

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY William M. Johnson

**Caladiums are known for their stunning leaves with unique patterns and vibrant colors. They will attract attention to any landscape and bring life to shady areas.**

April is a wonderful time to enjoy gardening. Azaleas are putting on their spring show and many types of citrus trees are blooming. Trees are putting out their new foliage that is such a delicate green. Add the pleasant temperatures and you have a strong invitation to get out in the garden. Hopefully, you have already planted the trees and shrubs that you want to plant for the year and are ready to concentrate on annuals, perennials, vegetables, and lawns. Here's a checklist for

keeping up with the chores while enjoying the pleasures of April. PERIWINKLES: One warm season annual that many folks set out too early is the periwinkle. These are warm weather plants. Periwinkles planted before mid-April are much more susceptible to a fungal blight disease (known as Phytophthora stem blight and root rot) that can wipe out sections or an entire bed of plants. Delay planting periwinkles until the

weather is consistently warm. LAWNS: Mid-March to mid-April is the recommended time period to fertilize lawns. A good way to determine when to fertilize is to wait until you have mowed the predominant lawn grass twice. If you fertilize too early, you will be fertilizing the winter weeds! This allows time for the grass to green up naturally without pushing it into growth. Use a 3-1-2 ratio fertilizer (such as 15-5-10) and distribute



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with a broadcast (cyclone) spreader. Uniform distribution is essential to prevent light and dark streaks in the lawn.

**AZALEAS:** Wait to fertilize azaleas until after the major bloom season is finished. Consider using a fertilizer specially formulated for azaleas which provides plant nutrients in the right ratio and also helps to maintain acid soil conditions needed by azaleas. Because azaleas have a shallow root system, many gardeners have found it to be beneficial to apply several light fertilizer applications over time rather than all at one time.

**CALADIUMS:** If you asked me what some of my favorite plants for summer color are, caladiums would absolutely be at the top of my list. Caladiums are ideal for both novice and experienced gardeners because they are so easy to grow. You would be hard-pressed to find a plant that provides such reliable color in areas that get shade. Select caladium tubers while there are ample stocks available but do not plant caladiums too early.

Caladiums typically should be planted from April into early May. Caladiums need warm soil temperatures (at least 70 degrees) for best growth. Caladiums produce delightful color splashes of white, pink, rose, red, burgundy, chartreuse or green, often with several colors combining in wonderful patterns to provide elegant beauty to local landscapes. Their bright leaves with bold textures embellish our shady gardens from May until October, when the tubers go dormant. Caladiums are remarkably free from major insect or disease problems.

**STORING LEFTOVER SEED:** Many flower or vegetable seeds left over after planting the garden can be saved for the next season by closing the packets with tape or paper clips and storing in a tightly sealed glass jar in your refrigerator until needed. Adding 1 or 2 tablespoons of powdered milk in a cloth bag to reduce the humidity within the jar can also be very beneficial to maintaining long-term seed viability.

**SUMMER ANNUALS:** One tendency shoppers have is to buy transplants of summer annuals only with open flowers. Young transplants that have few or no flowers may be a smarter purchase since these plants will grow larger before flowering. The result will be a more impressive floral display in your home garden.

**PURCHASING TOPSOIL:** Use good quality topsoil from a reputable source for replenishing flowerbeds, filling low spots in the lawn, etc. Nutgrass and other hard-to-kill weeds are sometimes introduced this way.

At a Glance

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Galveston County Extension Leadership Advisory Board will hold a Texas Community Futures Forum on Monday, April 20, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Galveston County Extension Office located in Carbide Park (4102-B Main St. in La Marque).

The forum is being held to assist local AgriLife Extension agents and the county's Leadership Advisory Board in identifying the most critical issues affecting local citizens.

Extension has a rich history of providing educational programs that address the most critical issues

in the county, specifically in program areas related to agriculture and natural resources, families and health, youth development and community development. In order to make sure Extension programs being planned for the future are on target and relevant, Galveston County residents are invited to participate in this grassroots, consensus-building forum.

Input from the local community is important toward shaping programming conducted by the Galveston County Extension Office for the next five years. We want to make sure we're meeting the needs of Galveston County residents.

Residents are asked to provide a RSVP by April 6; contact the AgriLife Extension Office by phone (281-534-3413, ext. 1, then ext. 2) or email GALV3@wt.net.

