

Busy days are in store for the May gardener

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

The days of May will bring warming nights and longer, sunnier days — a change of seasons. The average rainfall for May is about 5 inches. Hopefully, we'll get our monthly norm and, just as important, we'll get it in evenly spaced installments (over 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 gardening activities:

Home Fruit Growers' Tour

A Home Fruit Growers' Tour will be conducted May 14. Three fruit orchards are on this year's tour. Each location will be open from 9 a.m. to noon.

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 information can be downloaded from the website provided at the end of this column (click on the "Extension Educational Programs" link).

More information also will be provided in my garden column May 11.

Care Of New Plantings

This spring's drought is serious. Spring-planted trees and shrubs will be establishing 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 that mulched trees and shrubs will grow much better than non-mulched transplants.

Okra

Okra can be planted during the month of May. This cousin of cotton especially needs to be planted in a warm soil.

Some gardeners had poor stands this spring because they planted okra seeds too early and cool weather conditions not only reduced germination but slowed plant

growth.

Proven varieties include emerald, clemson spineless or jade.

After planting, plan to thin 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. Nothing to be concerned about — just Mother Nature putting a new spring coat of green and discarding the old.

Fruit Set On Squash

Don't be concerned if the first several squash fruit fall off the plant before they reach an edible stage. The first flowers to form in squash in early spring are the female flowers (with the miniature fruit located right under the yellow flowers).

With no male flowers being present, no pollination takes place. However, in a few days the male flowers will be formed, and normal fruit set should take place. Interest-



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ingly enough, it's the reverse in summer plantings — the male flowers tend to develop first so no fruit set occurs until the female flowers develop.

Summer Annuals

Remove faded blooms for more productive flowering. If beds are not mulched, then 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 might include: impatiens, coleus, caladiums (the tubers are just about out of stock, potted plants are still available) and bedding begonias. Caladiums will often 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.

