

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY William M. Johnson

Many home citrus growers reported that the rinds of maturing citrus fruit started splitting soon after plentiful rainfall occurred after the summer drought. This type of damage typically occurs when citrus trees rapidly take up water from rain or irrigation after an extended period of dry weather conditions.

It happens so very slowly that I am not aware of it. As I was looking out of my living room window last weekend, it occurred to me that days are getting shorter. No more working outside at 9:00 p.m. with sufficient sunlight to see. Ever so slowly and by one minute or so day and 2 minutes or so on another day, the days have become shorter in length since June 20 (the official start of summer). Now I

will look forward to Dec 21, when the cycle reverses and day length ever so slowly starts to increase. Ahhh, but September has at last arrived. Weather-wise, the 2015 summer season has been hot and, until recently, on the dry side. The 15-inch deep crack in a grassy area of our Master Gardener Demonstration Garden has closed up and is no

longer visible. Kids are back in school and the hope of cooler days is becoming more of a reality. Although it may not seem like it, September marks the beginning of a new season in our area. The change is subtle to be sure but the days of warm summer days are coming to an end and the fall growing season is here.



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One good thing about our Texas Gulf Coast summers is that we get to anticipate and to better appreciate the cooler temperatures of the fall season. The gardening checklist for September includes the following:

Master Gardener Horticulture Demonstration Garden Tour: The Master Gardeners will conduct a "Garden with the Masters" program on Thursday, September 3. A guided tour of vegetable beds as well as the fruit orchard and Asian garden will start at 9:00 a.m. Gardeners are also welcome to casually tour the garden and orchard thereafter until 11:30 a.m.

Annual Ornamentals, Perennials & Fall Vegetables Sale: The 2015 plant sale is an "absolute must" for area gardeners. This is an early notification so gardeners can pencil in this popular event on their gardening calendar for Saturday, October 10. A diverse variety of fall vegetable transplants will be available at this fall's sale. All activities will be conducted at Carbide Park in La Marque. More information will be provided in upcoming columns.

Fruit Splitting on Citrus Trees: Soon after our area received plentiful rainfall that ended the extended dry spell, I started receiving inquiries about the cause of citrus fruit splitting. This type of damage typically occurs when citrus trees rapidly take up water from rain or irrigation after a

long dry period. The fruit expands and bursts the peel in a crack across the bottom or blossom end of the fruit.

The buildup of excess fluids produces sufficient internal pressure to cause the skin to burst. Young trees have the highest incidence of splitting. Navel oranges are most susceptible, followed by tangelos, some tight-skinned types of mandarins, and other oranges. In contrast, grapefruits are rarely affected by this problem. Maintaining adequate and even soil moisture levels by regular irrigation during extended periods of dry weather is the best defense against fruit splitting.

Pruning Shrubs and Bushes: September is also a good time to trim unruly shrubs and bushes. Pruning too late in the season may encourage tender new growth which could be susceptible to cold weather. Be careful not to prune plants like gardenias, camellias and azaleas at this time as these plants have already formed next spring's floral buds. Pruning these plants now will result in fewer flowers next year.

Divide Perennials: Late September is time to divide spring-flowering perennials such as irises, Shasta daisies, gaillardias, cannas, day lilies, violets, liriopse, and ajuga. Reset divisions into well-prepared soil with generous amounts of organic material worked into the top 8 to 10

inches.

Fall Vegetables: Vegetables to plant at the beginning of September include corn, cucumber, eggplant, green beans, lima beans, pepper, squash and tomato. Toward the end of the month this list can be expanded to include broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, collard, endive, lettuce, mustard, onion, radish, and turnips.

At a Glance

WHAT: Square Foot Gardening
WHEN: Tuesday, Sept. 15, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

WHAT: Growing Onions and Garlic
WHEN: Saturday, Sept. 19, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.

WHAT: Kitchen Gardening
WHEN: Saturday, Sept. 19, 1:00 - 3:30 p.m.

LOCATION: All programs conducted at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbide Park (4102-B Main St. in La Marque). Pre-register by e-mail (GALV3@wt.net) or phone (281-534-3413, ext. 5065).