

Gardening tips for May

Flowers and houseplants

- ☞ Violas and pansies are among the most frost-tolerant annuals. Other frost-tolerant annuals include dianthus, petunia, and snapdragon.
- ☞ Plant gladiolus every two weeks from mid-May to June. By spacing out the time of your planting, you can space out the flowering period, too.
- ☞ After tulip and daffodil blooms begin to fade, clip off the flower stalks. Don't disturb the leaves—they are needed to replenish the bulb for next year's blooms. The leaves will naturally turn yellow once the bulb has refilled itself for next spring. An application of a balanced fertilizer, like 10-10-10 or something similar, at a rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet, will support bulb development.
- ☞ Remove the old debris from lily and iris plantings to reduce borer problems.



Trees and shrubs

- ☞ Viburnums are special shrubs. They provide the landscape with year-round color, starting with pure white flowers in spring, colorful fruits in summer, and vibrant foliage in autumn. The fruits of some viburnum, such as those of the American cranberrybush viburnum remain on the shrub through the winter.
- ☞ When mulching around a young tree, place a ring of about three inches deep, and reach out at least 12 inches away from the trunk. Gradually reduce the depth of the mulching as it approaches the trunk (don't create "volcano mulch" piles). There should only one inch of mulch near the trunk itself.


Vegetables

- ☞ Some plants like it hot. You will have a better crop of cucumbers, pepper, eggplant, okra, and lima beans if you wait until June to plant them.
- ☞ Don't plant tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, or eggplants within 60 feet of a black walnut tree. Otherwise the chemicals in the tree's roots will kill these plants in midsummer. You'll see a shocking, sudden wilt.
- ☞ The proper way to transplant a tomato is to "trench-plant" it. Dig a shallow trench about two inches deep. Pick off the leaves from all but the top eight inches of the plant. Lay the plant in the trench and curl the top eight inches of the plant so that it's above the surface. Bury the rest with soil. The stem buried underground will generate roots and your plants will get off to a quicker start. Trench-planting works especially well for spindly plants. But don't make the trench too deep, since the soil is still cold beneath the surface.
- ☞ When purchasing onion sets or transplants, look for healthy bulbs that are small or moderate in size. Large bulbs are more likely to go to flower this summer.
- ☞ Plant your sweet corn early to minimize problems with earworms.
- ☞ The best gardeners incorporate an inch or two of aged manure (or compost) into their garden every year.

Fruits

- ✎ Now is a good time to thin out a raspberry planting. If planted in a hedgerow, cultivate the edges so that the hedge is only about 18 inches wide at the base. Thin the canes to stand three inches apart down the row.
- ✎ Remove flowers from a new planting of Junebearing strawberries during their first year; otherwise, the plants will focus their energy on forming fruits, rather than forming roots and becoming a strong plant. Remove flowers from new plantings of everbearing types for six to eight weeks.
- ✎ Don't spray apples with insecticides when they are blooming; otherwise, you'll kill honeybees. This includes home orchard sprays that contain both fungicides and insecticides.

Lawns

- ✎ When buying a lawn fertilizer, look carefully to see how much *slow-release* nitrogen is in it. Cheaper, fast-release lawn and garden fertilizers (such as 10–10–10 and urea) give us a sense of pride when we see the grass quickly green up and start aggressively growing in spring. But this aggressive growth only means that you have to mow more often. A quick spurt of grass growth provides minimal long-term benefit to the lawn. Slow-release fertilizers will gradually feed the lawn and support good healthy growth.
- ✎ Lawn fertilizers that do not contain herbicides do not pose a significant threat to our children or pets. These fertilizers simply contain nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, all nutrients that are naturally found in our soil. The nitrogen granules might burn a pet if it is very, very sensitive. To minimize risk, simply water the lawn to wash the granules off the grass blades and into the soil before walking on the lawn.
- ✎ Mid to late May is a good time to fertilize the lawn, if you have not done so already. 

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