June in the Tallahassee Garden

Since our summers tend to be extreme, choose only plants that can tolerate high temperatures and humidity. If you haven’t done it already, now is the time to remove those spring annuals like pansies, petunias, and snapdragons that did so well in the cool weather but that can’t make it through summer. Pinch back leggy growth on flowering perennials in order to encourage thicker growth and additional blooms.

Plant zinnias, daylilies, firebush, pentas, calibrachoa, portulaca, bush allamanda, sun coleus, *Tecoma stans*, and Goldsturm rudbeckia in full sun. For shady areas choose caladiums, jacobinia, Persian shield, coleus and gingers. Hydrangeas and ‘Summer Wave’ torenias do best when planted in areas that receive morning sun and afternoon shade. Crape myrtles may also be planted now, but varieties range from dwarf to well over 20 feet, so choose varieties carefully and plant in full sun. Cape honeysuckle (*Tecomaria capensis*) can be planted this month. Its bright orange flowers attract hummingbirds. Plant in full sun to partial shade. Also, consider crossvine and trumpet creeper which are native to our area.

June is a good time to plant palms. You may want to include two native species, saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) and bush or dwarf palmetto (*Sabal minor*). European fan palm, and windmill palm are also recommended for North Florida.

Annuals, herbs, vegetables, and roses can be lightly fertilized monthly with a 15-0-15 product, but don’t fertilize your grass this month. If it’s looking yellow, treat with iron instead. Your lawn will green up, but you won’t get the excessive growth that you’d get with fertilizer. Young trees and shrubs may be lightly fertilized now with a 15-0-15
product to encourage new growth. Fertilize amaryllis, lilies and other bulbs that have finished blooming, but don’t cut back their foliage yet. The foliage is still performing photosynthesis and storing food in the bulb for next year’s blooms. Trim foliage only after it dies back completely.

Mulch is particularly important to the garden in summer. It prevents water from evaporating, keeps the soil temperature cooler and discourages weeds. Apply mulch to a depth of two to three inches but not touching the base of the plants and trees. Mulch can be used to cover shady areas where grass and groundcovers won’t grow. The best mulch is what’s readily available to you. If you have hardwood leaves, use them. If you buy mulch, pine straw, pine bark, and melaleuca mulch are better choices than cypress mulch.

Adjust your irrigation system according to rainfall amounts, and water only when needed. Over-watering can be as problematic as under-watering, encouraging plant diseases and other pests. Consider grouping plants according to their water needs in order to make watering easier. New plants will need to be watered more frequently than established plants and should be checked daily for wilting or dry soil in the original rootball of the plant.

With increased heat and humidity, disease and pests may occur in spite of good gardening practices. Chinch bug damage can develop in sunny areas in St. Augustine lawns. If we have frequent rainfall, gray leaf spot fungus can develop, especially in shaded areas. Spittlebug populations may reach a damaging level in centipede lawns, causing discolored grass blades and a dull cast to the whole lawn. Monitor your lawn regularly, but don’t treat for these problems unless damage occurs. Then treat promptly because the earlier you treat lawn problems, the better your chances of limiting further damage. Carefully follow label directions for all pesticides. And remember that excessive pesticides can end up in our water.

There is no shortage of work to do in the garden this month but no gardener ever gets it all done. Don’t forget to enjoy the process.

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