

## What to Do in July

By: Jackie Sledge

Past President of the Big Country Master Gardeners

This is the time of the year that my grandmother would call the “Dog Days of Summer” because it was too hot to go outside to do anything. I think we are now entering the “Dog Days of Summer” so we need to work outside early in the morning, take breaks as needed, stay hydrated, wear a hat, use sunscreen, and then stay out of the heat the rest of the day.

As the temperature gets hotter, and if there isn't any additional rain, the plants will need more attention. I'm checking my landscape and using the monthly tasks from *Lone Star Gardening* by Neil Sperry and *Texas Garden Almanac* by Doug Welsh to get the lawn and flower beds in good shape so they won't look stressed by heat, wind, and drought.

### **Planting Tasks:**

- Fall vegetable gardening starts this month! Plant tomatoes and pumpkins in early July and peppers a couple of weeks later. Wait until August to plant other fall vegetables.
- Plant trees, shrubs, and groundcovers. Be sure to water these new plants by hand every day or two during the summer and fall.
- Plant crape myrtles. Buy them while they are blooming so you will know the exact color you are getting. Be sure to plant the variety you purchase in the proper place so you won't have to heavily prune them later if they are overgrowing a small space.
- Plant turfgrass such as Bermuda, St. Augustine, zoysia, and buffalograss. Water new grass twice a day for short intervals to keep it moist until the root system is established in about two to three weeks after planting.
- Plant annuals that can tolerate summer heat. Examples are moss rose, trailing lantana, and purple fountain grass.
- Consider planting in pots. Containers add a new element to the landscape, and they make it a little easier to manage the problems of Texas soil, heat, and drought.

### **Pruning Tasks:**

- Mow the lawn at the recommended height. If you see brown stems or stubble, raise the mower a notch. You can lower it to the recommended level next February.
- Prune trees if needed to remove damaged branches or lower limbs that shade the lawn too much. It is also time to prune oak trees since oak wilt is not active. Always paint cut surfaces on oak trees.
- Remove spent flowers, seed stalks, and brown leaves from spring-blooming perennials.

- Remove dead or dying annuals and replace them with heat-tolerant species.
- Cut growing tips from annuals and perennials that have gotten lanky.

### **What to Feed:**

- Feed the lawn as well as landscape and garden plants. Follow the instructions on the label, and water deeply after applying the fertilizer.
- Feed hanging baskets and outdoor pots.

### **Troubleshooting Tips:**

- Watch for grasshoppers. Get rid of tall weeds to eliminate the breeding ground for pests.
- Check for aphids. These are small, pear-shaped pests that secrete a sticky honeydew on leaves of plants. Black sooty mold develops in the honeydew so take action to control the aphids to eliminate the honeydew and mold.
- July is the peak water use month for plants. Monitor the needs of the lawn and landscape to ensure that they are watered sufficiently.
- If you have plants that cannot take the heat, move them to a different place or remove them from the landscape. Replace them with more adapted plants.
- Mulch. Mulch preserves water in the soil, reduces soil temperatures, and lessens weeds. Mulch also gives a fresh look to the landscape.

Be sure to have fresh, cool water plus food available for the butterflies and birds.

Last month I mentioned some advice from Neil Sperry about gardening in hot weather, and I'm repeating it since hot weather is now here. "(1) water deeply, less often; (2) hand-water new trees, shrubs; (3) pay special attention to needs of potted plants; (4) eliminate water-grabbing weeds; (5) mulch beds; (6) be on lookout for insects that attack stressed plants; (7) fertilize to perk up plantings."

BCMGA will offer several free education programs in July. There will be a program on Planting Fall Vegetables at 6:00 pm on July 11 at the Abilene Public Library South Branch in the Mall of Abilene and the same program at 10:00 am on July 14 at the Abilene Public Library Downtown Main Location. We will also have the BCMGA Saturday Seminar from 9:00-12:00 on July 29 in the Taylor County Extension Office Conference Room.

If you have any questions, call the Taylor County Extension Office at 325-672-6048 or email us at [mgardeners@yahoo.com](mailto:mgardeners@yahoo.com). We hope you will like us on Facebook and visit [bcmgtx.org](http://bcmgtx.org) for all Big Country Master Gardener information and events. We are here to help you!