

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



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PHOTO CREDIT: Dr. William M. Johnson

Master Gardeners Luke Stripling (pictured left) and Wes Ruzek (right) are harvesting blueberries grown in the Discovery Garden located in Carbide Park. Master Gardeners will conduct a Plant Sale at the Discovery Garden from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, March 1. Blueberries and other fruit trees as well as citrus trees and vegetable transplants will be available.

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The first day of spring will arrive in a few days (March 20 at 11:15 p.m., according to the astronomical definition). From a gardening perspective, the exact timing of "spring" is less precise.

This has been an unusually cool-to-cold winter. Meteorologically speaking, that would not necessarily

be a hard science assessment—just my horticultural opinion. Even so, I had my air conditioner on over the weekend as I started to prepare this column.

Arizona ash trees serve as my harbinger for spring. I've observed over many years that Arizona ash trees will

start setting out new leaves around mid-February, give or take a few days. Arizona ash trees were definitely later than normal this year in setting out new growth. Even azaleas were delayed in setting out their floral displays.

We should remember that arrival of the spring



season along the Texas Gulf Coast tends to have a bumpy landing. Mother Nature has been known to deliver a surprise cold snap during this time of year.

Review the following gardening checklist for things to do as the spring season arrives.

GULF COAST HERB FESTIVAL: The Friends of Moody Gardens will host the Sixth Annual Gulf Coast Herb Festival on Wednesday, March 7, from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the atrium of the Moody Gardens Visitor Center located at One Hope Boulevard in Galveston.

A variety of vendors will be on hand showcasing their herbs, books, food items and gifts. The Herb Fair will also feature cooking demonstrations. A Garden Blessing will be held in the Butterfly Garden at 10:30 a.m. Professional and amateur craft brewers will present programs and answer questions relating to hops which have been named the "herb of the year."

Master Gardeners will also be available to answer visitors' questions on growing and using herbs. Tickets will be available to purchase a luncheon (\$35 each) that will start at 12:00 Noon.

Proceeds from this event benefit third-graders across Galveston schools with an educational experience at the Aquarium Pyramid and fifth-graders at Galveston schools with an educational experience at the Rainforest Pyramid.

MASTER GARDENER SPRING PLANT SALE . . . The sequel: The Master Gardeners will be conducting a plant sale on from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. on Thursday, March 1, at the Discovery Garden located in Carbide Park (4102 Main Street) in La Marque. A wide selection of vegetable transplants in addition to citrus and fruit trees will be available and at a discounted price.

ANNUALS: Copper plants, ageratum and ornamental amaranth and other annuals can be set out.

FERTILIZE LANDSCAPE TREES AND SHRUBS: March is an excellent time to fertilize established landscape trees and shrubs as they come out of their winter dormancy period and put out new growth. It is not necessary to punch holes in the ground to fertilize trees or shrubs or to use fertilizer spikes. Surface application of a granular fertilizer is quite satisfactory and an even better practice.

VEGETABLES: Many types of vegetables can usually be established in the garden during March including transplants of tomatoes and peppers as well as direct-seeding of corn, cucumbers, southern peas and many other vegetables.

Be prepared to provide cold weather protection as may be needed. It is still too early to plant okra as okra does not tol-

erate cool spells. Wait until mid-April before planting okra seeds.

LAWNS: Yes, most area St. Augustine lawns are dull brown in color because of several cold snaps occurring over the past few weeks. However, do not fertilize St. Augustine lawns now in the hope of making it green up faster. St. Augustine lawns should not be fertilized this time of year until after the grass starts to actively grow; otherwise, if you fertilize now you will be benefiting winter weeds and some of the nitrogen will be lost before lawn growth starts.

HANGING BASKETS: Late March is an ideal time to set out hanging baskets. The variety of plants that can be used is limited only by your imagination. Suitable plants for hanging baskets include portulaca, ivy, geraniums, airplane plant, bougainvillea, English ivy, begonias, and a host of others.

WEED KILLERS AND TREES: Many landscape trees and shrubs are damaged or killed each year by the careless application of weed killers to lawns, including those found in mixes of weed killers and fertilizers (commonly called "weed & feed"). Always read and follow all label directions very carefully including application near the drip line of landscape trees and shrubs.

