May in Tallahassee is typically dry and with increasing temperatures. So, don’t be surprised if the rains stop, and you’ll need to pay special attention to your plants’ water needs. Generally, plants need three quarters to one inch of water per week when they are actively growing. If you plant new plants, make sure you apply the water directly to the root ball. New plants don’t have roots out in the surrounding soil, and the root ball can dry out quickly. Consider using microirrigation or a soaker hose for more efficient watering. Newly-planted specimens are especially susceptible to succumbing to heat and drought-related stress and will require more frequent watering.

In sunny areas: It is time to replace winter annuals like pansies and snapdragons with heat-resistant flowers. This is a great time to consider planting tropicals in a sunny area. Many are super fast-growing and provide continuous color until winter’s first frost. Try firebush, yellowbells (*Tecoma stans*), thryallis, croton, bush allamanda, mandevilla, crossandra and others. Choose bedding plants like ‘Summer Wave’ torenias, vinca, ornamental pepper, purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), pentas and yellow African bulbine. Also some caladium species are adapted to sunny conditions. Plant heat-loving herbs like basil, tarragon, rosemary, fennel and dill in containers or in beds in full sun. Sun-loving vines to plant now are butterfly vine (*Mascagnia macroptera*), evergreen Chinese wisteria (*Milettia taiwanensis*), hyacinth bean, moon vine, snail vine, scarlet runner bean, mandevilla, and allamanda. Summer bulbs to plant now include crinum, gladiolus, iris and society garlic. Plant okra, southern peas, sweet potatoes and blackberries this month. Set out tomato transplants now. Plant tomatoes to the depth of the first set of leaves and water well.

*Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Butterfly vine (*Mascagnia macroptera*) has yellow flowers and butterfly-shaped seed pods.*

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In shade: If you have a shady spot in your yard you may wish to consider planting caladium, hydrangea, oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*), hosta, impatiens, Persian shield and Brazilian plume flower (*Justicia carnea*).

Fertilizer: Fertilize citrus and palms this month, as both are heavy feeders. Use a fertilizer specific to citrus and palms because they have additional secondary nutrients that these plants require. Fertilize vegetables, herbs and annuals monthly for maximum production and flowers.

Lawns: If you haven’t fertilized your lawn yet this spring, you may wish to do so now. Use a 15-0-15 product with half of the nitrogen in slow-release form. If chamberbitter is a problem you can apply a preemergent herbicide now. If your centipede lawn has extremely yellow areas, you may simply need an application of iron rather than fertilizer. Water grass when blades fold or footprints remain in the lawn. One half of an inch of water during dry periods is sufficient.

Maintenance: Finish pruning spring-flowering plants like azaleas and bridalwreath spirea now. Gardenias and hydrangeas should be pruned immediately after they have finished blooming. Stake tall plants like shrimp plant and daylilies before they bloom.

May is our last chance to garden before the serious heat sets in, so visit a local nursery and get busy!

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