

# May brings busy days of gardening

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*

May has arrived, and gardening activities are in full-gear. In fact, gardening activities are bit ahead of schedule because of the remarkably mild winter season.

Peaches, apples and other fruits are maturing well ahead of schedule.

Sam Scarcella, a Master Gardener renowned for his expertise on homegrown tomatoes, reported during the weekend he harvested his first crop of tomatoes April 28 in La Marque.

Sam also reported on the damage he received from the hail that accompanied the recent bout of thunderstorms. Hail can inflict extensive damage to vehicles, roofs and other structures, but it also can damage landscape trees and shrubs as well as vegetables and fruits.

The good news is rainfall and soil moisture has been good thus far this year. The days of May will bring warming nights and longer, sunnier days.

Hopefully, we'll get our monthly norm and, just as important, we'll get it in evenly spaced installments in time and in amounts.

Busy days of gardening are in store for the May gardener in completing spring chores and in preparing for summer. The following gardening guides might be helpful for May gar-



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

A Home Fruit Growers' Tour will be from 9 a.m. to noon May 12. Three fruit orchards are on this year's tour route, including a pick-your-own peach orchard in the Texas City-Dickinson area.

dening activities.

## Home Fruit Growers' Tour

A Home Fruit Growers' Tour will be conducted from 9 a.m. to noon May 12. Three fruit orchards are on this year's tour.

This year's tour sites contain a wide variety of fruit trees ranging from a peach orchard (Fruit 'n Such Orchard, 6309 Ave. U, in Texas City), the Master Gardener Demonstration Orchard (Carbide Park in La Marque) and a sizable home orchard in Santa Fe.

Tour maps and details can be downloaded from my website address — click on the "Extension Educational Programs" link. Information will be provided next week.

## Care Of New Plantings

Spring- and winter-planted trees and shrubs will be estab-

lishing their root system this year and, thus, are very susceptible to transplant shock during the summer if not given proper care.

The first summer of growth is a critical period for all new plantings. To reduce transplant shock, be sure to water thoroughly and deeply as needed during dry weather rather than giving more frequent, light sprinklings.

Plants also should be mulched with shredded pine bark, pine needles, compost, dried lawn clippings, etc. A 4- to 6-inch layer of mulch also will help control weeds, maintain more uniform soil moisture and keep the soil cooler.

As a result, the degree of transplant shock will be significantly minimized. Also, add to the list of benefits the fact mulched trees and shrubs will grow much better than non-mulched transplants.



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### Summer Annuals

For instant color, purchase started annual plants. Select short, compact plants. Remove faded blooms for more productive flowering. If beds are not mulched, lightly cultivate the upper soil so as not to disturb shallow roots. Doing so improves water absorption, reduces soil compaction and aids in weed control. Plant summer annual plants that take the heat such as periwinkles, purslane, portulaca, lantana, etc.

Annuals for shade include impatiens, coleus, caladiums (the tubers are just about out of stock, potted plants are still available) and bedding begonias. Caladiums often will produce a single flower stalk right after the first leaves are produced. Early removal of the flower stalk will encourage the plants to produce more lush leaf growth.

### Okra

Normally, I recommend okra be planted during the month of May, but this year, it would have been safe to have planted it earlier — given warmer weather conditions this spring. This cousin of cotton especially needs to be planted in warm soil. Proven varieties include Emerald, Clemson Spineless or Jade. After planting, plan to spread plants to 24 inches apart in the row, with rows 36 to 42 inches apart.

### Leaf Droppage Of Evergreens

Many gardeners take the description “evergreen” too literally and often are concerned when evergreens, such as magnolias, euonymus, live oak, gardenia and some of the hollies, lose some of their old leaves during late spring and early summer.

The flush of new growth on many evergreens will cause a yellowing of old leaves and leaf droppage. There is nothing to be concerned about. It is just Mother Nature putting a new spring coat of green and discarding the old.

