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**RELEASE DATE: June 26, 2014**

**July Garden Checklist**

By Aransas/San Patricio Master Gardeners

Compiled by Amanda Steves

Here in South Texas, July is the beginning of our gardening “winter.” This is the time when the vegetables are finished producing (except okra), the plants dry up from heat and lack of water, and many go dormant in order to survive. According to Rockport Master Gardener and gardening guru, Todd Cutting, July is when we “clean up the gardens, put them to bed, and do nothin’.” Here’s a list of July garden tasks from the Aransas/San Patricio Master Gardeners.

**Conserve Water -** Avoid using sprinklers**—**much water is lost to evaporation and runoff. If you must sprinkle, do it in the very early morning only, to ensure that more water gets into the ground for your plants. Soaker hoses and trickle irrigation are much more efficient, and you can target just the plants that need water when you turn on the tap. Don’t water too frequently. Most people think their plants need far more water than they really do. For example, lawns are usually okay with a deep watering once a week, twice a week at the most. If you have an irrigation system, check it for leaks regularly and keep it in good repair.

**Clean Up the Garden** **-** It’s time to pull out and compost the plants that are finished with their growing season, such as annuals and vegetables that are no longer producing. Trim dead wood off roses, shrubs, and trees, and refrain from fertilizing or applying insecticide or herbicide in this hot month. Many harmful insects disappear in the heat of the summer, but the beneficials are still out.

**Put It to Bed** **-** After cleaning out your garden’s crispy**-**fried stalks and branches, give the area a good mulching. Be sure there is a 3”to 4” layer of mulch, pulled a few inches back from shrub stems and tree trunks to prevent fungal infections. For vegetable gardens, now is the time to solarize. When the area is free of plants, cover with a layer of clear plastic, secured along the edges with rocks or strips of wood. The sun creates a very hot environment in the soil, killing root knot nematodes, which live in plant roots and are happy waiting in sandy soil for new roots to grow. You can do this for any empty garden area to clear it of these microscopic pests and many weeds and diseases. Leave the plastic on until you are ready to plant, in September.

**Lawn** **-** You should be using your lawn mower at its highest setting by now. Tall**-**cut grass is happy grass this time of year. Most lawns will need very little mowing anyway. To conserve water, cut back to a minimum (once a week). Some turf grasses go dormant in July, August, and September, and will green up as the weather cools a bit and the rains return.

**Trees & Shrubs -** Water citrus trees and landscape plants deeply every 2 weeks, unless they were planted this year. Young trees and shrubs need to be watered once or twice a week for the first year. Established shrubs can go 2 weeks to a month. If there’s no rain, give trees like oaks and palms a deep watering once a month.

**Citrus** **-** Look for psyllids on citrus trees. Psyllids are little 1/8-inch insects that feed on leaves and stems. You can recognize them by the way they attach themselves, head down and tail in the air. Psyllids are fairly common, and after sucking out plant juices they produce a gooey clear drop of “honeydew,” which can reduce the tree’s photosynthetic efficiency. If you find them, you can spray with insecticidal oil, such as soybean, cottonseed, citrus, or neem. Watch the health of your trees for stress and signs of citrus greening, a disease that is sometimes carried by psyllids. This is a deadly citrus disease, which has no cure and has arrived in South Texas in the Valley. Symptoms develop over time, including yellow shoots, rabbit**-**eared leaves, and misshapen fruit. If you suspect citrus greening, contact your County Extension Agent as soon as possible for verification. This is a serious, destructive problem that wipes out whole orchards and is easily transmitted.

**Hummingbirds -** Now is a great time to start getting ready for the fall influx of migrating hummingbirds. Clean your feeders, or better—create a hummingbird haven. You can provide them with the basics: food, water, and protected perches. Most birdbaths are too deep for these tiny birds, so leave some water dripping on a large leaf. They especially love moving water. Plant hummingbird-friendly plants, such as yaupon holly, bottlebrush, cape honeysuckle, coral vine, native hibiscus, Mexican fire bush, pentas, Pride of Barbados, Turk’s cap, verbena, cross vine, any native sage, esperanza, or Texas lantana (but not the invasive large leaf lantana – *Lantana camara*). Be sure to keep new plants well**-**watered to get them established and blooming by September.

Thanks to Master Gardeners Todd Cutting and Kitty Angell for contributing to this list.

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