**Weekly Express-News Article**

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Saturday, March 31, 2012

**Time to Move Plants Out of the Greenhouse**

The soils have warmed up and the likelihood that we are going to get anymore cold weather is very slim so it is time to move all your cold sensitive plants out of shelter.

Bougainvillea – if your bougainvillea were protected from cold in a greenhouse they may be in full bloom. Don’t be surprised when you move them out of the windless confines of the greenhouse if all the colored bracts fall off in the wind. Don’t worry, the color will be back. Prepare the bougainvillea for a summer of color with a treatment of hibiscus food or Osmocote. Remember that bougainvilleas bloom best when they are root-bound and you let them dry out between watering. Bougainvilleas require full sun.

Oriental hibiscus – can also come out of the greenhouse. Prune off all the dead wood and remove some of the old stems at their origin on the main trunk. This will stimulate some new wood. Hibiscus requires full sun to bloom well and unlike bougainvilleas they should not be allowed to dry out between watering. Irrigate oriental hibiscus when the soil surface dries.

If your hibiscus have not been performing as well as you expect it may be time for repotting in addition to pruning. Either put them in a large container or just remove a strip of soil and root with a butcher knife from around the root ball and replace it with new potting soil.

Provide regular fertilization to oriental hibiscus with hibiscus food and/or application of soluble fertilizer in the irrigation water.

If you grow purple fountain grass you probably wintered several clumps in the greenhouse. They can be placed back in the spot in the garden from which they were removed or in new locations in full sun. Fountain grass grows fast so you can split a large clump into 2 to 4 new plants. Remove the dead grass as best you can from the new sprouts which have already started.

It is also time to plant those potted-up tomatoes that have been growing in the greenhouse or a sheltered sunny spot near the house. The weather in April is usually warm and stable enough that determinate tomatoes will finish their foliage growth and begin blooming to set fruit later in the month and in May.

It is also not too late to buy tomato plants from your favorite nursery and plant them directly in the garden. Consider Tycoon, BHN 602, BHN 968, 444, Celebrity, Solar Fire, Sun Pride, Phoenix, and Merced. They are all determinate and semi-determinate which means they grow to a limited size and then concentrate on setting fruit.

The heirlooms and selections from the North are all fun to try to grow but most are indeterminate. They grow foliage as long as the conditions are good and often do not start to set fruit until it is too hot for them to be successful.

Plant your tomatoes in full sun with about 3 feet between plants in soil that has been enriched with 2 inches of compost and a cup of slow release lawn fertilizer spread over each 20 square feet of bed (3 plants.) Surround the tomato plant with a tomato cage right after planting and cover the root system with 2 inches of mulch. My favorite mulch is live oak leaves. The mulch reduces evaporation and helps keep the weeds down. The tomato cage supports the heavy crop of tomatoes that you can expect if you use the recommended varieties and care for them as recommended.

Tomatoes are not xeriscape plants they need to be well watered if they are going to maintain a strong growth rate and produce a heavy crop of fruit. Drip irrigation works the best. Apply water every day for several weeks and then water every 2 to 3 days for maximum production.

For gardeners that want to grow tomatoes in containers consider BHN 968. It is also called the “Rodeo Surprise Dwarf Tomato.” It produces a beautiful supply of large cherries on a relatively small plant. Grow it and other tomatoes in 10 gallon or larger containers. Half whiskey barrels work well.

Even with a whiskey barrel the soil reservoir in a container is limited so they will probably have to be irrigated every day. Fertilize with Osmocote and soluble fertilizer formulated especially for containers.

If you wintered plants in the greenhouse they may have aphids, whiteflies, and weeds that have developed.

The usual weed in my greenhouse is chickweed. It is easy to pull. Pull it up before you move the plants to their place on the patio. As for the insects, they will probably disappear after you move the plants out of the greenhouse. The wind, more severe temperature fluctuations, and predatory insects may be all that is required. If not, aphids can be controlled with Spinosad, Safer Soap or even a water spray. You may have to use acephate for the white flies on the ornamental plants.