



May: our transition into summer

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MAY 2012

In southeast Texas, May is usually just a bridge between hot and really hot. This year, spring actually arrived in early to mid-February, but relatively cool weather has prevailed for March and April. Although rains have returned for a time, there still may be drought in the future, so plan your gardens with that possibility in mind.

Vegetable Gardens

Plant eggplant, cantaloupe, okra, southern peas (black-eyed, Crowder and purple hull peas), sweet potatoes, pumpkin and watermelon now. Peppers can go into the ground now, but it's getting a little warm for them.

Tomatoes are ripening. Since tomatoes ripen from the inside out, the best time to pick them is when there is a slight blush on the outside skin. Harvest blushing tomatoes and put them in a window in the kitchen. In a couple of days, they'll be red and tasty. Watch for early blight in tomatoes. Cut off the diseased portions and treat the rest of the plant with an organic fungicide.

Many beans are maturing now. Pole beans continue producing throughout the season. Pick pole or bush beans when they are fat and tender.

Lawns

Apply compost to lawns now if you haven't already. Refrain from using "weed and feed" products. These agents disrupt the natural cycle of the soil and may lead to weaker root systems.

Don't water any more than two days a week. Watering every seven or eight days is the ideal. Put one inch of water down on the lawn. Make it a habit of keeping a rain gauge out, or better still, install a rain sensor to your lawn irrigation system.

A grass plant produces food through photosynthesis. In order for that to happen, it must have green leaves exposed to the sun. Cutting grass too short will inhibit it from making and storing food, eventually weakening and killing it. A good rule of thumb is to set the mower blades to the highest possible setting and leave about three inches of the blade uncut. Also, make sure that the mower blade is sharp.

General plant care

Here come the bugs! Aphids, chinch bugs, spider mites, thrips, grasshoppers,

leaf-footed bugs, stinkbugs, caterpillars and a bevy of other critters are descending on our gardens. Use biological controls to eradicate or discourage these animals. Insecticidal soap, Neem oil, Bacillus thuringiensis (BT), a hard spray with a hose, are all good methods of controlling insects. Many gardeners purchase ladybugs (ladybird beetles), praying mantids' eggs, or braconid wasps to help them get rid of bad insects.



Trees

Fruit trees are setting fruit right now and need more water than normal. Don't drown them, but make sure they do get enough water.

Other trees may also need water. A soaker hose, circled around the drip line, is a great way to keep them irrigated. The Texas Forestry Service has a brochure out which can help you. For more information, [click here](#).

Pollination Gardens

Plant heat and drought tolerant plants like Aesclepias (milkweed), butterfly bush (buddleia), salvia, gaillardia, passion vine and lantana to name a few.

Provide water for birds, beneficial insects, squirrels and other animals.

“A delicate fabric of bird song
Floats in the air,
The smell of wet wild earth
Is everywhere.

Oh I must pass nothing by
Without loving it much,
The raindrop try
with my lips,
The grass with my touch;

For how can I be sure
I shall see again
The world on the
first of May
Shining after the rain?”

- Sara Teasdale
May Day

Upcoming Free Events

Nature Live Pollinator Fest
What's the buzz about bees, birds and butterflies?

- June 23, 2012
- 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
- Jones State Forest

Talk with Texas Master Naturalists and enjoy various exhibits about pollinators.
No reservations required.

