

# Gardeners' Activities for May

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



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PHOTO CREDIT: Bob Richmond

**Some vegetables struggle or stop growing in the heat and humidity of a Texas summer. Okra, a southern favorite, doesn't just survive, it seems to delight in our hot summers, growing ever taller as temperatures soar, spreading its dark green leaves and beautifully colored blossoms.**

One bright spot of the COVID-19 quarantine is that home gardeners were very willing to get out of the house to spend more time in the garden. The quarantine provided a great opportunity to take even better care of our plants. The timing was right to inspire couch potatoes to grow some real po-

tatoes!

With the arrival of May, we should be prepared for warming temperatures and longer, sunnier days—a change of seasons. Until last week's somewhat generous rainfall (we received 1.09 inches at the Discovery Garden), we had been on the dry side. The upside

to low rainfall in the spring is that tomato plants will have significantly fewer problems with fungal leafspots.

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





checklists will be helpful:

**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 on 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.

**OKRA:** 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 month of April. 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.

**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.

**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.

**LEAF DROPPAGE OF EVERGREENS:** Many gardeners take the description "evergreen" too literally and often are concerned when evergreens, such as magnolias, euonymus, live oak, gardenia, and some of the hollies, lose some of their old leaves during late spring and early summer. The flush of new growth on many evergreens will cause a yellowing of old leaves and leaf droppage. Nothing to be concerned about—just Mother Nature putting a new spring coat of green and discarding the old.

**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.

**ANNUALS:** Annuals for shade 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.

**BLACKBERRIES:** Blackberries will be coming into production in May. As canes which produced fruit this season finished 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.

**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.

