gooseberry.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah, I can see you probably are not too happy.

MEG COWDEN: Yeah, they're kind of gross to deal with. I mean, all the other pests I mentioned aren't too bad. But the three-lined potato beetle does something very special because they don't have protective properties in their larva. Even though they eat a plant that has toxicity, their body doesn't absorb it.

So they actually take their fecal matter, and they spread it on the backs of their larva [LAUGHS] to disenfranchise humans and predators alike from removing them. So they are my least favorite. I actually take a whole leaf and drop it into my soapy water. I can't touch those things. They drive me crazy. Yeah, so it's all fun and games in the garden.

INTERVIEWER: The things I learn from you. So I asked you what you're planting. What are you harvesting?

MEG COWDEN: So right now, since we've spoken, strawberry season came into full effect. And we're now waning. I only harvested-- the kids and I only harvested about 4 and 1/2 pounds of strawberries last night. So we're almost done with strawberry season, which is wonderful. Because it's almost like the news cycle, Kathy, like every day, there's something different that's coming into season and something pressing that I have to deal with, whether it's a pest or a harvest. And strawberry season demands our attention.

So, strawberries are a big thing right now. We're still eating asparagus and rhubarb. We're still eating cilantro. Our peas have come into season. We've got a few radishes left. I harvested my first carrots of the season recently. We got beets. Yeah, beets, and celery, and broccoli, and kohlrabi, cabbages as well. So it's been an unusual harvest though, in that with my succession planting, I'm actually harvesting my first and second successions of some things at the same time.

The first successions stalled a little bit. My theory is the cold spring caused them to have a little bit of stress. And so they sort of stopped growing. But the second succession that I planted in late April, they grew phenomenally fast and well. So I ended up harvesting like all my cabbages. A two-month stagger, but harvested them all, like on Monday. It was kind of weird.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. Wow. It's getting a little dry out there too, obviously. How are you doing with the watering?

MEG COWDEN: Yeah, so we have drip irrigation. And our irrigation is set to go on for 20 minutes very early in the morning, every other day in our beds. And our irrigation pipes, for the most part, are drip lines. We actually buried them under three or four inches of compost so the water can really settle in and promote a deeper watering and deeper routes. Other than that, I don't water any of my crops, unless all these places where I had mentioned that I'm establishing new seeds and trying to get things to propagate, that's where I will go in and hand water up to three times a day right now.

The dryness is-- unfortunately, I feel like this is becoming more normal. Dryness and wind, Kathy, that is the other factor for me with climate change, that I feel like we need to adapt to really quickly. I mean, I've lost several of my nasturtium plants to wind. And some of my onions have been knocked over. And they just don't want to stand back up. This is the story of a gardener, though. You're so tuned in to the real nuances of the climate. And it's very humbling. It's very grounding. And we adapt, just like the garden adapts.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting, you brought up wind. Spen Sunguard, our meteorologist, is going to join us in the next few minutes. And he and I have been talking about just how windy it has been. And people are noticing this. And he says that June has been about 16% windier than normal. What you're seeing is actually what's been going on. It's just kind of strange. And then it dries out everything too.

MEG COWDEN: Yeah, but I feel like last year too, the wind-- this whole spring, the wind, and I don't know. For me, I love weather. There's something about wind that makes me say, OK, we are not in control. It is a very humbling part of the environment for me. A little scary, like, I'm not scared of the dark anymore, I'm 48. But the wind kind of freaks me out. I don't know if that makes sense to you at all.

INTERVIEWER: It does. It does. It does. I used to do a lot of work in South Dakota. And of course, just constant wind out there. And it just kind of wears on you after a little bit. What has most impressed you in your garden this season so far? What's popping up, where you think to yourself, wow, that's pretty amazing?

MEG COWDEN: The strawberries have been great, like I had mentioned. What really impressed me was I harvested my first tomatoes on June 8. Now, we all know that this spring really sucked. I mean, it was terrible. May was way colder than average. And June wasn't that warm. So I was so surprised to see-- it was just a handful of cherry tomatoes. But I harvested them on June 8. And these were plants that I had started indoors in late February. And they flowered indoors in April. And I let the fruit set. I was like, ah, whatever. You're not supposed to do this. But this is what the garden is. It's my garden, my rules.

And they ripened in spring. And actually, not only did they ripen, Kathy, that was the earliest I've harvested tomatoes, on what was the coldest spring. And so that to me is just like the garden is telling me to keep trying and to keep pivoting and to keep planting things in ways that I-- it questions my own philosophies. Because the garden says. Like in that moment, it said to me, yes, you need to keep experimenting, keep going. So that's where every day, the garden really will shed light in that way for me.

INTERVIEWER: Love that. I'm going to end it there too, Meg. Thank you so much. It was good to talk to you again.

MEG COWDEN: Thanks, Kathy. All right, enjoy the rest of the month. Thank you, you too. Meg Cowden has been with us, author of the book, *Plant Grow Harvest Repeat*. She's the founder of the website, Seed to Fork, and the Modern Garden Guild.