

## **The Dog Days of Summer do not Refer Necessarily to Rover and Spot**

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**These are the dog days of summer.** Where did this phrase originate? Contrary to popular belief it doesn't necessarily refer to the family dog, who sleeps away the day in a heap on the cool tile floor, tongue lolling, moving only as far as the water dish. **The dog days refer to the hottest, most sultry days of summer,** and in the **northern hemisphere** they usually fall **between early July and early September.** We can attest to that! The term was used by ancient Greeks and Romans to **name the Dog Star, Sirius,** the brightest star in the heavens besides the sun. And Brady's *Clavis Calendarium* written in 1813 stated that the dog days were believed to be an evil time “when the seas boiled, wine turned sour, dogs grew mad and all creatures became languid, causing to man burning fevers, hysterics and phrensies.”

So **stay indoors already.** It's way too hot to garden. We suggest that you **spend some languid hours reading** about your favorite outdoor activity. After munching on a heavenly peach, with the juice running down your chin, read **“Epitaph for a Peach,” by David Mas Masumoto.** Farming in our central valley, he maintains the family farm and cherishes the Sun Crest peach which his father and grandfather grew before him. It's too fragile for commercial shipping so it is a labor of love and a nod to a time long past as he continues the family tradition. If you enjoy this book, he has written others and each one is an inspiration to all gardeners.

Another author who has caught my attention is **Amy Stewart** who spoke to a room full of attentive gardeners in Sutter Creek last month. Having just published **“Wicked Plants: The Weed that Killed Lincoln’s Mother and other Botanical Atrocities”** she spoke vehemently about the many plants which are poisonous and cautioned us to be careful what we sow. With a title like that who wouldn't be intrigued to learn more. Another of her publications **“From the Ground Up”** is the story of her first garden in Santa Cruz when her efforts as a newbie were only gradually rewarded. All gardeners will recognize those early days and share her disappointment at the uneven results and her joy at eventual success. She now lives and gardens in Eureka.

Are you familiar with **Michael Pollan**? He too writes about creating his first garden, in Connecticut, in his book **“Second Nature: A Gardener's Education.”** Wonderful reading, of his eventual capitulation to the lure of the rose and it's fascinating history, his treatise on weeds which could be said to rule the world, and with frequent references to his grandfather who inspired him in the first place, it's a fine read to start on a summer's day. Another of his books **“The Botany of Desire: A Plant's Eye View of the World”** promises to reveal the relationship between human desires for sweetness, beauty, intoxication and control to the plants that satisfy them: the apple, the tulip, marijuana and the potato. This is next on my list; I can't deny my fascination. Pollan teaches at U.C. Berkeley.

If it's the gardens of Italy you pine for, read **“Under the Tuscan Sun” by Frances Mayes.** Not a new publication, it still resonates with the story of restoring an old villa and older garden and remains a favorite. The movie fashioned after this story was ridiculous; read the real thing and enjoy.

As we wait for cooler weather and a return to the garden, put the dog days to good use by reading about the passion we all share.

*Joan Bergsund, master gardener since 1994, is spending the dog days indoors, reading.*