

Caring for plants now carries rewards for later

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

June is almost here, and gardening activities have been well ahead of schedule because of the unusually warm winter.

At least rainfall levels have been much more favorable this year compared to last year at this time. This is the time of year when we might tend to neglect our plants in the landscape and garden.

A little care now will not only help your plants better withstand the rigors of summer weather, it also will reward you with a flush of color during the late summer and fall seasons. Critical gardening activities for June include the following:

Peach tree pruning

Annual summer pruning of peach trees is a critical management practice for producing easily harvested, heavy crops of high-quality peaches. If left unpruned, peach trees will become too tall and tangled to comfortably and safely harvest, and yields will start to decline.

Summer pruning should be carried out soon after all fruits have been harvested. As crucial as this practice is, home peach growers are often unaware of the importance of summer pruning and how to perform this task.

Whether you are a novice or wish to enhance your skills on summer pruning of peach



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

The most anticipated moment for spring gardeners is when they start harvesting the fruits of their labors. Vegetables should be picked when they are at their peak flavor and tenderness.

trees, take steps now to reserve a space to participate in a hands-on training on pruning peach trees.

The training will be conducted at the Master Gardener Demonstration Orchard in Carbide Park, 4102 Main St., in La Marque on Thursday. The first training session will be at 9 a.m., and a second session will be at 10:30 a.m.

Because this is a hands-on training, participation is limited to 22 individuals on a first-come, first-accepted basis. Email [galv3\(at\)wt.net](mailto:galv3(at)wt.net) or call 281-534-3413, Ext. 21.

Vegetable Harvest

Harvest vegetables frequently to ensure continual production.

When not harvested on a frequent enough basis, many

vegetables will reduce production of flowers and channel their energy into seed production in the maturing fruit already on plants.

Container Plants

Plants growing in containers are far more dependent on you for adequate water than plants growing in the ground. A practical approach to determining whether a plant needs water is to stick your finger in the soil.

If the soil is dry down to the first knuckle on your index finger, then add water. Conversely, if the soil is still damp to the touch, don't water.

Watering frequency will vary depending on the type of plant, time of year, temperature and size of the plant in relation to the size of the con-



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tainer among other factors. It has been a very windy spring, and soil in container-grown plants dries out faster under windy conditions.

You'll note the procedure is called watering as opposed to sprinkling. When you water, water generously until water runs out of the drainage holes to ensure adequate soil moisture throughout the potting soil medium. Generous watering also helps to flush or leach out excessive salts commonly seen as a flaky, off-white crust along the inside rim of pots.

To facilitate watering, the soil, or soilless potting medium should not be level with the rim of the pot. Having the top of the soil slightly lower than the pot rim provides space to hold water while it penetrates into the medium.

Blackberries

Once blackberry plants have completed their current crop, they should be fertilized.

The stalks, called fruticanes, that produced this year's crop soon will die back and should be removed to reduced disease problems.

A new set of green stalks, called primicanes, should be present, and these will produce next year's crop of blackberries.

Mulch Plants

Soil moisture, essential for plant growth and health, might be conserved by applying an organic mulch. Choose a clean mulch — one that is free of weeds and that will remain loose and well aerated.

Shredded pine bark, compost, pine needle and oak leaf mulches are excellent for conserving moisture. These mulches also serve to keep the soil cool and limit weed seed germination and/or weed growth.

If you have a newly planted landscape tree, it will be well worth the time and

effort to mulch the area from the base of the tree trunk out to at least 3 feet. Weeds and lawn grass are aggressive competitors for nutrients and moisture. As a result, newly planted trees often struggle along the first year or two.

Your landscape tree will grow up to 50 percent faster when mulched. Apply a 4- to 6-inch layer (after settling) to landscape trees.

Applying an overly deep layer of mulch next to the trunk of a tree or shrub should be avoided as doing so can increase the incidence of insect pest and disease problems.

Summer Annuals

It is not too late to plant colorful summer annuals during June and early summer, especially if transplants are used. Plant dependable summer annuals such as vinca, impatiens, salvia and portulaca.

To keep flowering annuals on the grow, remove the faded blooms often, which will induce more branching and more blooms. Seasonal flowering plants also will profit from an occasional feeding with a light application of a balanced fertilizer.

Free Advice

June gardening days also should include taking time to just sit back in your favorite lawn chair on a long summer evening to just enjoy the fruits of your labor.

