

Be careful in asking for rain

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

When will it rain? Home-owners in general and gardeners in particular hope for some relief from this drought in the very near future.

Just 10 years ago, Tropical Storm Allison started as a small swirl of clouds off the Upper Texas Coast.

In a several-day period soon thereafter, Allison dumped 30-plus inches of rainfall. So, let us wish for rain in very prudent and precise terms.

The rather warm temperatures and very dry weather at this time of year have made gardeners a bit apprehensive. It's enough to strain even an optimist's temperament.

Seriously though, this is the time of year when we might tend to neglect our plants in the landscape and garden.

A little care now not only will help your plants better withstand the rigors of summer weather, it also will reward you with a flush of color later on during the late summer and fall seasons.

Critical gardening activities for June include the following:

Harvesting Vegetables

Harvest vegetables frequently to ensure continual production.

When not harvested on a frequent enough basis, many vegetables will reduce pro-

duction of flowers and channel their energy into seed production in the mature fruit already on plants.

Container Plants

Plants growing in containers are far more dependent on you for adequate water than plants growing in the ground.

A practical approach to determining whether a plant needs water is to stick your finger in the soil.

If the soil is dry down to the first knuckle on your index finger, then add water. Conversely, if the soil is still damp to the touch, don't water.

Watering frequency will vary depending on the type of plant, time of year, temperature and size of the plant in relation to the size of the container among other factors.

It has been a very windy spring and soil in container-grown plants dries out faster under windy conditions.

You'll note that the procedure is called watering as opposed to sprinkling.

When you water, water generously until water runs out of the drainage holes to ensure adequate soil moisture throughout the potting soil medium.

Generous watering also helps to flush or leach out excessive salts (commonly seen as a

flaky, off-white crust along the rim of pots).

To facilitate watering, the soil (or soilless potting medium) should not be level with the rim of the pot.

Having the top of the soil slightly lower than the pot rim provides space to hold water while it penetrates into the medium.

Blackberries

Once blackberry plants have completed their current crop, they should be fertilized. The "stalks" (called fruticanes) that produced this year's crop will soon die back and should be removed to reduced disease problems.

A new set of green "stalks" (called primicanes) should be present and these will produce next year's crop of blackberries.

Mulch Plants

Soil moisture, essential for plant growth and health, may be conserved by applying an organic mulch.

Choose a clean mulch — one that is free of weeds and that will remain loose and well-aerated.

Shredded pine bark, compost, pine needle and oak leaf mulches are excellent for conserving moisture. These mulches also serve to keep the soil cool and limit weed seed germination and/or weed



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growth.

If you have a newly planted landscape tree, it will be well worth the time and effort to mulch the area from the base of the tree trunk out to at least 3 feet.

Weeds and lawn grass are aggressive competitors for nutrients and moisture.

As a result, newly planted trees often struggle along the first year or two.

Your landscape tree will grow up to 50 percent faster when mulched.

Apply a 4- to 6-inch layer (after settling) to landscape trees. Applying an overly deep layer of mulch next to the trunk of a tree or shrub should be avoided as doing so can increase the incidence of insect pest and disease problems.

Gardenias

Most gardenias will complete their flowering display by late May to early June.

Next year's flower buds will be formed on this year's new growth.

Therefore, if you need to prune gardenia bushes for minor shaping, do so immediately after the bloom cycle is over to avoid reducing next spring's flower display.

Summer Annuals

It is not too late to plant colorful summer annuals during June and early summer, especially if transplants are used.

Plant dependable summer annuals such as vinca, impatiens, salvia, and portulaca.

To keep flowering annuals on the grow, remove the faded blooms often, which will induce more branching and

more blooms.

Seasonal flowering plants also will profit from an occasional feeding with a light application of a balanced fertilizer.

Free Advice

June gardening days also should include taking time to just sit back in your favorite lawn chair on a long summer evening to just enjoy the fruits of your labor.

