



Dear *Extension's Successful Gardener* E-tips Subscriber:

Our May issue of *Extension's Successful Gardener* newsletter features hydrangeas, one of the hallmarks of a Southern garden. It also includes your guide to growing tomatoes, including some recommended cultivars. To get a copy of the May issue, subscribe at www.successfulgardener.org or ask for it at your local garden center or Cooperative Extension office.

May Gardening Tips

Ornamentals

- If spring-blooming shrubs need to be pruned, do so after flowers fade and before July 1.
- If you move houseplants outdoors for the summer, wait until nighttime temperatures are above 50 degrees. Do not place plants in direct sunlight.

Edibles

- It is time to begin fungicide sprays on fruit crops: apples, peaches, plums, grapes. Even if the fruit crop was lost to the freeze, spray plants for disease management to maintain the health of the plants.
- The only insect spray you need this summer on peaches or plums without fruit will be for scales and for peach tree borers. If you controlled the scales with dormant oil during the winter, you don't need to worry about them. The greater peach tree borers will not show up until August. Apples won't need any insecticide unless you have had problems with dogwood borers or mites. In areas where dogwood borers have created problems, a spray near Memorial Day will give good control.
- Fruit trees that do not have fruit this year may need some extra pruning as excess sucker growth may result from the lack of fruit load. It is fine to remove water sprouts and suckers in May or June.

- In the mountains, wait until after the first week in May to plant frost-sensitive flowers or vegetables.
- Do not plant beans, melons or okra until the soil temperature has warmed to 65 degrees.
- Start planting or transplanting warm-season vegetables like okra, sweet potatoes or watermelons in the piedmont. When transplanting during hot weather, water the plant before you cover with soil. Once the water has soaked the root ball and the surrounding ground, cover the root ball with dry soil (so the capillary action pulling water to the surface is broken). This method will keep the plant from drying out as much.

Lawns

- Keep up with mowing. Try to mow frequently enough to remove no more than 1/3 of the grass blade at a time. Leave clippings on the ground unless frequent rainfall produces excess growth and you have too many clippings piling up.

Dealing with Freeze Damage

- Many plants damaged in the Easter freeze have put out new leaves. If new leaves are visible, you can prune out the damage to make the plant look better. A few plants haven't leafed back out yet. Give these some more time and see if they recover. Due to the nature of this freeze, it is unlikely that any roots were damaged so plants like figs and gardenias will likely come back from the ground even if the entire top was killed.
- Prune back and shape blueberry plants that lost all fruit during the April freeze. Finish this pruning by the first of July and it will set fruit for next year.

Irrigation Tips

- It's best to set up irrigation so that plants do not stay wet any longer than 8 hours at one time. Most fungi require 8 hours of moisture to develop, though some need 10 or 12 hours. The best way to avoid disease problems is to run the irrigation during the early morning hours when the dew is on the plants. The plants will dry off when the dew evaporates. It doesn't increase disease to run the irrigation in the afternoon if the plants dry off before the dew settles on them after dark. But more water is lost to evaporation when irrigation is run in the afternoon. The worst scenario is to irrigate in late afternoon and leave the plants wet all night.

Herbicide Pointers

- When using a directed herbicide spray, a slight wind (just enough to feel on wet skin) is better than perfectly calm air. Heavy particles will still go where you

spray them. In perfectly calm conditions, micro particles will hang around and eventually be attracted to desirable plants due to the opposing electrical charge of the spray and the plant. A few particles wouldn't matter but enough of them can cause damage.

- Enhance the selectivity of directed herbicide sprays by covering desirable plants with plastic bags, boxes or cans. Once the spray dries, you can remove the container.
- The popular herbicide glyphosate (Roundup and others) binds to clay soil and doesn't have the ability to damage plants once it is bound. It can remain active on top of plastic mulch or a plastic groundcover. In addition, if used in a container that doesn't have clay soil, it can damage the roots.

North Carolina Cooperative Extension

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Until next month, Happy Successful Gardening!

