

Garden Line - Growing Green in Our City

by Brent Moon - HPARD Urban Garden Manager

Where I grew up in Western Kentucky, mid-April was the average "frost-free" date. We looked forward to this time to get our gardens going again. Here in Houston, we've been at work in our vegetable and fruit gardens for some time now.

For those of you who got your tomatoes in the ground (or pots) in mid to late February or early March, you should really be seeing some good growth by now and maybe some fruit as well. Continue to give your tomatoes an occasional application of granular or liquid organic fertilizer as they will need the extra nutrients to produce well. Keep them mulched and well watered.

Some cool season crops such as lettuce, cabbage, and various other greens may still be producing. Enjoy them while you can; because, it's about to get hot and these tender greens will soon be gone!



But, if you're in the mood to experiment, it's been reported that Swiss chard will grow throughout the year. I plan to try this experiment myself this year to see if I can have a new source of greens during the summer. I'm also going to experiment with lettuce seed by trying out something I heard growers in Hawaii were doing.

They were successful in growing lettuce during the hot summer months by shading their plants. So with a little shade cloth and weed barrier I plan to rig up a cover for my lettuce and see what happens. I'm not sure if this will work, but hey, lettuce seed is cheap! Let me know if you're up to experimenting with either of these ideas and I'll let you know what success I have. Who knows we might have something to impress all our gardening buddies with and have some nice fresh lettuce in the summer, to boot!



If you like peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, melons, squash, corn, okra, green beans, or sweet potatoes then now's the time to get them planted. Remember to mix in some compost and organic fertilizer and don't forget to water... the hard work will pay off when harvest time comes. Houston's hot weather is just around the corner and if you want your garden to succeed water and mulch are key. Properly applied mulch will not only help conserve water but it will also deter weeds and help amend the soil as it breaks down.

If you have fruit crops growing now's a good time for thinning. Don't worry that you're reduce the amount of fruit your trees are producing...the thinning process helps the remaining fruit grow bigger and healthier which means you'll be getting a more flavor filled crop in the end. Keep an eye on your citrus for the dreaded Citrus Leaf Miner. If the leaves on your citrus plant are crinkled up and look little they have tunnels going through the leaves, the Citrus Leaf Miner is the likely culprit. While the Citrus Leaf Miner doesn't really damage the plant much or affect fruit production they do make the tree look unsightly. If you can't ignore the ugly leaves, treat with a product like Neem oil or a product with Spinosad in it. Spinosad is considered an organic product.



If you grow your own strawberries or blackberries ... this is their time of year. If not then you might want to check out some of the pick your own farms in the area. I know of one in Alvin where my wife and I went a little overboard picking strawberries last year. Trust me when I tell you that 6 gallons of strawberries is waaaaaaay toooooooo much for two people to eat! We'll be enjoying strawberry jam for the next few years. Love those fresh strawberries!