

# June marks Summer Solstice by Bob Dailey

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 6

JUNE 2012



“ In June as many as a dozen species may burst their buds on a single day. No man can heed all of these anniversaries; no man can ignore all of them.”

- Aldo Leopold



## Native Plants

With the heat beginning to beat down on yards and gardens, it may be time to look at turning to native and climate-adapted plants for color and structure. A great many commercially available plants used in The Woodlands do well in the Victorian gardens of the east coast, but they tend to get a little scorched here. Native plants, on the other hand, existed in Texas before humans set foot here. They existed only on rain.

Native plants have colorful flowers and interesting colors and shapes. They do well in drought and the unrelenting heat of southeast Texas summers. To keep plants blooming, deadhead spent flowers and fertilize.

This year's Summer Solstice, Thursday, June 21, in The Woodlands is the longest day of the year. On this day the sun reaches its most northern point in the sky at noon. After this date, the days start getting shorter. This year's Summer Solstice has 14 hours and eight minutes of daylight. Sunrise is at 6:20 a.m. and sunset is at 8:22 p.m. A new moon is on June 19, so the rising and setting of the moon will not be visible.

## Mulch

Now's the time to mulch your garden beds. Mulch keeps moisture in the soil from evaporating, helps maintain the soil at a cooler temperature which in turn protects tender roots, and adds to the soil's organic structure. Use organic mulches.

## Weed

Weeds guzzle water and compete with plants for nutrients. Keeping gardens free of weeds makes for healthier plants and more water available for desirable plants. Control weeds by hoeing or pulling them. Refrain from using herbicides.

## Insects

Control insects and diseases by using organic pesticides like neem oil, insecticidal soaps, diatomaceous earth and *Bacillus thuringiensis* (BT).

Fire ants love the sun and summer heat. There are two organic fire ant controls on the market. One is Spinosad (which also kills fleas). The second is eugenol, which is a clove oil extract.

All the above products should be available at your local nursery or garden center.

## Water Wise

Water use always goes up in the summer when people are thinking that they have to put more and more water on their plants. Actually, the reverse is true. Too much water actually encourages plants to grow shorter roots, making them more susceptible to drought and disease.

Convert your beds from sprinkler irrigation to drip irrigation. Drip irrigation gets water right to the roots of plants, minimizes evaporation and run off, and ultimately, saves the homeowner money.

Water lawns no more than twice a week, putting an inch of water on the turf. If it

rains, water less. This encourages strong, healthy grass root systems.

Water which runs down the street is an indication of overwatering. Overwatering not only costs the homeowner more, it helps breed mosquitoes in the storm sewers.

## Vegetables

It's hot, and late for a summer vegetable garden. Brave gardeners can still try their hand at watermelons, southern peas (black-eyed, purple hull and Crowder), sweet potatoes, eggplant, okra and cantaloupe. Drip irrigation works best on vegetable crops.

For those who don't plan a summer garden, they can get their gardens ready for fall by laying in soil and compost on beds or planting red clover or some other type of cover crop which will add nitrogen and other nutrients to the soil. Solar treatment of soil will also kill weeds.



## Wildlife

The warmer (and dryer) it gets, the more wildlife will be seeking water. Provide good clean water for birds and butterflies. Change the water regularly (every few days) to discourage mosquitoes.

Put in plants that provide food and cover for birds: plants which bear fruit, seeds, berries or nuts, such as yaupon, American and Possum haw holly; coralberry and passion vine.