

THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY SPRING GROWTH

Posted on 2018, May 2nd by Bob

Notes on the Importance of early Spring Growth.

As I am never tired of mentioning, here on the high desert, spring frosts are a regular issue. We get numbers of them every year without fail, and while they don't always kill flower buds, they can effect the carpals in ways so they won't produce seeds. Last spring I tried an experiment : I did not water my plants at all during the time prior to flower bloom., and allowed them to develop with the soil moisture left over from our winter snows. My thought was that if the plants and buds were less hydrated, they might be more resistant to frost. The outcome of which was...I did not have a lot of flowers, and although the plants had the expected number of stems, the plants were shorter than normal. Once the danger of frost was past, I gave these plants very good care, lots of water, and fertilized them several times during the summer.

This spring the outcome is that many of my plants have gone backwards in their stem count, even though I had pampered them during the previous summer. Some newer plants had only half the number of stems that they'd had during the previous year, and some stems look like they may not have any flowers.

What conclusions should I draw from this ?

One thing that came to mind was the method that one sometimes hears about that hybridizers use to get seeds on flowers that would normally be too double to make seeds at all. At some point in early spring, the developing stems are cut back, and the plant responds by sending up a new set of stems on which the flowers are often single, and thus usable for hybridization.

My sense is that this second set of stems comes from immature buds which normally would go on to make next spring's stems, but which are unnaturally forced into action this spring instead. At a time when the embryonic flower buds inside them are only just beginning their development.

This indicates to me that next year's stems are already beginning to develop right at the very beginning of the previous spring. The fact that I had not watered my plants in the early spring (we have very sandy soil here) inhibited the initiation of these buds, and was the reason that I got fewer stems this year, despite taking very good care of my plants last summer. And in contrast to last year, watering them copiously this spring as well.

I also tend not to fertilize in early spring, for fear of the sort of soft growth which will be susceptible

to frosts. This may also lead to fewer embryonic buds and thus slower stem increase, even though I do fertilize several times during the summer.

It seems reasonable to fertilize in spring to produce good blooms this season, but it may have a secondary effect as well – The encouragement of flowers and good stem increase which will not show up until a full year in the future. From eyes which need to begin developing quite early in spring if they are going to develop at all.

Bob Johnson