

Garden Line - May 2011

by Brent Moon - HPARD Urban Garden Manager

Summer is just around the corner, and so is the heat. This is Houston, after all, so we're used to it, even if we're not looking forward to it. I'll miss the milder temperatures of spring, but no use lamenting what we can't change, so let's gear up for summer!



You should be harvesting lots of veggies from your garden by now. Vegetables in production this month should be tomato, eggplant, pepper, squash, beans, cucumber, and maybe a few late-season carrots and radishes. With the heat bearing down on us, consider planting some veggies that can really take it, such as okra, peppers, eggplant, sweet potatoes, Malabar spinach (a good summer green), and summer peas, if you haven't done so already. Be sure to add some compost and consider mulching around your plants to help retain moisture. Good choices for mulch include pine needles, hay, and leaf compost.

Consider installing a soaker hose or drip irrigation system in your vegetable garden. This type of system is very efficient, providing water right at ground-level with very little lost to evaporation. The best way to do this is to lay your drip hose on top of the soil and then mulch over it with 3" of mulch. Your plants will thank you and you'll be rewarded with lots of produce!



Keep an eye out for stink bugs. They love your tomatoes as much as you do! Most years, I have issues with them (especially the leaf-footed stink bug), and try to control them by spraying them with either orange oil or insecticidal soap. You have to nail them pretty good, but it seems to work. If you aren't patient or don't mind using other chemicals, there are products out there that will do a quicker job on them, though you may also kill off such beneficial insects as lady bugs, lacewings, and assassin bugs.



If your spring-blooming shrubs have finished blooming, now is the time to prune them. Shrubs one would typically trim now include azaleas, leather leaf mahonia (unless you want to wait and let the birds eat the blue fruit before you prune), spirea, quince, and roses that only bloom once per year. Be sure to fertilize and water your shrubs well after you've pruned them. They'll be induced to put out a new flush of growth shortly and will need the extra nutrients and moisture.