

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: William M. Johnson



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The Master Gardeners will be conducting a plant sale from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. on Thursday, April 4, at the Discovery Garden located in Carbide Park (4102 Main Street) in La Marque. A wide selection of greenhouse-grown annuals including Angelonias (shown above is Angelonia 'Serenita Purple') will be available. Citrus trees will also be available.

April is a wonderful time to enjoy the outdoor garden, especially after a rather cool winter season. Landscapes that were turned dull brown are beginning to display vibrant colors that remind gardeners the joy of gardening in the Upper Texas Gulf Coast region.

blossoms that will soon yield tasty harvests for mouth-watering fruits in a few weeks. Many citrus trees are in full bloom and azaleas are nearing the end of their spring bloom season. Trees are putting out their new foliage in delicate hues of green.

ready planted the trees and shrubs that you want to plant for the year and are ready to concentrate on annuals, perennials, vegetables, and lawns. Here's a checklist for keeping up with the chores while enjoying the pleasures of April.

Tomato plants have put out

Hopefully, you have al-



MASTER GARDENER GREENHOUSE-GROWN PLANTS SALE: The Master Gardeners will be conducting a plant sale from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. on Thursday, April 4, at the Discovery Garden located in Carbide Park (4102 Main Street) in La Marque. A wide selection of greenhouse-grown annuals including Angelonias, Pentas, Salvias, Portulaca, Persian Shield and more will be for available for purchase in addition to citrus trees sold at a discounted price.

AZALEAS: As flowering finishes, evaluate your azaleas for needed pruning. April and May are good months to trim your bushes, but only do it if it is necessary. Generally, a little shaping is all that is required. Controlling size is a common reason for pruning, especially if large-growing cultivars were planted where smaller ones should have been used.

You should begin to manage the size of your azaleas when they reach the maximum desirable size. Unless you are trying to create a formal clipped hedge, avoid shearing azaleas with hedge clippers because this destroys their attractive natural shape. It is better to use hand pruners to selectively remove or shorten branches to achieve the desired shape and size.

First, identify the tallest or widest shoots or branches on a bush that are too large then prune the branch back a few inches inside the interior of shrub growth. When the shortened branch sprouts, the new growth will be inside the shrub creating a thicker, fuller plant. And the new growth will not immediately stick out above the rest of the bush — something that commonly happens if pruning cuts are made just

back to the edge of the bush or when azaleas are sheared.

Keep pruning back the tallest and widest shoots until the shrub is the proper size. You may continue to prune occasionally as needed using this technique into the summer up until late June (early July at the very latest). After that, chances increase that you will remove flower buds when you prune. Alternate-season-blooming azaleas, such as the Encores, have a shorter window or opportunity, and pruning on them should be done as soon as the major spring blooming period is over.

LAWNS: Mid-March to mid-April is the recommended time period to fertilize lawns. A good way to determine when to fertilize is to wait until you have mowed the predominant lawn grass twice.

If you fertilize too early, you will be fertilizing the winter weeds! This allows time for the grass to green up naturally without pushing it into growth. Use a 3-1-2 ratio fertilizer (such as 15-5-10) and distribute with a broadcast (cyclone) spreader. Uniform distribution is essential to prevent light and dark streaks in the lawn.

PERIWINKLES: One warm season annual that many folks set out too early is the periwinkle. These are warm weather plants. Periwinkles planted before mid-April are much more susceptible to a fungal blight disease (known as Phytophthora stem blight and root rot) that can wipe out sections or an entire bed of plants. Delay planting periwinkles until the weather is consistently warm.

STORING LEFTOVER SEED: Many flower or vegetable seeds left over after planting the garden can be saved for the next season by closing the packets with tape or paper clips and storing in a tightly sealed glass jar in your refrigerator until needed. Adding 1 or 2 tablespoons of powdered milk in a cloth bag to reduce the humidity within the jar can also be very beneficial to maintaining long-term seed viability.

CALADIUMS: If you asked me what some of my favorite plants for summer color are, caladiums would absolutely be at the top of my list. Caladiums are ideal for both novice and experienced gardeners because they are so easy to grow. You would be hard-pressed to find a plant that provides such reliable color in areas that get shade. Select caladium tubers while there are ample stocks available but do not plant caladiums too early.

Caladiums typically should be planted from April into early May. Caladiums need warm soil temperatures (at least 70 degrees) for best growth. Caladiums produce delightful color splashes of white, pink, rose, red, burgundy, chartreuse or green, often with several colors combining in wonderful patterns to provide elegant beauty to local landscapes. Their bright leaves with bold textures embellish our shady gardens from May until October, when the tubers go dormant. Caladiums are remarkably free from major insect or disease problems.