



PHOTOS BY **William M. Johnson**

If you've never tackled a landscape design before, you might be overwhelmed by all the choices you have to make. As with most major projects, the biggest challenge is knowing how to get started! A Plan Before You Plant Your Landscape seminar will be offered by the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office on Saturday, May 7, to provide guidance to homeowners

The days of May will bring warmer nights and longer, sunnier days—a change of seasons. While rainfall has been overly generous for the past few weeks, here's hoping that the rainfall over the month of May occurs in evenly spaced installments over time and in amounts.

Busy days of gardening are in store for the May gardener in completing spring chores and in preparing for summer. The

following gardening guides and educational programs may be helpful for May gardening activities:

**HOME FRUIT GROWERS' TOUR ON MAY 14:** A Home Fruit Growers' Tour will be conducted on Saturday, May 14, 2016. 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 Orchard located at 6309 Avenue U in Texas City), the Master Gardener Demonstration Orchard (located in Carbine 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



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"Extension Educational Programs" link). Additional information will also be provided in next week's garden column.

**LANDSCAPE PLANNING SEMINAR:** Galveston County Master Gardener Karen Lehr, who holds a Master's Degree in Landscape Architecture, will present information about planning an attractive and functional landscape. It begins with analyzing your property's characteristics, strengths and problems or limitations. Learn to plan your layout and use of space for utility and beauty. The "Plan Before You Plant" seminar will be conducted from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, May 7, at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbide Park (4102-B Main St. in La Marque). Pre-registration is required by e-mail ([GALV3@wt.net](mailto:GALV3@wt.net)) or phone (281-309-5065).

**LAWNS:** Many homeowners will level out low spots in the lawns this time of the year using sharp sand or bank sand as the only filler. While this is a common practice, it is not a good one. Use of sand to fill low areas in a lawn will very likely cause problems later on with unsatisfactory lawn growth.

Such areas will suffer more from drought stress during the summer and will likely have problems with soil nutrient uptake. For best results, use a good quality topsoil to fill in low areas of the lawn.

**BLACKBERRIES:** Blackberries will be coming into production in May. As canes which produced fruit this season finish bearing and start to die back, they should be removed at ground level. "Tip back" new canes to encourage branching; next year's blackberries will be produced on these canes.

**PRUNING AZALEAS:** A common azalea question is: "When do I prune my azaleas?" Since they bloom on growth produced the previous year, you must wait until they finish blooming before pruning. Azaleas do not need to be pruned every year, but you might find it desirable to remove long shoots sticking up above the rest of the bush to keep the growth more compact. After azaleas have finished blooming, fertilize them to stimulate new growth. Just be careful not to fertilize too heavily, and evenly distribute the fertilizer over the root zone. Their shallow roots can be easily burned when fertilizer is applied in concentrated piles.

**FERTILIZE VEGETABLES:** For best growth and yield of vegetables, apply small amounts of nitrogen fertilizer (called side dressing) every couple of weeks. This will keep vegetables growing vigorously so they reach their maximum yield potential.

**FRUIT SET ON SQUASH:** Don't be concerned if the first several squash fruit fall off the plant before they reach an edible stage.

The first flowers to form in squash in early spring are the female flowers (with the miniature fruit located right under the yellow flowers).

With no male flowers being present, no pollination takes place. However, in a few days the male flowers will be formed and normal fruit set should take place. Interestingly enough, it's the reverse in summer plantings—the male flowers tend to develop first so no fruit set occurs until the female flowers develop.

**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 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.