

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY William M. Johnson

Each of us can do something to help insect pollinators including honey bees (pictured above). Simple actions ranging from planting more pollinator-attractive flowers to using pesticides only when necessary and according to label directions can make a big impact.

Busy days of gardening are in store for the May gardener in completing spring chores and in preparing for summer. The following gardening guides may be helpful for planning May's gardening activities:

HOME FRUIT GROWERS' TOUR ON MAY 16: A Home Fruit Growers' Tour will be conducted on Saturday, May 16, 2015. Three fruit orchards are on this year's tour. Each location will be open from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. This year's tour sites con-

tain a wide variety of fruit trees ranging from a peach orchard (Fruit 'n Such Orchard located at 6309 Avenue U in Texas City), the Master Gardener Demonstration Orchard (located in Carbine Park in La Marque) and a sizeable home orchard in Santa Fe. Tour maps and additional details may be downloaded from my website address provided with this column (click on the "Extension Educational Programs" link). Additional information will

also be provided in next week's garden column.

CHALLENGING YEAR FOR VEGETABLES:

The unusually wet and cool spring delayed planting of many vegetables. Even tomatoes have had an unusually tough time this spring.

Normally I recommend that okra be planted during the month of April but this year it would have been better to have waited until May given the occurrences of cool temperatures over the past few weeks. This



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cousin of cotton especially needs to be planted in a warm soil. 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.

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. Interestingly 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.

CARE OF NEW PLANTINGS: Spring- and winter-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 provided proper care during extended periods of dry weather conditions.

The first summer of growth is a critical period for all newly planted trees and shrubs. To reduce transplant shock, be sure to water thoroughly and deeply as needed during dry weather rather than giving more fre-

quent, light sprinklings.

Plants should also be mulched with shredded pine bark or pine needles. A 4-to-6-inch layer of mulch will also 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.

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, 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 annual plants that take the heat such as periwinkles, purslane, portulaca, lantana, etc.

Annuals for shade may 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.

PROTECT INSECT POLLINATORS: We are busy in the garden this month and so are honey bees

and other insect pollinators. Let's do all we can to protect these valuable little insects. Many insecticides are highly toxic to bees. Some cannot be safely applied any time target plants are in bloom, while others should be applied during late evening when bees are less likely to be foraging for nectar and pollen.

