

# Around the Yard

by Reeve Hobbie, Master Gardener



It certainly is a different kind of spring this year. With so many of us stay-at-home folks during these unusual times, there is an opportunity to get outside and do some yard work that in years past may have been neglected. So, enjoy your own little park and make it beautiful this spring. You might just have the time and you could get the kids involved too!

Here are tips to help your gardens, lawns, trees and shrubs look their very best by following these “Do’s and Don’ts” to get you through May and June.

## MAY & JUNE

### Do...

- mow your lawn **every** week. Regular mowing will help snuff out weeds from going to seed or spreading. For St. Augustine grass and perhaps a few other grasses, start mowing at a high setting that leaves your lawn at least 2½ inches high. Bermuda grass, on the other hand, can tolerate being cut a little shorter.

- let the grass clippings drop down onto the lawn. The clippings are one of the best sources of nutrients for your lawn.
- water your lawn, gardens and trees at least weekly, when there has been no appreciable rainfall, in accordance with city guidelines\*.
- fertilize vegetables and flowering annuals monthly. This may be done with a liquid fertilizer application.
- complete the pruning/shaping of spring-flowering shrubs and climbing roses soon after they bloom.
- plant caladium bulbs. The earth is finally warm enough for them. It's also a good time to plant other tender plants like coleus, begonias, New Guinea impatiens (forget regular impatiens, they've got a blight), pentas and other summer annuals.
- allow foliage of spring-flowering bulbs to yellow completely before removing their leaves. Apply bone meal around those spent bulbs.
- pinch the terminal growth on annuals and perennials. This will keep them shorter, more compact and well branched for better flowering later on.
- apply a good 3- to 4-inch layer of mulch to all your beds if you haven't already done so. There are so many benefits: water retention, weed control, plant root insulation, organic matter, and overall beautification. If you have the opportunity, put down landscape cloth or other weed barrier before topping with mulch. This will provide an even greater defense against weeds.
- watch for insect pests. A simple solution of 1 tablespoon liquid soap (can't be a detergent such as Dawn) to 1 quart water may be sprayed on most infested plants and may do the trick of ridding the pests. Be sure to spray undersides of leaves and stems too.
- fertilize roses every four to six weeks even when not blooming. Put reminders on your calendar all the way to fall.
- hand water and fertilize container plants and hanging baskets as needed. They dry up a whole lot quicker than plants in the ground.
- plant vegetables and fruit like cantaloupe, spinach, okra, Southern peas, peppers, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, winter squash & watermelon.

## **Don't...**

- scalp your lawn during these warmer spring months. Mow high!
- water your gardens or lawns with hose-end sprinklers or your automatic irrigation system except on your one designated day a week and during very specific hours\*. See third “Do” above and footnote below.
- **prune oak trees**. Just don’t even consider it! To help prevent the devastating oak wilt you must now wait until the hottest days of summer (after July 1) before pruning oaks. The dead of winter is even a better time.
- plant or transplant trees or shrubs if you possibly can avoid it. Far too much stress on the plants. Winter is the better time to do that.
- plant sun-loving plants (requiring a minimum of 6-8 hours of full sun) in the shade or shade-loving plants in too many hours of sun, especially afternoon sun.
- allow water to sit days on end in plant saucers, rain gutters, shallow pools or other vessels around the yard where mosquitoes can breed. Change water frequently in bird baths.

\*Water restrictions in Austin. See <http://austintexas.gov/department/water-conservation> for details of what hours you may use hose-end sprinklers and/or automatic irrigation.

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If you have questions about your yard or garden, please call Travis County Master Gardeners at 512-854-9600. The person at the other end of the line may not have an immediate answer, but they’ll research it and will get back with you.

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