



Garden Tips for May 2016

by Thea Fiskin, UC Master Gardener

May is the month we celebrate Mother's Day, so remember Mom with a big bouquet of flowers or perhaps a foliage-filled hanging basket she can enjoy all summer.

Annuals: Plant summer annuals in early May so they will be established before the heat of summer. For those sunny spots try amaranths, bedding dahlias, celosias, cleome, cosmos, dianthus, gomphrena, marigolds, petunias, portulacas, salvias, sunflowers and zinnias. I really like the little star zinnias; plant them now, and they are care-free through October. Shaded areas will brighten up with bedding begonias, caladiums, coleus, impatiens and New Guinea impatiens.

Herbs: Not only are herbs great to use in cooking, but when they bloom, they encourage bees and butterflies to visit your garden. Plant these heat loving herbs now: basil, borage, catmint, hyssop, lemon balm, parsley, summer savory, rosemary, thyme and yarrow.



Dianthus

Lawns: Renovate warm season lawns like Bermuda and St Augustine by dethatching them with a vertical mower. Add fertilizer, and they will spring back better than ever. Mow Bermuda lawns ½-1" and fescue lawns 2-3" tall. Mowing fescue lawns too low will encourage weeds and require more water. Mowing warm season lawns too high will encourage thatch to develop.

Perennials: Nurseries are full of perennials and are adding more water-saving varieties all the time, so take a tour of your favorite nursery and be amazed by their beauty and easy care. Look for California natives, coreopsis, lantanas, ornamental grasses, salvias, succulents, verbenas and yarrows.

Vegetables: Plant beans, corn, cucumber, eggplant, melons, okra, peppers, pumpkins, summer squash and tomatoes. Stagger your plantings to have fresh vegetables all summer long. When buying tomato seedlings, look for the letters V, F, N and T next to the cultivar's name. These letters indicate disease resistance to Verticillium and Fusarium wilts, nematodes and Tobacco mosaic virus. The more letters, the more disease resistant your plant should be. With our long growing season, there's still time to plant seeds. Seeds are very affordable and offer more variety selection. For fall decorations, consider planting seed of unusual pumpkins or winter squash. Use legume inoculant with bean seeds for better germination. Sprinkle the inoculant in the planting hole, place the bean seed on top, cover with soil, and then water.

Vines: Annual vines can add that "WOW" factor to your garden. Make sure you have a sturdy trellis or other structure for the vines to climb on easily. Good candidates are cypress vine, moonflower, hyacinth vine and scarlet runner beans. One of my favorites is the bird nest gourd. It is easy to grow and great for crafts. Another

is the hyacinth vine which can turn an ugly fence into a delight . I grow mine on an old hammock hung on the side of my shed.

Pest Control: The battle between gardeners and bugs never ends. Blast aphids, mites, and spittlebugs with a jet of water from a hose aiming at the underside of leaves. Repeat regularly as doing it once is not enough. If infestations are extremely heavy, try using insecticidal soap. Watch for caterpillars or "worms" on plants especially geraniums, petunias and tomatoes. Handpick the worms or use BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*). BT will get rid of caterpillars without harming beneficial insects, birds or people. Bait or handpick slugs and snails.

Garden Chores:

1. Pinch back growing tips of bedding plants to promote branching and compact growth.
2. Fall blooming chrysanthemums should be pinched back to 6" and a wire basket placed around the plants to support branches as they grow. Continue pinching until July.
3. Some spring blooming perennials, like Mexican sage and other salvias, need a trim. Cut them back after their big flower display, and then fertilize and water. They will be blooming again in no time.
4. Prune spring flowering shrubs and vines (clematis, forsythia, lilac, wisteria) when they are finished blooming. This will promote new flowering wood for next spring.
5. Pull weeds when they are young and before they develop seeds; some weeds produce thousands of seeds per plant. Be sure to get all the roots on perennial weeds, otherwise they will grow back.
6. Fertilize lawns, roses, shrubs and vines. Give acid fertilizer to azaleas, gardenias and rhododendrons as soon as they finish blooming.
7. Paint fruit tree trunks with a 50/50 mix of white latex paint and water to prevent summer sunburn.
8. Thin out fruit on fruit trees and grapes. This prevents marble size fruit and improves fruit quality. Also, tree branches and vines may break if too much fruit is left on the tree. In general, leave on the tree or vine only what you can realistically use. Citrus and nut trees will thin fruit on their own.



Moonflower Vine

Finally, don't forget watering. Test sprinklers to be sure they are aimed correctly and working properly, with no leaks or clogged emitters. It is particularly important to prevent any water from running into streets or gutters. As days get warmer, increase water time but follow your area's water rules.

For answers to all your home gardening questions, call Master Gardeners in Tulare County at (559) 684-3325, Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9:30 and 11:30 am; or Kings County at (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m.; or visit our website: <http://cetulare.ucanr.edu>.

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