



Garden Tips for May 2017

by Thea Fiskin, UC Master Gardener

With all the rain we have had this winter and early spring! May should be a glorious month in the garden. This is a month I spend as much time as possible in my garden, not just working but also enjoying Mother Nature.

Annuals: Plant summer annuals early in the month so they will have time to establish good roots system before summer. Shaded areas can be brightened up with bedding begonias, caladiums, coleus, impatiens and New Guinea impatiens. These plants can also be grown in a large container in an area under a tree full of roots; be sure to use a saucer under the pot to prevent tree roots from growing into your container. For those sunny areas, try amaranths, bedding dahlias, celosias, cosmos, dianthus, gomphrena, marigolds, petunias, portulacas, salvias, sunflowers and zinnias. Last summer, I planted seeds of tithonias, also known as Mexican sunflowers. They grew to be 4 ft. tall with bright orange flowers, and were quite a show-stopper in the garden.



Herbs: Time to plant basil, borage, catmint, hyssop, lemon balm, parsley, summer savory, rosemary, thyme and yarrow. You don't have to grow one type of each herb. For instance, basil has many different varieties: cinnamon, lemon, lettuce-leaf and Thai. Be adventurous and try something new.

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. Change the direction and pattern when mowing,

Perennials: Visit your local nurseries. Right now they are full of new plants and adding new ones all the time. Look for coreopsis, lantanas, ornamental grasses, salvias, succulents, verbenas, and yarrows. Pick up a fragrant shrub to put by the front door, garden seat or path. It will give you years of pleasure.

Vegetables: Plant beans, corn, cucumber, eggplant, melons, okra, peppers, pumpkins, summer squash and tomatoes. When buying tomatoes, be sure to read the label. "Determinate" means the plants will grow to one height, and all the fruit will ripen at once, which makes them great for canning. "Indeterminate" means the vine will keep on growing and producing all season. Also, 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, nematode and Tobacco mosaic virus.

Critter Control: Blast aphids, mites and spittlebugs with a jet of water. If infestations are extremely heavy, try using an insecticidal soap. Check for hornworms, the enemy of all tomato growers. The best method for removal of hornworms is to handpick them off the plant. You can also use Bt (*Bacillus Thuringiensis*). However, use with care, as it will kill any other caterpillars or butterflies. Look for natural enemies like assassin bugs, lacewings, ladybeetles and praying mantis. If you have them in the garden, they will go after those nasty pests and protect the balance of nature.



Garden chores:

- Pinch back growing tips of bedding plants to promote branching and compact growth.
- Fall blooming chrysanthemums should be pinched back to 6. Place a wire basket around plants to support branches as they grow. Continue pinching until July.
- Some spring blooming perennials, like Mexican sage and other salvias, need a trim. Cut them back after their flower display, then fertilize and water.
- Prune spring flowering shrubs and vines (clematis, forsythia, lilac, wisteria) when they finish blooming.
- Pull weeds before they set seeds.
- Fertilize lawns, roses, shrubs and vines. Give acid fertilizer to azaleas, gardenias and rhododendron as soon as they finish blooming.
- Paint fruit trees trunks with a 50/50 mix of white latex paint and water to prevent sunburn.
- Thin out fruit on fruit trees and grapes. This prevents marble size fruit and improves 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.
- Test sprinklers and emitters. As days get warmer, increase watering times, but follow your area's water rules.

Finally, don't forget Mother's Day! Remember Mom with a big bouquet of flowers or perhaps a lovely potted plant.

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