



Wilson's Nursery



Connie's Corner

Grower's Block by Connie Kratzke

Needless to say, I'm experiencing a creative dry spell. Spring has sprung and so have all the perennial issues. Plants wake up at different rates, in varying conditions. Weather alters best laid plans. Things break. People start. People quit. Nature goes on about its merry way, for better or for worse. We're driven in multiple directions at once, managing the tasks at hand while extinguishing pop-up fires. Meanwhile, we're trying new things! Solutions are being sought and improvements made. Trucks are pulling in to be loaded and unloaded. Trees are being planted and spaded and shipped out the door. That's the short list. Way too many thoughts attempt to pass through my neural pathways simultaneously. I overthink and overwhelm myself with the plethora of things I want to tackle. I'm not alone.

I spent a couple of hours in my gardens tonight to clear my head. Most of my plants are making appearances. The few that haven't are on borrowed time. There are new cultivars I want to try. I have resisted the temptation to clear leaves out of my bee and butterfly gardens. What I couldn't tolerate any longer were the tall, dead stems of Asters, Rudbeckias and the like. I cut them down and piled them up beneath my arborvitaes

where they won't disrupt my peace. The good bugs that may dwell within them can sleep in a little while. I did clear most of our foundation and border plantings last weekend and hauled out a truckload of leaves. Etiolated foliage of leaf-smothered plants popped out like squinting moles. It was time. I took a risk and planted potatoes and lettuce in raised beds the weekend before Good Friday. Both are popping up! I needed a fresh perspective and I found it out back.

The most pleasant occurrence of the week at work so far was the discovery of good bugs in greenhouse four! Aphids appeared and I was taking measures to combat them. Epishield was ordered and a new sprayer was assembled (mostly successfully). Wanting to commit fully to the IPM approach, I went scouting to flag the plants that needed treatment. What I found were tiny black aphids and little brown balls. I had an inkling that what I was seeing were parasitized aphids, so I employed the world wide web to check my hypothesis. Sometimes you just get lucky! Nothing will be sprayed for now while I carefully monitor the situation. Since only two varieties in two different greenhouses are affected and each female wasp lays its eggs in 100 aphids, I want to play the odds for a few days. Decisions like that and their potential ramifications lurk in the crannies of my brain 24/7. I keep reminding myself: no risk, no reward.

Rice hulls are another new fangled thing we're playing around with. They aren't really new of course. Braver pioneers than us implemented them first. We were inspired by Bailey's to try them after noticing issues with our pre-emergent applications last year. Plants were displaying symptoms of injury and hand weeding was still mandatory. It didn't seem like our barriers were effectively being set. I did some calculations to determine how much rice hull material we needed and massively miscalculated. I'm not certain how you mathematically account for the squish factor of hulls and that became obvious. Our inadequate supply did not arrive on schedule, requiring us to go without in the first greenhouse. We ran out before we finished potting the third. Best laid plans. More rice hulls arrived, but as they did, members of our crew were diverted to other tasks. Our clumsy, first efforts towards this new step indicated the need for two "rice-hullers". There weren't enough hullers to be had. That's when we decided a small scale experiment wasn't a terrible place to start.

Spring 'tis the season of fulfillment challenges. All sorts of stuff happens under the cover of winter slumber. Best selling plants don't always wake up. Suppliers suffer invasive pest attacks. Sun burns and frost cracks. Critical shipments get delayed. We strive to put our best foot forward, but toes get stubbed along the way. Please know, our entire team is working tirelessly to deliver what you need. When we fail, we feel it. We're digging deep and having tough talks. Improving every aspect of your experience is the goal. One hull at a time, we'll do that.





Aphid "mummies", parasitized insects and nymphs.



Rice hulls in action, making everything look tidy and keeping soil conditions even.

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