

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

**A Home Fruit Growers' Tour will be conducted from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on Saturday, May 11. Three fruit orchards are on this year's tour route, including a pick-your-own peach orchard in the Texas City-Dickinson area.**

May has already arrived and gardening activities are in full-gear.

What a spring season thus far: We've had warm mornings followed by very cool afternoons and very cool night temperatures. Ahhh, Texas weather. The baseball size hail was a surprise to vegetable gardeners as well as owners of cars and homes. One friend in Santa Fe reported that he only had his brand-new vehicle on his drive way for just 2 days before being totaled by the hail.

I think I need to amend my peach thinning recommendation to include if know it's

going to drop hail, then put off your peach thinning project. At least the remaining peaches will be even larger in size so all in not lost. The following gardening guides may be helpful for May gardening activities: HOME FRUIT GROWERS' TOUR ON MAY 11: A Home Fruit Growers' Tour will be conducted on Saturday, May 12, 2012. Three fruit orchards are on this year's tour. Each location will be open from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

This year's tour sites contain a wide variety of fruit trees ranging from a peach orchard (Fruit 'n Such Or-

chard located at 6309 Avenue U in Texas City), the Master Gardener Demonstration Orchard (located in Carbide Park in La Marque) and a sizeable home orchard in Santa Fe. Tour maps and additional details may be downloaded from my website address provided with this column (click on the "Extension Educational Programs" link). Additional information will also be provided in my garden column on May 8.

CHALLENGING YEAR FOR VEGETABLES: I normally recommend not planting okra until mid-April at the



May 1, 2013



Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

*News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.*



earliest. This spring's temperatures have been on a roller coaster. When you have shirt sleeve weather in the morning and have to reach for the jacket in the afternoon, planting okra seed is an exercise in futility. Even tomatoes have had an unusually tough time this spring. Most tomatoes sustained significant cold temperature injury at our Demonstration Garden in Carbine Park. Most were left to grow out again and appear to be recovering well. Sam Scarcella is a Master Gardener renowned for his expertise on homegrown tomatoes and he reported that last spring he harvested his first crop of tomatoes on April 28 in La Marque but that his crop will likely come in a bit later this year. Corn can tolerate moderately cool spells of weather once germinated and mine has been growing fairly well. Even during thus the spring season that has not been kind to vegetable production, we should be able to produce a decent vegetable crop despite Mother Nature periodically throwing few screw balls.

Normally I recommend that okra be planted during the month of April but this year it would have been better to have waited until May given the occurrences of cool temperatures over the past few weeks. This cousin of cotton especially needs to be planted in a warm soil. Proven varieties include Emerald, Clemson Spineless or Jade. After planting, plan to thin plants to 24 inches apart in the row, with rows 36 to 42 inches apart.

**CARE OF NEW PLANTINGS:** Spring- and winter-planted trees and shrubs will be establishing their root system this year and thus are very susceptible to transplant shock during the summer if not given proper care. The first summer of growth is a critical period for all new plantings. To reduce transplant shock, be sure to water thoroughly and deeply as needed during dry weather rather than giving more frequent, light sprinklings. Plants should also be mulched with

shredded pine bark, pine needles, compost, dried lawn clippings, etc. A 4-to-6-inch layer of mulch will also help control weeds, maintain more uniform soil moisture, and keep the soil cooler. As a result, the degree of transplant shock will be significantly minimized. Also, add to the list of benefits the fact that mulched trees and shrubs will grow much better than non-mulched transplants.

**SUMMER ANNUALS:** For instant color, purchase started annual plants. Select short, compact plants. Remove faded blooms for more productive flowering. If beds are not mulched, then lightly cultivate the upper soil so as not to disturb shallow roots. Doing so improves water absorption, reduces soil compaction, and aids in weed control. Plant summer annual plants that take the heat such as periwinkles, purslane, portulaca, lantana, etc. Annuals for shade may include: impatiens, coleus, caladiums (the tubers are just about out of stock, potted plants are still available), and bedding begonias. Caladiums will often produce a single flower stalk right after the first leaves are produced. Early removal of the flower stalk will encourage the plants to produce more lush leaf growth.

**LAWNS:** Lawns have been a bit slow to green-up and put on vigorous growth due rather cool weather at times. When temperatures consistently warm up, St. Augustine and bermudagrass lawns will start growing well and lawnmowers will be getting full use provided rainfall is adequate.

