

AROUND THE YARD

with Travis County Master Gardener Reeve Hobbie

NOW you may safely prune oak trees if you feel you must. The danger period of introducing and spreading oak wilt has passed. (Wish we could say the same about the coronavirus.) I personally have held off having major pruning work done in my backyard, but I have hired a certified arborist to begin trimming in early July.

The do's and don'ts of July and August are nearly the same, so I have combined them for this article. The best suggestions I have for working around the yard in the heat of summer is to hydrate yourself with plenty of water before going outside and to tackle the work you want to do early in the morning with a bottle of water nearby.

July & August

DO...

- Water all lawns and planted areas deeply once or twice a week if you have a built-in automatic irrigation system or a hose-end sprinkler system. There will be far less evaporation of our precious water if you do this early in the morning or later in the evening.
- Hand water potted and hanging plants frequently. We have unlimited days and hours for hand-held hose watering.
- Prune oak trees if it's truly necessary. The contagious oak wilt fungus is not producing spores July through January. Even so, paint the oak cuts immediately.
- Keep mowing your St. Augustine grass on the high side once a week, Bermuda grass only a bit shorter. Grass clippings should be allowed to fall back onto the lawn as both a source of nutrients and light mulch.
- Mulch all bare garden soil and add some to existing mulched beds. I put down a whole pallet (65 bags) of mulch last month and really could have used some more. Mulch helps to hold in soil moisture, keeps the soil cooler, and hampers weed growth.
- Feed roses, annuals and perennials using liquid or granular fertilizer.
- Watch for pests: white flies, spider mites, leaf rollers, lace bugs and aphids may be found on many plants; chinch bugs, fleas, ticks, chiggers and grubs may be on or under lawns; scale may appear on euonymus, hollies and fruit trees; webworms may show up on pecans and persimmons; crape myrtles will be exhibiting powdery mildew. There are specific chemical and organic products on the market to eliminate most all of these ailments. Be sure to follow manufacturer's directions.
- Lightly prune roses after they have bloomed. Shaping comes in October. Major cut back of roses, by as much as one half, comes next February.

- Deadhead spent flowers and seed pods on crape myrtles for the possibility of one more flush of color this fall.
- Pinch back perennials, such as fall asters and chrysanthemums, so that they put on a show of color this fall. Pinching back will create bushier plants and possibly more blooms.
- Apply mosquito repellent when working or sitting in your yard.

DON'T...

- Ignore watering lawn, shrubs and trees. They are all especially thirsty during these dry summer months.
- Stop mowing your lawn. Keep to a weekly schedule. At this time of year, mowing is the best practice we have for controlling weeds and increasing the density of our lawns.
- Leave water standing in flower pot saucers, other containers, low spots in gutters, etc. where mosquito larvae can live.
- Rush into using a mosquito eradicating product or service without finding out if there are consequences to beneficial insects. You need those good bugs.
- Plant or transplant trees or shrubs if you possibly can avoid it. There will be far too much stress on the plants. Winter is the best planting/transplanting time in Texas.
- Prune shrubs and perennials during these stressful summer months. Minimal shaping is okay, but major cutback pruning is not. For major plant pruning you should wait until fall or winter.
- Apply herbicide to live oak root sprouts. That can kill the mother tree. Instead weed whack them or pull them out. Unfortunately, it's only a temporary fix.
- Xeriscape your yard if you believe it will require less maintenance in the future. Indeed, you will save water once your plantings are established, but you may have more and different maintenance issues.

If you have questions about your yard or garden, please call Travis County Master Gardeners at 512-854-9600. If they don't have an immediate answer, they'll research it and get back to you.