July in the Tallahassee Garden

Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Tecoma stans stands up to our summer heat well and provides fantastic color from spring through fall. It is among plants you can see at the July 7 garden tour provided by the Leon County Extension Service.

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Usually by this time of summer we are in a fairly steady pattern of frequent afternoon thundershowers. But, if it doesn’t rain at least once during the week, most gardeners will have to water. And if you planted new plants this spring, you will have to water several times a week. Wise irrigation practices are important to conserve resources.

The best time to water is very early morning, completing the cycle before mid-morning. Watering in the heat of the day results in much loss of water due to evaporation and may burn foliage as the sun shines on water droplets. Watering in the morning allows foliage to dry early in the day, protecting plants from disease formation which may occur when evening temperatures and moisture conditions are conducive to growth of fungal organisms.

Water deeply so that plant roots will grow deeply into the soil, where they can seek out residual soil moisture. Shallow watering results in a shallow root system, making plants dependent upon frequent applications of water. Place several rain gauges or straight-sided cans throughout the zone covered by your sprinkler, and water until there is an average of one half-inch of water in all the cans. Going through this procedure enables you to fully understand exactly how long it takes to water effectively.
Unless regular rainfall returns, this is not a good time for planting trees or shrubs, as it is too difficult to apply the amount of water needed to overcome the heat stress that new plantings would experience. July is a good time for other activities such as pruning and fertilizing.

**Lawns:** Now is not a good time to fertilize the lawn. Your lawn should still have enough nutrients from the spring fertilization. Keep mower blades sharpened and decks leveled. Cut St. Augustine grass at a height of 3 to 4 inches and centipede grass at 2 to 3 inches. Mow frequently enough to cut off only about a third of the grass blade at each mowing.

**Flowering Trees and Shrubs:** Prune hydrangeas, gardenias, spireas and other spring blooming shrubs after they finish flowering. If sucking insects such as scales, whiteflies, or aphids are present, choose an environmentally friendly insecticide such as a horticultural soap or ultra-refined horticultural oil to control pests. Keep beds well mulched to prevent weeds that can foster thrips and other insect problems, and to help retain soil moisture.

**Annuals and Perennials:** Deadhead annual and perennial flowers frequently, to encourage more flower buds to form. If planting now, choose only the most heat-tolerant types such as lantana, bulbine, pentas, melampodium, buddleia, firebush, zinnia, sunflowers, celosia, blue daze, *Tecoma stans*, dwarf allamanda, and sun coleus, planting these in sunny spots with a little afternoon shade. Brighten a shady spot with lush ferns and white flowers such as Japanese anemones or plant impatiens, justicia, caladiums, or torenia. Continue to fertilize annuals monthly. Pinch, cut back the growing tips, of asters, Korean mums and other fall blooming perennials to encourage compact growth and sturdy stems that will support the weight of the flowers.

**Bulbs:** Divide gingers, cannas and iris if needed. Deadhead daylilies to encourage continuous bloom. Clean up foliage on gladiolus and plant more bulbs throughout the summer if desired. It’s not too late to plant caladium, crinum, society garlic, and knifophia or red-hot pokers.

**Fruits:** Blueberries have a second growth flush in August, so fertilize in late July, using an azalea-camellia fertilizer for these acid-loving plants. Watch peach trees for white peach scale and control with ultra-fine horticultural oil if seen.

**Vegetables and Herbs:** Continue to pick off hornworms from tomato plants, only resorting to use of stronger measures if absolutely needed. A good organic control for chewing insects is *Bacillus thuringiensis* or Bt. Squash and cucumbers can be planted throughout summer, but pests are worse in hot weather. Southern peas, peppers, eggplants, okra, lima beans and green beans, both bush and pole varieties, can be planted now. Continue to fertilize monthly and monitor for pests. Harvest regularly to keep plants producing. Reapply mulch where it becomes thin and remove any plants suspected of disease immediately.
Take a Garden Tour: David Marshall of the Leon County Extension Service will lead a tour through their demonstration garden on Saturday, July 7 at 10 a.m. Space is limited to the first 35 to register, though. So call 606-5202 today or tomorrow, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., to see if there still is space available and to register. The garden, at 615 Paul Russell Road, is full of flowering plants, groundcovers, trees, and shrubs well suited for our area.

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