

Gardening Calendar for May

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If you haven't fertilized the lawn yet, use a slow release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9 in early May. The lawn won't probably require much irrigation in May but have your irrigation contractor service the system to insure it is ready for action later in the summer. On some lawns the winter grass weeds are browning because of the heat just in time to make room for the St Augustine, zoysia, and Bermuda grass.

Your tomatoes should be planted and blooming by May 1. In a pinch you may be able to find some tomato transplants at the nursery in 1-3-gallon containers that may be able to mature a crop before the end of July. Peppers are less challenged by the heat, so it is not unreasonable to plant them in early May. Plant okra and southern peas by seed. Southern peas can be used like green beans if you harvest them early before the peas are defined in the pod. They are a good option to fill up unused garden space in the summer. With minimal watering they will fill up the space and prevent the garden filling up with weeds such as Bermuda grass.

Onions may be ready to harvest in May. Recognize it is time, when the tops flop over. Harvest potatoes anytime after the blooms appear. You can leave them in the ground until the tops dieback if there is not excessive soil moisture from rainfall.

In the flower garden snapdragons began a rapid decline in late April due to the arrival of fungal rust. Replace them with zinnias for color in full sun. Zinnias are also a top nectar producer for butterflies and hummingbirds and produce excellent cut flowers. I like the Dreamland transplants available at many nurseries. The Cactus and California Giant selections also do well. They can be planted by seed.

Deer often will pass up zinnias and they always let vinca grow unmolested. Use the Cora selection to avoid any problem with aerial phytophthora. Cosmos can be planted by seed in your wildflower field to provide color while the bluebonnets, poppies and other spring blooming flowers pass through the "ugly" period while they mature the seed for next year's crop. Use moss roses and purslane for hanging baskets and other containers in full sun.

In the shade pentas are a premiere container plant. They are blooming when you obtain them from the nursery and don't miss a day of bloom until after Thanksgiving. Hummingbirds and butterflies like them as a nectar source. Another useful plant for the shade is Semperfloren begonias. If you like them, you will probably love the "Whopper" selection. It is a hybrid version of the begonia that resembles Semperfloren relative but is 3 times as large with bigger blooms and bigger leaves. Last year it was designated as a Texas Super Star by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

The drought tolerant color plants to consider for the summer are firebush, the blue salvias, lantana, duranta, poinciana, thyrallis and esperanza. They all are attractive to pollinators. In addition, consider mistflower, milkweed, and porter weed to bring in the butterflies.

Keep up your pesticide spray program on your peaches and hybrid tea roses if you want blemish free fruit and rose blooms.