Friday's Feature
By
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Five essential summer gardening tips

Summer has arrived in North Florida, and with it comes heat, humidity and afternoon thundershowers. Here is a list of some easy things to do to help keep your garden under control and looking good throughout the summer season.

Plant for Color: Enjoy color all summer long by establishing heat resistant annuals and perennials. Some to consider include zinnias, pentas, shrimp plant, coleus, plumbago, cuphea, ornamental peppers and hibiscus.

Deadhead spring planted annuals and summer flowering perennials by pruning off old flowers. Make a light, supplemental application of a complete fertilizer and continue irrigating as needed. Remove weeds by either hoeing or hand pulling.

Lawn Care: Raise the cutting height by ½ inch as extremely hot weather arrives. This removes some of the stress from the grass and allows for deeper root growth.

Lawns should be watered on an “as needed basis,” rather than on a schedule. Daily watering of established grass is not necessary nor recommended because it wastes water and encourages disease.

Two, possibly three, irrigations per week might be required in the absence of rainfall. Calibrate the sprinkling system in order to make sure that the right amount of water is being applied. Depending upon soil type, one-half to three fourths of an inch will moisten the soil to a sufficient depth.

Pest Watch: Inspect the lawn and landscape weekly in order to detect pests before they begin causing serious problems. Following are the most common summer pest related disorders. Contact your Extension agent for help controlling these common summer pests.

- Chinch bugs in St. Augustine lawns and spittlebugs in centipedegrass.
- Flower thrips feed within blooms and cause distorted and/or short flower life. They are most commonly found in flowers of gardenia and rose, but also infest many other flowering annuals and perennials.
- Spider mites can cause serious damage on shrubs, flowers and perennials – especially if dry weather continues. Mites feed mostly on the underside of leaves, causing the foliage to take on a stippled or...
gray cast.
- Lacebugs are also found on the underside of leaves, but are more specific as to the species infested. They are found mostly on azaleas, lantana, pyracantha and sycamore. Heavy feeding causes the leaves to have a white, bleached or gray cast.

**Pruning:** Finish pruning your spring flowering shrubs such as azaleas, camellias, spireas and wisteria by early June.

Do any necessary pruning of hydrangeas and gardenias as soon as flowering is finished. They must have sufficient time to re-grow before the dormant season.

Ligustrum, elaeagnus, cleyera and a number of other shrubs tend to send up shoots that significantly protrude from the canopy. These longer shoots should be completely removed or at least cut off below the canopy. This will improve the appearance of these shrubs.

**Beat the Heat:** Take care of yourself this summer by keeping cool while gardening.
- Slow down. Strenuous activities should be reduced, eliminated, or rescheduled to the coolest time of the day.
- Dress for summer. Lightweight, light-colored clothing reflects heat and sunlight and helps your body maintain normal temperature.
- Drink plenty of water. Your body needs water to keep cool. Drink plenty of fluids even if you don’t feel thirsty.
- Don’t get too much sun. Sunburn makes it harder for you to cool off.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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