

Gardening Checklist for August

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



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PHOTO CREDIT: William M. Johnson

As a rule of thumb, palm fronds should never be removed before they have completely or mostly turned brown. The horizontal outline of palm canopies, for most species, should minimally start at the 9 o' clock position and extend over to the 3 o'clock position. Excessive pruning overtime will eventually weaken a palm and may cause premature death of the tree.

The Dog Days of August have arrived. The last few days of July provided a pleasant and rare weather event: the arrival of a noteworthy cool front last week. Then many areas of the county received heavy rains over the weekend to help relieve the dry summer spell.

So, working outside this

month will be more tolerable throughout during early morning or late evening hours.

The gardeners' calendar of activities for August includes the following:

Annual Fall Plant Sale: The 2019 Master Gardener Fall Plant Sale is an "absolute must" for area gardeners. This is an early notification

so gardeners can pencil in this popular event on their gardening calendar for Saturday, October 12. A diverse variety of citrus trees, ornamentals, and perennials will be available at this fall's sale in addition to vegetable transplants for the fall garden. All activities will be conducted at Galveston County Fair-





grounds near Hwy. 6 in Hitchcock. More information will be provided in upcoming columns and on the Master Gardeners' website (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/index.html>).

Plumeria. Plumerias are in full bloom across the county. Most plumeria flowers are very fragrant and some are downright intoxicating.

Each flower can last for several days, whether on the plant or brought indoors and placed in water. To perform at their best, plumeria require ample soil moisture. However, they do not tolerate "wet feet," so their root system must be provided with good soil drainage whether they are grown in containers above ground, in containers sunk in the ground, or directly in the ground.

Plumeria are heavy feeders and will bloom and grow vigorously if provided the proper amount of soil nutrients. Plumeria enthusiasts recommend fertilizers that are low in nitrogen (the first number) and high in phosphorous (the middle number), such as "Super Bloom" or "Carl Pool's BR-61" or Peters "Super Blossom Booster 10-50-10."

Other specialty plumeria fertilizers can be used as well. Plumeria growers typically fertilize at least every two weeks during the growing season.

Pruning Palms: It is common practice to see folks removing all but a few of the upper fronds (leaves) of

palms in hopes of reducing wind damage from severe tropical storms. This practice is very harmful to the tree as most palms produce only a few dozen fronds or less per year. The removal of even a few green fronds can significantly reduce a plant's capacity to produce energy or food needed for proper growth and overall health.

Excessive removal of green fronds over time will often result in a condition known as pencil-pointing or pencil-top. This condition is characterized by a marked reduction in the diameter of the upper trunk and the overall trunk takes on the shape of a sharpened pencil.

Most palms are native to the tropics and have evolved modifications that enable them to successfully weather most storms. The open feather-like structure of their leaves allows wind to pass through them easily and their trunks are strong but flexible allowing them to bend but not break.

I was at Moody Gardens on Monday and I was impressed (though not surprised) with how well their palms are pruned. As a rule of thumb, palm fronds should never be removed before they have completely or mostly turned brown. The horizontal outline of palm canopies, for most species, should minimally start at the 9 o'clock position and extend over to the 3 o'clock position. Excessive pruning overtime will eventually weaken a palm and may cause premature death of the tree.

A properly pruned palm will have fronds growing at least from the 9 o'clock position to at least the 3 o'clock position.

Staked Trees: If a landscape tree were staked after transplanting, be sure to inspect for girdling damage caused by prolonged staking. Staking systems must be periodically checked and adjusted to be certain that they are not causing tree damage. Staking will not damage trees if installed correctly and properly maintained.

Girdling or strangulation of a tree trunk can be caused when wire fencing, nylon or steel cable has been tied around the tree for anchorage. Whatever tie material is used, it will eventually press or cut into the bark as the tree trunk increases in diameter and thereby restrict the movement of water and nutrients within the tree.

If a tree must be staked, all stakes and support wires should be removed between 12 and 18 months after planting, provided the tree has a well-established root system. The most important point to remember is that the staking system must be removed as soon as it is no longer necessary for the support of the tree.

Since the sultry, sweaty days of August have arrived, be sure to carry an extra-large glass of iced tea or water and make sure to wear a hat for protection from the sun.

