

What to Do in May

By: Jackie Sledge

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We've all heard the old saying that "April showers bring May flowers." We haven't had many April showers this year, but that doesn't mean that we can't have beautiful landscapes in May - if we take care of the necessary tasks to make that happen. I'm checking my list of plans for the 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 for the year.

Planting Tasks:

- Plant new lawns this month. Plant Bermuda, St. Augustine or Zoysia for sun and St. Augustine for shade.
- Don't wait for grass to grow in thin unhealthy areas of the lawn. Purchase and lay sod to immediately increase the quality of the lawn.
- Plant trees, shrubs, and other landscape plants, and stick to your landscape plan to ensure the right plant is in the right place. Check the mature size, bloom color, sun/shade requirements, and water needs before planting new selections.
- Add annual color and be sure the plants are acclimated to the Big Country weather (sun, wind, hot, dry) prior to planting outdoors.
- Plant summer and fall-flowering perennials. Be sure to plant selections that will provide continuous blooms.
- Plant heat-tolerant butterfly-attracting plants such as butterfly weed, lantana, penta, salvia, and verbena for our pollinator friends.
- Plant summer vegetables.

Pruning Tasks:

- Prune spring-blooming shrubs and vines because next year's flowers will be on shoots that develop this year.
- Prune shade trees to remove low branches that block visibility or cause excessive shade on turf. Wait until mid-summer to prune oaks to lessen the likelihood of spreading oak wilt fungus.
- Prune peach and plum trees. Thin fruit early in the month to produce a high-quality crop.
- Prune blackberries. Tip-prune new cane to encourage branching and to keep plants compact.

- Deadhead perennial flowers to encourage continuous bloom.

What to Feed:

- Feed turf.
- Feed trees, shrubs, and groundcover beds with the same type of fertilizer used on the turf but be sure it does not contain a weedkiller.
- Feed annuals, perennials, and vegetables. Brush or wash granules off leaves, and water deeply after application.
- Feed pots and hanging baskets.

Troubleshooting Tasks:

- Check plants often for plant problems by using a process of elimination. Look for insects and related pests first and then check for plant diseases if no pest is found. Some common problems are root-rot in St. Augustine grass, black spot on roses, rose rosette, early blight on tomatoes, webworms, bagworms, and scale insects on plants, shrubs, and trees. Follow the instructions on all products used on plants.
- If there is no sign of pests or disease, look for improper cultural practices or conditions that result from environmental stress. Is the plant adapted to your area? Can the plant take “Texas heat” during the summer? Was the soil prepared properly? Has the plant been underwatered or overwatered? Have herbicides, pesticides, or fertilizers been used improperly around the plant? What exposure does the plant need – sun, part sun, shade? Has there been any physical damage to the plant? What about weather conditions – excessive heat or cold, drought, wind, hail?
- Apply a broadleaf weedkiller to eliminate non-grassy weeds such as clover, dandelions, and other unwanted plants. Follow the directions on the label.
- Be sure the mower blades are sharp to prevent increased damage to the grass.
- Sprinkler systems can develop problems over winter. Some examples are heads that become misaligned or missing, valves that do not operate correctly, and pipes that may have broken during cold spells. Run the irrigation system and monitor it for problems. Be sure the system is in working order before the main summer watering season.

BCMGA will offer several free education programs in May. There will be a program on Rainwater Harvesting at 6:00 on May 2 at the Abilene Public Library South Branch in the Mall of Abilene and the same program at 10:00 on May 12 at the Abilene Public Library Main Location. We will also have the BCMGA

Saturday Seminar from 9:00-12:00 on May 27 in the Taylor County Extension Office Conference Room, and the topic is Pests in the Garden.

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